Meeting called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Will Neary, Chair.

PRESENT

Regular members: Will Neary, Lindsey Turner, Christine Harding, L. Thomas Roman, Michele Murelli
Alternate members: Renee Betar, Danielle Muecke, Lelah Campo
Ex-officio (virtually, by phone): Denise Raap, First Selectman, Litchfield
Members of the public: None

ABSENT

Regular members: D.J. Murphy, Cleveland Fuessenich, Anne Haas
Alternate members: None

Appointment of alternate voting member(s) for meeting: Renee Betar, Danielle Muecke

Public comment: N/A

Motion by D. Muecke to approve amended draft minutes of the October 27, 2021 regular meeting; W. Neary seconded the motion. All voted aye and the motion carried.

EDC task force updates:

Marketing and Branding Litchfield:
- Nearing the final approval stage for the complete www.visitlitchfieldct.com website (on track to be approved by W. Neary and L. Turner week of 12/6)
- In the queue, after the website launch, will be a printed piece...
- D. Raap provided update from Connecticut Conference of Municipalities:
At one of the workshops, David Lehman (Economic Development Commissioner for the State of Connecticut) spoke with D. Raap about making sure the EDC—and Litchfield broadly—ensures they partner with ctvisit.com to actively post and promote local events; next step is to connect Doug Clement with them.

D. Raap voiced how CT rest areas need improvement (making them more welcoming to people from New York to Boston).

The state has hired a brand new person responsible for contacting different towns in hopes of getting more exposure for said towns (attendees called out how the northwest corner is lacking in exposure).

T. Roman voiced that many business owners are fully unaware of ctvisit.com.

Restaurant Week (L. Turner):

- Scheduled for Monday-Sunday: February 21-27, 2021
- L. Turner will assign EDC volunteers for researching contact details for (and, once a flyer is assembled, conducting outreach to) Litchfield restaurants.
  - First step is to complete a spreadsheet of restaurants’ contact info (first names, last names, titles, phone numbers, addresses, etc.).
  - W. Neary and L. Turner will draft copy for the pitch, being sure to include a deadline by which restaurant owners shall commit or decline.
  - M. Murelli will assist with designing a flyer; aims to circulate draft 12/2.
  - The next steps will involve EDC volunteers reaching out to restaurant staff by phone asking if they want to participate in Restaurant Week.
  - The main requirement of the event is for the restaurants to offer a pre-fixe menu (appetizer, entree, dessert) — anything above and beyond that (e.g., special drinks) is welcome as well.
  - In the event of Covid-19 restrictions, Restaurant Week shall continue but can be amended as needed (e.g., takeout).
  - This will be Litchfield's inaugural Restaurant Week—intended to focus on sit-down restaurants that serve dinner; down the road, we can consider lunch or happy hour to involve more establishments.

Opening a Business in Litchfield (C. Harding, D. Muecke):

- Goal is to provide a flowchart of sorts on how to open a business in Litchfield.
- C. Fuessenich has been working on a directory; push this along to completion.
- Given the number of idiosyncrasies and facets specific to different types of businesses (e.g., restaurants vs. retail and so on), C. Harding and D. Muecke are discussing an interactive feature online where users can self-identify and be guided appropriately. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.
- D. Raap circulated ‘checklist for starting your own business’ document.

Local Business Update:
Commission members discussed inviting a local business owner as a guest 1x/quarter to EDC meeting to discuss challenges or opportunities (15 minutes); L. Campo will take the initiative to invite and schedule guests for 2022.

- LABA update (DJ): None.

- Western CT tourism (Tom):
  - Recently, a letter from Western CT Tourism District’s Board of Directors went out to business owners inviting them to partner with them / participate in free marketing opportunities.
  - The letter encouraged businesses to register or update existing tourism-related business information in the WCTD’s database; WCTD can then feature businesses on social media.
  - Appears there has not been a lot of pickup around this partner.ctvisit.com/partner-with-us initiative.

- CT.gov EDC “Connecticut Communities Challenge” Program (D. Raap):
  - D. Raap mentioned American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds can go towards tourism, hospitality, economic growth; Litchfield plans to budget for these funds for at least the next four years. On the agenda for the 12/7 Board of Selectmen meeting is to discuss ways we can utilize this funding to create a Community Development Director position (e.g., like Michelle Gorra of Washington who works 28 hours/week).
  - ARPA: $100 million total (each grant will be $1-$10 million)
  - 50% of ARPA money will go to municipalities that are considered distressed (Litchfield is not one of them); they do want to promote the use of underutilized buildings, like the Bantam Annex for instance.
  - Grant also promotes a public-and-private partnership.
  - There is not enough time this year (intent of application is due 12/3 and grant itself is due 1/14), but next year Litchfield should jointly put together a grant application for repurposing the Bantam Annex among other projects.
  - D. Raap mentioned a January charette (public hearing / gathering) with food truck, site plans of arts / cultural center and sports extension being proposed but nothing has come to the Board of Selectmen meeting formally as of yet.
  - As an aside, if Litchfield was to find a space for a community pool center, perhaps it can/should be overseen by a private entity as opposed to the town.
  - Transit-oriented development is within the “Communities Challenge” program.

