



## LITCHFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Regular Meeting Minutes · DRAFT

April 26, 2023  
Bantam Annex  
80 Doyle Road  
Bantam, CT 06750

1. Meeting called to order at 7:07 p.m. by Will Neary.

**PRESENT**     *Regular members:* L. Cleveland Fuessenich, Michele Murelli, Will Neary, Thomas Roman and Lindsey Turner *Alternate members:* Renee Betar, Missy Lafferty and Cailyn Paradise  
*Ex-officio:* Denise Raap, First Selectwoman, Litchfield  
*Members of the public:* Doug Clement (Boardwalk Media principal), Jennifer Graham (Litchfield Historical Society board member) and Priscilla Jeffery (Chair, Litchfield Arts Council and Litchfield Prevention Council member).

**ABSENT**     *Regular member:* Tara-Marie Bares

2. Appointment of alternate voting member for meeting: Renée Betar
3. Motion by C. Fuessenich to approve draft minutes of the March 29, 2023 regular meeting; Tom Roman seconded the motion. All voted aye and the motion carried.

### Public comment:

- Priscilla Jeffrey:
  - Relatively new to Litchfield and feels it's important to be involved in her community.
  - Believes EDC is a town hub and wants the arts (including poets and writers, musicians, and visual and performing artists, etc.) to collaborate with EDC to increase and feature the arts as a strong contributor to personal and community well-being. One example is creation of a public mural.
  - A useful resource for more details: [CT Humanities](#)
- 4. Naugatuck Railroad (NRR) next steps
  - Discussed pursuing next steps involved in working toward the eventual goal of re-creating a railroad platform in East Litchfield where the Naugatuck Rail Road (NRR) would bring new people and business to all of Litchfield. Some opportunities and concerns include:
    - Opportunities
      - NRR would build the platform if they are certain who owns the land.

- Funding a survey to determine ownership is possible with partial funding from EDC and help from an East Litchfield Village Improvement Association (ELVIS) fundraiser. Bid(s) for survey would have to be written by Litchfield Public Works.
- E. Litchfield platform could be an asset for the town - a historic and culture gateway to the town.
- A safe, attractive platform could attract additional businesses and opportunities for existing businesses, especially leading up to the America 250 celebration in 2026. In 2022, 36,000 passengers rode the NVR from the Thomaston station to the Torrington station!
- E. Litchfield property needs attention anyway. A new platform would enhance the gateway to Litchfield from the east, north and south.
- (ELVIS) and perhaps other entities (businesses, non-profits and municipal commissions) could be potential partners in the project (from funding to execution and maintenance).
- Concerns
  - Who owns the land? Funding for a land survey is needed to confirm ownership.
  - Restaurants would be the only businesses open between 5:00 and 8:00 pm when the train would be dropping off riders.
  - Transportation to and from points of interest around town
    - The town is not renewing (as of July 2023) the NW Transit bus contract (a potential obstacle for making this project work) due to the astronomical increase in fee (\$2000 to \$38,000) and low ridership.
    - Need other sources of transport – All Star, business sponsors (e.g. Haight Vineyard)
  - Point of contact for the project and ongoing administration of programs is uncertain.
  - Who would maintain the platform?

Next step is to draft a detailed proposal to address the above and more. C. Paradise and R. Betar offered to help T. Romans draft a proposal to present at next EDC meeting.

#### 5. EDC Task Force updates:

- Marketing and Branding Litchfield update – D. Clement
  - VisitLitchfieldCT.com update for last 28 days:
    1. Remainder of Restaurant Week and introduction of Laurel Ridge daffodils generated great returns.
    2. FB jumped from 24,000 to 37,000 - organic reach with 3,347 followers. For comparison, new followers for Washington, CT= 20; Litchfield = 100.
    3. Instagram: Arethusa piece on donation to Region 20 Education had 500+ likes and Laurel Ridge Daffodils had 1000+ like
    4. MailChimp stats: 70% open rate (normal is 60%)
    5. T. Roman: Is it possible to estimate how these efforts translate to dollars in the business community? D. Clement shared that's hard to do. Anecdotally, the site is making a difference for the businesses and drawing people to

Litchfield. D. Raap added that the site is creating a buzz – a sense of community within and outside Litchfield.

