

COMMUNITY CULTURAL CENTER ROOM 111/MICROSOFT "TEAMS"

FEES COMMITTEE

April 17, 2023

PRESENT Chair Harry Amadasun, Councillors Awet Tsegai and Travis Simpson

ALSO Eileen Buckheit, Development Director
PRESENT Melissa McCaw, Finance Director
Kevin Munson, Fire Chief (via Teams)
Ted Fravel, Director of Parks and Recreation (via Teams)
Rich Kehoe, Town Council Chair

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Amadasun called the meeting to order at 6:40 pm

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

February 15, 2023

MOTION By Awet Tsegai
seconded by Travis Simpson

to **approve** the minutes of the February 15, 2023 meeting.

Motion carried 3/0

April 3, 2023 Combined Meeting with Tax Policy Committee

MOTION By Awet Tsegai
seconded by Travis Simpson

to **approve** the minutes of the April 3, 2023 Combined Meeting with the Tax Policy Committee.

Motion carried 3/0

OPPORTUNITY FOR RESIDENTS TO SPEAK

Sam Pines, Director of Fixed Operations at Hoffman Auto Group, located at 650 Connecticut Boulevard has requested a reduction of permit fees for a large scale development project on the site. Mr. Pines stated that in researching other municipalities, East Hartford's pricing structure for fire permits higher than neighboring towns. Mr. Pines commended the Planning and Zoning Commission for their support in the process and the plan is to begin development in May.

The Commission thanked Mr. Pines for attending the meeting and stated that the goal of the committee this evening was to evaluate the current fire permit structure as a whole.

OLD BUSINESS

363 Roberts Street

Chair Amadasun stated that the development project at 363 Roberts Street would be addressed as part of the overall discussion of Fire and Building Inspection Permit Fees under New Business. The Chair stated that at the previous combined meeting of Tax Policy and the Fees Committees, the developer for the project attended and provided previously requested documentation surrounding his investment into the project as justification for a request of reduced fees.

NEW BUSINESS

Fire and Building Inspection Permit Fees

Director Buckheit stated that addressing the current fee structure has been an issue under consideration for the Town for some time. The Development department provided a summary of findings based on research of pricing other local municipalities provide. In a memo provided, the Director highlighted Enfield, Waterbury and Meriden as comparable towns in both size and scope, highlighting Meriden's model in particular. The results of this research detailed that East Hartford's current structure was higher than others. After additional discussion of the issue with the Town's Building Official, Fire Marshal, and Fire Chief, the Director feels that a change to the current fee schedule will assist the Town's efforts to be more business friendly and add certainty to the approval and permitting process.

Chief Munson stated that the current fees for the Fire Marshal's office cover both plan review and field inspections. The complexity of a fire protection system (sprinklers, fire alarms, etc.) can require significant additional review to assure projects are up to code. The Chief concurred with Director Buckheit's assessment that by making fire marshal fees a percentage of building department fees the process would be simpler. The Chief stated that a fair compromise would be setting the fee at 75% for the plan review with a sliding scale based on certifications provided by developers that would alleviate the burden on building department staffing.

Council Chair Kehoe feels that a percentage structure would be less user friendly and complicated.

Director McCaw stated that in her experience, as developers are benchmarking fees, they will look for direct comparison and the majority of similar towns have an initial flat fee, with an additional fee based on the dollar value of construction. Having a structure that looks similar would provide for easier comparison and less computation.

The Committee discussed the merits of a three-tiered structure that would accommodate for the added cost of plan review in cases where there is a fire suppression unit, but would also provide value for those projects that provide stamped certification of units that are up to code. Chief Munson estimated that roughly 80% of commercial projects brought under review have some kind of fire suppression feature built into them.

The Committee discussed how discounting the current schedule would affect the town budget. Director McCaw stated that based on current trends the budget for 2023-24 projects for \$600,000 in revenue. If changes made are too aggressive, the Director feels that meeting that amount would be challenging.

The Committee proposed that going forward a regularly scheduled review of Fire and Building Fees would assure that rates remain competitive with surrounding towns.

650 Connecticut Boulevard

MOTION By Awet Tsegai
seconded by Travis Simpson

to **recommend** the Town Council approve the revised Fire Marshal Fees Schedule as follows effective April 19, 2023:

1. Projects without fire protection features review:
\$20 for 1st \$1,000 of construction with an additional fee of \$13 per \$1,000 of estimated costs.
2. Projects with fire protection feature review:
\$20 for 1st \$1,000 of construction with an additional fee of \$15 per \$1,000 of estimated costs.
3. Fire protection engineered with stamped certification:
\$20 for 1st \$1,000 of construction with an additional fee of \$13 per \$1,000 of estimated costs.

Motion carried 3/0

Chair Amadasun stated that the new fee structure would also accommodate the proposed projects at both 363 Roberts Street and 650 Connecticut Boulevard.

Lease of Cricket Field at Shea Park

Chair Amadasun provided the Committee with background of a proposal by resident Parvez Bandi, who is looking to lease the recently built cricket field at Shea Park in an effort to better manage cricket field programming.

Ted Fravel, Director of Parks and Recreation stated that this would be the second season partnering with Mr. Bandi on use of the field, and that the proposed programming provided is much more detailed than last year. For comparison, the Town provides use of athletic fields for baseball and other sports to East Hartford residents for free with a nominal fee structure in place for non-resident participation. The Director stated that the proposed schedule is much longer than is normal for league use.

The Committee requested that more information be provided by Mr. Bandi on expected participation and schedule use before action can be taken.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION By Awet Tsegai
seconded by Travis Simpson

to **adjourn** (7:50 pm).

Motion carried 3/0

cc: Town Council
Mayor Walsh
Eileen Buckheit, Development Director
Melissa McCaw, Finance Director