

**Regional and Economic Development Committee
Conference Call
APPROVED Meeting Minutes
March 11, 2021
3:00 PM**

Members Present via GoToMeeting: Committee Chair Marcia Leclerc, Board Chair Suzanne Hopgood, Randal Davis, DECD Deputy Commissioner Alexandra Daum, Bob Patricelli

Staff Present via GoToMeeting: Mike Freimuth, Anthony Lazzaro and Kim Hart

Guests Present via GoToMeeting: Agriculture Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt, Jamie Smith (Agriculture Dept) and Martha Page (Hartford Food System)

The meeting was called to order at 3:01 pm by Mayor Leclerc and the minutes of the January 14, 2021 meeting were approved on a voice vote.

Mr. Freimuth updated the Committee on various projects:

1. **East Hartford Projects** – All projects are progressing and there are no major changes to report.
2. **Bushnell South Garage** – Construction is winding down and the garage should be operational sometime in July.
3. **Front Street** – CRDA continues to closely monitor the health of the restaurants and theaters in the Front Street district, as well as the Marriott Hotel. All have been severely impacted by the COVID pandemic and the loss of convention goers, Downtown Hartford employees and UConn students. Mr. Freimuth noted that two restaurants have been forced to close.
4. **Parkville Market** – The State Department of Transportation has approved the Parkville Market's use of space under I-84 for much-needed additional parking. DOT will now submit the required paperwork for federal approval.
5. **Regional Agricultural Market** – Mr. Freimuth introduced Commission Hurlburt and updated members on the Development Planning Consultant RFP process. Two of the bidders were invited to make presentations to the Selection Committee on March 3rd. Mr. Freimuth noted that while both offered impressive credentials, the Selection Committee is struggling with the basic question of what the Market's role should be. Bidders were told that a more focused scope would be provided and that they would be asked for revised proposals.

Commissioner Hurlburt offered some thoughts on his agency's role, Connecticut's food industry, lessons learned during COVID and what the Market could offer. He sees the Department of

Agriculture as more of a regulatory and marketing agency and believes that real estate and development questions relative to the Regional Market are rightly in the purview of CRDA.

The Commissioner suggested that the pandemic has put a greater emphasis on the importance of Connecticut's farmers and the state's food industry in general. Early in the lockdown as grocery shelves emptied, residents sought out local farmers' markets and farm stands as a means of securing food unavailable in grocery stores, as well providing a more socially distant shopping experience. He noted that, as a result, these retail farm operations saw a 30% increase in sales during this time. Conversely, those farmers operating at the wholesale level, particularly dairy farmers, saw their business dry up with the closure of restaurants, hotels and educational institutions.

Commissioner Hurlburt explained that his agency is embarking on a new "CT Grown" media campaign. He reflected on the need to assist farmers in "stretching the season", helping them find supplemental income through things activities such as "light processing". While it may not make financial sense for individual famers to set up space for canning and making jams and salsas, the creation of shared work and commercial kitchen spaces – perhaps at the Regional Market - could help many farmers. The Commissioner also cited the need for space for small breweries and wineries and the success of efforts to pair these retail enterprises with the State's shellfish industry, which has traditionally been a wholesale operation.

Deputy Commissioner Daum questioned whether the Commissioner saw the Market as being retail- or wholesale-focused. Commissioner Hurlburt discussed the idea of the site encompassing both, noting that the farmers often do not always limit themselves to one or the other. He cited the market at Groton Airport as a successful operation in spite of the site's lack of ambiance – not unlike the Regional Market.

Mr. Freimuth questioned Commissioner Hurlburt about transportation and the role the Regional Market plays or should play in ensuring adequate food supplies in New England. Committee members discussed the staggering fact that should bridges over the Hudson River shut down, New Englanders would be left with only a three-day supply of food.

Mr. Patricelli expressed his belief that the net step in the development process should be for CRDA to draft a "statement of purpose" for the Market, citing the diversity of activities, including light processing and even meat processing, that might find a home there, The Commissioner offered his assistance and support to CRDA as it works to develop such a statement.

The next meeting of the Regional & Economic Development Committee is scheduled for April 8, 2021.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:03 p.m.