- M. Lafferty questioned how to get data from Information Booth that helps us understand who is visiting and how they learned about Litchfield. R. Betar shared that Info Booth volunteers collect zip codes and try to document relevant conversations.
  - Visit Litchfield pamphlet reprint – sponsorship update: W. Neary reported that no new sponsors have been secured yet. D. Raap suggested asking businesses for \$100 each – not a formal pay-to-play but an effort to cover costs. A one-page summary will be prepared to support future sponsorship efforts.
6. Post - Restaurant Week (RW)
- T. Bares sent a report on the post-event survey to participating restaurants. To date, six restaurants completed the survey. Responses were more qualitative than quantitative although three businesses estimated a 10% increase in business. All responses were mostly positive, and all agreed that the timing of the event was good in a historically slower month and that the Distillery was a great partner. Improvements for next time included different *prix fixe* points, fewer meal variations, and a possible pay-to-play request from restaurants.
  - All respondents and EDC members agreed to “Restaurant Week 2024”.
7. New Businesses in Litchfield in ‘23:
- Both R. Betar and W. Neary contacted Chris Kelsey in the Assessor’s office to find another way (rather than assessor spreadsheets) to identify newly registered businesses.
  - [Stockyard](#) grand opening was April 22. Great addition to Litchfield’s businesses.
  - W. Neary and L. Turner will re-visit adding an EDC letter to the LABA new resident bags and perhaps introducing a “new business” bag. Next LABA bag stuffing is in June.
8. Litchfield Historical Society Update: Guest Jennifer Graham
- Does Litchfield have a marketing consultant that LHS can contact? D. Raap shared the POCAD’s last strategic planning priorities. Tara-Marie Bares is the EDC volunteer marketing guru. There was no formal marketing effort before [VisitLitchfieldCT.com](#)
  - Given the LHS plan to become a CT Welcome Center, J. Graham is coordinating an effort to fund (possibility is Seherr-Thoss Foundation), acquire and place “Welcome to Litchfield/Entering Litchfield” signs from five different directions. J. Graham and L. Turner shared thoughts on shape, location and content of signs.
  - Process for moving forward: Need public input. Borough and the State need to be involved. To start, LHC and EDC present proposal and mock-up of sign to Board of Selectmen.
9. Business – Summer “tent-pole” ideas
- M. Murelli: Coordinate with other entities for town-wide event
  - W. Neary: Hot Dog Contest in July
  - L. Turner: Porch concerts – 2024
  - D. Raap: How can EDC help with fireworks on June 30?
  - D. Raap: Oktoberfest

- C. Fuessenich: Farm tour - coordinate a week-end with environmental and farm groups.
- M. Murelli: Arts and Prevention Councils – educate school children in Law School at the Meadow setting

10. America 250 (C. Fuessenich)

- Third community meeting of A250 group to be held on May 30, 2023 from 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. at the Historical Society.
- EDC needs to nail down how they will participate. Send ideas to C. Fuessenich, who is a member of the Litchfield Patriots (the planning group) and is the EDC liaison for A250.
- Idea generated at today's meeting:
  - C. Fuessenich: Research businesses in Litchfield in 1776. Chronical type of business, ownership between then and now, evolution of businesses as times changed. Maybe a series of weekly or monthly features of each business throughout 2026.
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11. Adjourn: Motion to adjourn meeting made by Tom Roman; Cleve Fuessenich seconded the motion. All voted aye and the motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 31, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

Renée Betar, Acting Secretary  
Litchfield Economic Development Commission

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