DRAFT Minutes
MANSFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
Regular Meeting – Thursday, March 24, 2016
Council Chambers, Audrey P. Beck Municipal Building

Members Present: S. Ferrigno, J. McGuire, G. Thompson (5:40 p.m.), D. Fecho, M. Hirschorn, A. Marcellino (ex officio)

Staff Present: Matthew Hart, Town Manager; Linda Painter, Director of Planning; Jennifer Kaufman Environmental Planner and Inland Wetlands Agent; Kevin Filchak, Graduate Intern

S. Ferrigno called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

Public Comment: No public comment was received.

Approval of Minutes: Tabled until after the presentation of new business.

New Business: In light of the number of presenters at the meeting, the Commission agreed to alter the meeting agenda to allow the presenters for the New Business items to be heard first. Jennifer Kaufman, Environmental Planner and staff to the Agriculture Committee, introduced the Agriculture Committee members and provided a general overview of their duties. She also discussed the Agriculture Committee's accomplishments over the past year.

1. Presentation on the Dairy Industry – Stacey Stearns, Mansfield Agriculture Committee: Stearns provided a general overview of the dairy industry in Connecticut and the nation, including how the media influences the perception of the industry, challenges with current labor laws and policies, and difficulties with fluctuating milk prices due to the convoluted pricing system that has been established nationally. Other challenges include a lack of overall infrastructure and the impacts of various regulations. Members asked several questions regarding regulatory impacts, potential EDC assistance, and the extent to which agriculture is an economic engine in town. Kaufman noted that agriculture is the largest commercial land base in town; additional research on how many agricultural jobs are in Mansfield is needed. It was also noted that while Mountain Dairy is in discussions with Mansfield Schools regarding a pilot program, the schools currently do not purchase Mountain Dairy milk.

2. Presentation on Mountain Dairy – Paul Brody, Mountain Dairy: Brody explained the Mountain Dairy and W.J. Stearns and Sons, Inc. operation, history, and current production levels. Mountain Dairy is considered a producer-handler that produces 12-13 million pounds of Class I milk annually, and is one of only forty vertically integrated farms in the country that handles every facet of milk production from managing the herd to bottling and distribution. He emphasized that this is not a hobby farm, and they are in the market against other big milk industry producers. The Board of Directors has established several near term goals including completion of the sale of development rights on nine-hundred acres of farmland to the State of Connecticut, doubling the size of the herd, and increasing milk production by 50%. The business is also emphasizing marketing and sales, recently rebranding the company and expanding distribution of products statewide. Members asked Brody several questions regarding current operations and future plans.

3. Discussion with Agriculture Committee members on potential joint initiatives: Vicky Wetherill, Stacey Stearns and Nancy Rawn, Agriculture Committee members along with Jennifer Kaufman, staff to the Committee identified two potential joint projects for the EDC and Agriculture Committee: business visitation and a 'farm to chef' event. The Agriculture Committee is very interested in the work being done by the EDC with regard to business outreach and would like to participate in business visits involving agricultural businesses. McGuire updated the Agriculture Committee on the current status of the surveys and key themes such as signage, parking, and seasonal challenges. Members of the EDC also expressed support for the joint visits.

Kaufman and Wetherill described the proposed autumn 'farm to chef' event as a way to bring local farmers and restaurants together. The Agriculture Committee would like to jointly sponsor the event with the EDC and hope that some members of the EDC will volunteer to serve on the project committee. They also discussed the need to brand the event and Mansfield Agriculture in general. Members indicated that they would further discuss the project and seek volunteers at the April meeting.

Approval of Previous Minutes: McGuire MOVED and Fecho seconded to approve the December, January, and February minutes and notes as presented. MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

Old Business: Tabled until April meeting.

Reports: Tabled until April meeting.

Adjournment: Ferrigno adjourned the meeting at 7:30 p.m.