- Old and unfinished business:
  - T. Roman raised DOT train project:
- Expressed interest in getting architectural renderings (though this will likely not happen pro bono).
- W. Neary pointed out that transit-oriented development is within the “Communities Challenge” program.
- T. Roman to therefore reach out to Carol Powers re: reviewing the state’s “Communities Challenge” program, specifically its section on infrastructure and transportation.

New business:
- ARPA “form” forthcoming from D. Raap after 12/7 Board of Selectmen meeting
- Update on Litchfield lodging accommodations (B&B, hotel):
  - Rose Haven - decision will be made at the next Planning and Zoning meeting
  - The Courthouse - submitted application, expected to be formally presented at public hearing set for likely January/February 2022
- M. Murelli requested EDC support for planning events:
  - ‘Gallery on the Green’ (grant for this has already been written in hopes of securing seed money)
  - ‘Plein-air Festival’ (working with Amy from Chanticleer Acres Farm)
- C. Harding voiced contention from local businesses around the Passport Program:
  - 2020: Lauren M. of Ace took on the Passport Program
  - 2021: The Spa at Litchfield Hills took on the passport project last minute as a recognized champion of Small Business Saturday (AMEX)
  - The issue was that many folks had already told inquiring businesses that the Passport Program was not happening this year. So when it was pulled together at the last minute, some businesses felt slighted.
  - Questions: Is this something the EDC can take on? LABA? Merchants uniting themselves? Is it possible to make everyone happy? Will there always be points of contention?
  - Answer(s): Table this discussion until if/when we are able to secure a Community Director via ARPA state grant. General consensus is that any single business should likely not take on the Passport Program unilaterally; consider making it pay-to-play (where each business puts money towards being a part of the project) as well as opening a subcommittee where business owners can organize potentially under one EDC appointee / “referee” for functional consistency (for the record, non-residents of Litchfield who own/operate businesses in Litchfield could serve on such a subcommittee as ad hoc, non-voting members).
  - D. Muecke offered a suggestion about the EDC issuing a universal QR code to use as a digital passport that can be scanned at any Litchfield business.
D. Muecke suggests that if the passport program should happen again next year, perhaps consider making it an entire month.

Would Litchfield consider having a Chamber of Commerce? If one was to exist, it'd likely take the shape of a private, nonprofit (like Kent, CT).

In a future meeting, outline list of potential seasonal tentpole community events:
  - Hot dog week in July
  - Holiday Stroll in November
  - D. Raap suggests Oktoberfest on the green or community field
  - Road race
  - Spring fling (end of April, beginning of May)
  - Sustainable Litchfield will want to do something on Earth Day (4/22)
  - Flower show?
  - C. Harding suggests talking to other committees like Park & Rec
  - T. Roman also suggests coordinating with communities bordering Litchfield so as to not cannibalize any event
  - L. Campo made the point that Torrington Area of Health (TAH) has to issue all of the permits for these major community events; if EDC needs details, we can contact them.

2022 schedule (meetings, programs, events):
  - EDC to continue meeting the last Wednesday of every month into 2022.
  - W. Neary proposed the following meeting dates:
    - 1/26
    - 2/23
    - 3/30
    - 4/27
    - 5/25
    - 6/29
    - 7/27
    - 8/31
    - 9/28
    - 10/26
    - 11/16 (instead of 11/30, to meet before Thanksgiving and before Holiday Stroll)
    - 12/21
    - 1/12 (potential special subcommittee meeting for Restaurant Week planning)
  - Motion by D. Muecke to approve 2022 meeting dates; W. Neary seconded the motion. All voted aye and the motion carried.

Adjourn: Motion to adjourn meeting made by D. Muecke; W. Neary seconded the motion. All voted aye and the motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 8:42 p.m.
Next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 26, 2022.

Respectfully submitted,
Tara-Marie Lynch
Litchfield Economic Development Commission

Litchfield Economic Development Commission Mission Statement (adopted 06/10/2020):
The mission is to promote sustainable economic diversity for Litchfield.