Meeting called to order at 7:04 p.m. by Will Neary, Chair.

PRESENT

Regular members: Will Neary, L. Cleveland Fuessenich, Thomas Roman, Michele Murelli, Danielle Muecke
Alternate members: Renee Betar, D.J. Murphy, Lelah Campo, Tara-Marie Lynch
Ex-officio: Denise Raap, First Selectman, Litchfield
Members of the public: John McKenna, Doug Clement

ABSENT

Regular members: Lindsey Turner, Christine Harding
Alternate members: N/A

Appointment of alternate voting member(s) for meeting:
- D.J. Murphy
- Renee Betar

Public comment: N/A

Motion by M. Murelli to approve draft minutes of the December 1, 2021 regular meeting; D. Muecke seconded the motion. All voted aye and the motion carried.

EDC task force updates:
- Marketing and Branding Litchfield (D. Clement):
  - Website is ready to launch
  - Will be updated on a daily basis
  - Blog posts of original content (what to do this week/month, concierge-style ways to plan activities, logistics/parking, etc.)
- Social stream
- Newsletter component
- And so on

- Print piece is in the works
  - Potentially do two (one in the spring and one in the fall)
  - TBD on getting ads; at some point it should fund itself
  - Reference quality / thickness of Washington booklet
  - Roughly $4.5K earmarked for printing

- Digest provided for social media metrics; benchmarking “Explore Washington”
- Grant request for “Visit Litchfield CT” project was $40K / we were given $23K (for website build, standing up social media pages, print pieces)
- D. Clement will ask Harmony Tanguay to attend next EDC meeting (post-website launch, so she can collect feedback from the EDC)
  - Restaurant Week:
    - Originally scheduled for Monday-Sunday: February 21-27, 2021 (canceled)
    - Now looking to summer or fall / ensure adequate amount of preparation time
  - Opening a Business in Litchfield:
    - List of tips for people looking to open new business (retail or not) recommended by D. Muecke
    - Charlie Dumais to attend next month’s meeting

- LABA (D.J. Murphy):
  - Record-attendance for events, starting with Black Bear Music Festival
  - January meeting held at renovated Litchfield Inn had ~60 people in attendance
  - Expect to have 200+ LABA members in 2022
  - Next meeting scheduled for February 15, 2022 (announce/plan welcome bags)
  - Plan to stuff/deliver next round of Litchfield welcome bags in March 2022

- Western CT Tourism (T. Roman) — Reviewed boosted campaigns, social media audience size

- 28 Russell Street:
  - Litchfield Land Trust plans to purchase
  - Greenway plans rent and is in search of non-profits to share space/costs
  - The idea is to create something like a welcome center-type feel
  - Any ideas should be sent to D. Raap

- Litchfield Affordable Housing / Employee Survey:
  - Survey is still live as of 1/26
Per L. Cleveland Fuessenich, Litchfield has been a model statewide for affordable housing that has been generated (with 45 houses in town that hardly anybody recognizes called ‘scattered sites’ + a couple complexes)

Kent and Norfolk have similarly progressive pieces of properties that have helped residents of the town in this vein

There is a long waitlist for Litchfield affordable housing (the demand is higher than the supply at this point)

Public forum to be held in March to discuss results of the survey, brainstorm ideas

- Old and unfinished business: N/A

- New business:
  - America’s Rescue Plan Act, ARPA (D. Raap):
    - Town of Litchfield has allocated $150K of $911K to help support businesses and/or nonprofits that have struggled / had loss of revenue due to COVID
    - A form is in the works to have a fair and equitable way for organizations to apply for these funds
    - Town of Litchfield is seeking volunteers from different committees to:
      - Review applications
      - Determine distribution methods (same cap amount across the board vs. scaled allotments based on factors like percentage of loss, dollar value of loss, service to local community, planned use of funds, etc.)
      - Assemble a rubric of sorts for rating applications
    - Then in June, the Town of Litchfield expects another round of funding — at which point applicants who may not have received funding in the first round can be reconsidered
    - EDC recommended R. Betar of the EDC to help in the abovementioned capacity; R. Betar accepts and W. Neary will serve as deputy representative
  - 2022 schedule:
    - Bring thoughts to next EDC meeting about tentpole events (from there, start drawing lines in the sand as far as seasonal dates)
    - M. Murelli has received $5K from Connecticut Humanities Council to do a Makers’ Market on the Litchfield Green (June 11, 2022):
      - Opened up applications around 3 weeks ago
      - 30+ applications received so far
      - Nonprofits won’t have to pay a fee if they’re not selling anything (otherwise a nominal entry fee)
      - Invited 25 of the small farms in surrounding towns
      - M. Murelli explaining to folks that this is a built-in audience given it's the weekend of the Litchfield Hills Road Race
○ R. Betar to formally go to the Borough of Litchfield to request the information booth opens May 1 to November 1, 2022
○ T. Roman mentions that the ‘bring back the train’ project remains ongoing:
  ■ State of CT is pushing for commuter rail (“Communities Challenge” program)
  ■ The idea of a brick-and-mortar station in East Litchfield is floating around
  ■ Train currently goes from Thomaston to Torrington
  ■ Next steps are to i) nail down boundaries and ownership; ii) look into surveyor; iii) seriously review grant application; and then iv) put a plan in front of the Board of Selectmen for review
  ■ D. Raap suggests temporary platform to experiment before jumping into what could be a million-dollar project
○ D.J. Murphy asked whether the EDC will make a public comment on the Borough of Litchfield’s yellow-ribbon controversy (given national press)
○ L. Campo, C. Harding, and Lauren Mahieu have met / organized small a small counsel to see if certain Litchfield-centric events (e.g., passport program, job fair, and so on) can fall under Northwest CT Chamber of Commerce; next meeting is 1/27
○ **Film TV Digital Media** (R. Betar):
  ■ A portal on CT website accepts submissions from towns and businesses offering their location(s) as a destination for potential film shoot(s)
  ■ Do people (or town) of Litchfield want to submit? Probably so, as it’s likely to attract economic activity as far as accommodations, businesses, etc.
  ■ D. Muecke will reach out to fellow town clerk from her hometown who had managed this and reaped benefits from doing so
  ■ D.J. Murphy requested R. Betar to present this at next LABA meeting
  ■ Will add it to next month’s EDC agenda to discuss further...

- Adjourn: Motion to adjourn meeting made by D. Muecke; M. Murelli seconded the motion. All voted aye and the motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 8:39 p.m.

Next regular meeting is scheduled for February 23, 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.*