

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Regular Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, July 9, 2025 at 5:00pm

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

ATTENDEES: Mayor Caggiano, Commissioner Schmelder (Zoom), Council Member Dickau, Commissioner Mills, Goldwasser, Provenzano, Cowdell, and Kearney-Gonzales

ABSENT: Commissioner Hick

STAFF PRESENT: Justin Malley - Executive Director, Dr. Dawn Leger - Grants Administrator, and Dawn Nielsen - Marketing & Public Relations Specialist

GUESTS:

I. Call to Order

Mayor Caggiano called the meeting to order at 5pm and led all present in the Pledge of Allegiance. The Board then made their introductions for those present in the gallery.

II. Public Participation

Mayor Caggiano introduced Max Kothari, Founder and CEO of Express Kitchens, to the Board. Mr. Kothari spoke about the opportunity and deciding factors that led him to move his business to 18 Main Street, the former Associated Spring location, in Bristol. He said that on a visit to Bristol, he recognized the downtown development, including City Hall and Centre Square projects, as planned revitalization. This was a pivotal factor in him choosing to move operations here.

Mr. Kothari provided a brief history of his business from his beginnings with a hardware store in Hartford, CT thirty-five years ago to when Express Kitchens began in the early 2000s. The cabinet manufacturing company has been based in New Jersey. They currently have twelve stores in four states and provide cabinets to big box stores like Home Depot and to large scale building companies. That aspect of the business is nationwide. Their customer pickup location has now moved from Hartford to Bristol, bringing people from Hartford, New Haven, and other areas into the city for their supplies. There are currently 40-50 employees in the Bristol building, with more expected when the plant is running.

In addition to distribution, Express Kitchens in Bristol will be a “smart factory” operation. Steps are in progress to bring the factory online. Mr. Kothari hopes to honor the building’s history and the Barnes family with a visual display for visitors and future generations of manufacturing employees to see when they visit the location. He invited the Board to tour the facility when it is finished. Mr. Kothari said he appreciated the welcoming attitude and assistance he received across all departments in City Hall.

Discussion followed. Commissioner Goldwasser noted Mr. Kothari's commitment to the Bristol community regarding the use of the building's parking lot in support of the annual Mum Festival. The Board thanks Mr. Kothari for attending the meeting and introducing himself to them and the community.

III. Approval of Minutes

A. Minutes of the June 5, 2025 Regular Meeting

Mayor Caggiano called for a motion to approve the minutes from the June 5, 2025 Regular Meeting. Commissioner Provenzano made the motion which was seconded by Commissioner Schmelder. There were no changes, all were in favor and the Minutes were accepted into the record.

IV. Consent Agenda

A. Communications

B. Economic Development/Grants/Marketing Report

Mayor Caggiano called for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Goldwasser made the motion which was seconded by Commissioner Provenzano. All were in favor and the Consent Agenda was accepted into the record.

V. New Business

A. Strategic Planning Update

Mayor Caggiano provided a broad overview of the need for a strategic plan where all the goals for the city are in writing. These written goals will be used to guide city planners, boards and commissions with a more streamlined and cohesive approach when budgeting and planning city projects going forward.

Justin Malley requested the Board provide their input to ECD Staff, and to include notes on those goals, to serve as a starting point of input from the ECD perspective. While the Board has been working on its goals over the years, the Strategic Plan requires that they be in writing to be combined with those provided by other departments to help guide the long-term planning. A sample template was provided to the Board with examples of goals, values, deliverables and measurable indicators with a request for the Board members to provide their input to ECD Staff by July 31, 2025 to allow for compilation and presentation at the August ECD Board Meeting.

Commissioners Schmelder and Provenzano both expressed the need for trackable, measurable measures to ensure the plans are being implemented, reported on and adjusted accordingly. Commissioner Goldwasser encouraged the Commissioners to break larger issues or goals down into smaller, attainable ones to help bring about greater change over time. Additional discussion followed.

B. Fiscal Year Incentives Review

Justin Malley provided an end of the Fiscal Year Business Incentives Program review to the Board. Of note, the Revolving Loan Program provided ten (10) loans with a combined total value of \$357,405.00. One loan has already been paid in full, and the remaining loans are current with none in default. The Small Business Grants came in with four (4) totaling \$20,000.00, and six (6) Façade Program Grants totaling \$71,513.82.

C. Downtown Update

Mayor Caggiano provided a report on 234 Riverside Avenue which is currently being used as laydown space for the nearby bridge work. Recent meetings regarding the use of the property for the fuel cell and data center have taken place and were deemed productive. Discussion about the use of the property followed. It should be noted that fuel cells will not be manufactured on the site, rather, it will be a data center site which will use its own fuel cell due to the amount of energy required to operate it.

Justin Malley referred to the final parcel at Centre Square that will be going out for RFP. A few more details need to come together before the RFP can be issued, possibly in August 2025.

Commissioner Schmelder asked about Parcel #10 which, the mayor advised, belongs to a private developer. There is some new movement on it, however it is not information that can yet be made public. The new Hope Street parking garage is now available for use, and the remaining parcel by Wheeler Health is being reviewed for the next best steps. Mayor Caggiano emphasized that any developer that comes in will need to show they have the financial means. Discussion followed including available bid options steps and city guidelines for such processes.

Commissioner Goldwasser inquired about the J.H. Sessions Building at 273 Riverside Avenue. Justin Malley provided an update regarding the State of Connecticut's readiness to cover the developer's financing gap. Discussion around the number of apartments to be offered at the varying AMI percentages continues. One final piece of remediation remains regarding removal of a telephone pole and cleaning the dirt around the area of the pole. The city currently retains ownership of the property. Mayor Caggiano shared his belief that the State is committed to the project as discussed and that it will come to fruition.

Commissioner Schmelder asked about the former Kenmore Cleaners location at 211 Riverside Avenue. Justin Malley confirmed that the property is on the market with some interest. Mayor Caggiano advised that the building is not in code violation at last check, and assured the Board that the city would continue to make sure the location is kept in order.

D. Manufacturer Visits

Justin Malley shared feedback from two recent visits to manufacturing locations in Bristol. Katie D'Agostino from the Central Connecticut Chamber of Commerce, and Kim Holley from BristolWORKS! Have partnered with Justin Malley to visit various local manufacturers for a casual conversation regarding the industry, the work force, and related experiences.

Some conversation highlights include the slow ramp up after COVID due to the loss of workforce and how the work is received, the encouraging rise of the younger demographic in the manufacturing workforce, and the positive impact the bus route serving 229 Technology Park has had for their employees. These meetings have provided insight into ways the city might be able to help the manufacturers, such as driveway flooding at one location they visited.

VI. New Business by Commissioners

There was no New Business by Commissioners.

VII. Old Business by Commissioners

There was no Old Business by Commissioners.

VIII. Committee Reports

A. City Council Member Report

There was no City Council Member Report.

IX. Adjournment

With no further items to review, the mayor called for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made by Commissioner Goldwasser which was seconded by Commissioner Provenzano. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 6:13pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sharon Arsego

Recording Secretary