ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Thursday, February 5, 2026 at 5:00pm

City Council Chambers, City Hall, 111 N. Main Street & on Zoom

Present: Mayor Zoppo-Sassu, Vice Chair Howard Schmelder, Council Member Susan Tyler, and Commissioners David Mills, Marvin (Mickey) Goldwasser, Tom Hick, Louise Provenzano, LaQuita Kearney-Gonzalez, and Jason Paul Sirko

Absent: None

Staff Present: Justin Malley - Executive Director, and Dr. Dawn Leger - Grants Administrator

Guests: Charlie Talmadge, President of Development Planning Solutions
Mary Ann Sirois, 362 Shrub Rd.

I. Call to Order

Mayor Zoppo-Sassu called the meeting to order at 5:01pm and led all present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Public Participation

Charlie Talmadge, President of Development Planning Solutions, addressed the Board regarding 894 Middle Street, confirming that the project had received Wetland's approval Monday of that week. A site plan will be submitted to the Site Planning Commission for a hearing by February 13, 2026. Mr. Talmadge noted the outside storage part of the plans would be scaled down citing ongoing discussions with Eversource who holds an easement for the area in question.

Mr. Talmadge advised the Board that the abatement at 40 West Street is expected to be finalized soon, and other factors are also coming to their conclusion with demolition fencing going up in March. The intention is to take the building down after the first of the month. Progress for the former Funck building was also shared with additional work being weather dependent. The Eagle building project follows the completion of the Funck building.

The mayor called for, and received clarification that 40 West Street and 894 Middle Street have been remediated as needed. Mr. Talmadge noted some illegal dumping is taking place at 894 Middle Street and it is being addressed. He also confirmed that the building isn't closed on yet.

Mary Ann Sirois referred to a previous meeting when the Board referenced researching what other towns were doing for a specific issue or project. She recommended starting with or including online research as a way to gather information and methods used by other municipalities.

III. Approval of Minutes

A. Minutes of the January 8, 2026 Regular Meeting

The mayor called for a motion to approve the Minutes. The Vice Chair made the motion which was seconded by Commissioner Mills. The mayor noted the Minutes cited that she had a motion which is incorrect and the minutes will need to be updated. All were in favor of voting to approve the minutes with the correction noted, and the updated Minutes were accepted into the record.

IV. Consent Agenda

A. Communications

B. Economic Development/Grants/Marketing Report

The mayor called for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion to approve was made by Commissioner Goldwasser and was seconded by the Vice Chair. All were in favor and the Consent Agenda was accepted into the record.

V. New Business

A. Downtown Update

Justin Malley provided an update regarding the installation and monitoring of security cameras for the Hope Street and the City Hall parking garages to address the community's concerns and increase their comfort in using the new garages as intended.

The bridge on Main Street (railroad overpass) is in discussions with Public Works, the state and the railway engineers. The overpass detracts from the new developments taking place in that area and the city wants to ensure that the bridge is structurally sound.

Planning and funding for streetscape work on Main Street is in progress in partnership with Public Works. Additional parking is needed on North Main Street to accommodate the demand for both the current Centre Square retail businesses and the ones that are coming. Of initial concern is the lunch crowd and another new restaurant that will be part of phase two.

The RFP process for the 1.35 acre plot on Centre Square has closed. Two proposals were received. The Downtown Committee will be contacted with next steps in the vetting process.

B. Facade Improvement Grant Program

A Façade Grant application was received and is in progress for The New Cambridge Brewing Project. They're changing their name to The Factory Brewing Collective, which better reflects their brewing partnership business model and the signage will help with their branding.

C. Incentive Budgets

A monthly review of the business incentive budgets was provided, with the Revolving Loan Program now at $97,000.00, which changed since the reporting was posted with this meeting's agenda. The current account balances for the Small Business and Façade Improvement Grant programs are sufficient at this time.

The mayor suggested that at the end of future fiscal years, the department proactively requests that any potential surplus finds not being utilized for either debt reduction or sinking funds to replenish the Economic Incentive Fund.

D. Non-Profit Grant Program

A review of the initial discussions about creating a funding program to support the community and/or non-profit city agencies was provided by the ECD Director and Commissioner Provenzano. The program was considered due to various factors such as the decrease in the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding the city has received over the years and the city's increase in homelessness and food insecurity.

The mayor spoke to growing community concerns and the role of the city in meeting them. The not-for-profit agencies she has been meeting with report a significant loss in state and federal funding with a large number of people from young families to seniors living precariously close to their financial edge, adding that the emerging social service, nonprofit, and human service needs are complex and far reaching. Discussion followed.

Following the Board's in-depth discussion, Mayor Zoppo-Sassu offered for her office to complete a one-page review of the initiatives the city currently funds, focusing on those addressing the needs highlighted in the Board's discussion. Included in the review would be questions raised at the meeting and their answers. Additional research will also be conducted and provided to the Board for their review.

E. CDBG Year 52 Report

Dr. Dawn Leger provided details of the CDBG Year 52 Report: 14 applications were received - 12 for public service grants and 2 for public facilities grants. The requests total $322,000.00 which is beyond the program's capability. The first CDBG Public Hearing is Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at 5pm in City Council Chambers in City Hall. The Board was invited to attend.

The CDBG funds for Year 51 which began in July 2025 have been received the first week in January 2026. Dr. Leger noted the funds usually arrive in October, but that the program is now fully operational.

VI. New Business by Commissioners

There was no New Business by Commissioners.

VII. Old Business by Commissioners

Commissioner Hick asked about the Shaffer Beacon location. Justin Malley confirmed they are doing the project work that the Board previously provided grant funding for.

The mayor advised the Board that Code Enforcement did a motion to foreclose on 267 Main Street. If the city acquired the building there are opportunities in terms of supportive and wraparound housing that could address and positively impact issues facing the unhoused community. Updates will be provided when available.

VIII. Committee Reports

A. Downtown Committee Report

Committee Chair Mickey Goldwasser provided an update on the RPF process for the Sessions Building location on Riverside Avenue. The Committee received 13 proposals, and the top 5 will be interviewing before the Committee on February 26th. A report of those interviews will be provided to the full Board.

B. Budget Committee Report

Committee Chair Hick provided an update on the proposed ECD Budget. It was noted that only salaries and benefits were increased while remaining line items remained flat. The Budget Committee approved the proposed budget and now it is before the ECD Board for their approval.

Commissioner Hick read the following Motion:

Motion to approve the ECD FY 2026-2027 budget request as recommended by the Budget Committee on January 14, 2026 and to forward it to the Comptroller's Office for revisions if necessary.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Goldwasser. There was no discussion. All were in favor and the Motion was accepted into the record.

C. City Council Member Report

Council Member Tyler announced that The Factory Collective is releasing their newest brew, Our Long Creepy Driveway, within the next couple of weeks.

IX. Adjournment

With no further discussion, the mayor called for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made by the Vice Chair and was seconded by Commissioner Mills. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 6:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Arsego
Recording Secretary