Town of Somers

Somers Economic Development Commission — Meeting Notes

November 10, 2026 | Town Hall, Lower Level | Called to order at 6:02 p.m.

1–3. Call to order, September minutes, and public comment

Attendance: Shawn Curtis, Karen Murdoch, Melissa Zelek, Matthew Beggs, and Gail Kulas were present. Attending from the public, Holly Bonasera arrived during the meeting.

Shawn called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. Because the commission did not meet in October, the commission voted to approve the September minutes on a motion by Matt Beggs, seconded by Gail Kulas. Melissa, who was absent in September, did not vote. No public comment was offered.

Shawn noted that the meeting was being recorded with an AI note-taking tool to help prepare the minutes.

4. Correspondence

- **Tolland County Chamber of Commerce:** The Chamber reached out to strengthen its connection with member towns by assigning a liaison to each community. Matthew Beggs, who was originally assigned to the Tolland County Chamber with Holly, will serve as the EDC's point of contact. Shawn will forward the email to him.
- **Holiday Festival (December 5):** Samantha Charette, Director of Recreation and Leisure Services, asked whether the EDC would continue the past practice of encouraging local businesses to offer special hours or deals during the town's holiday festival and tree lighting, and whether the EDC would like a presence at the event. Members noted that past participation was limited. Options discussed included asking businesses to post special hours, displaying Shop Local signs, and a self-serve table for business materials. The item was moved to New Business (see 7a).
- **Senior Center community workshop:** Recreation and Leisure Services offered time during the Senior Center's coffee hours (November 10, 17, or 24) for an EDC community workshop on Somers Center. Given the chairman's resignation, Shawn advised that the commission may need to schedule this in the new year.
- **Email practice and FOIA:** Shawn reminded members that once email discussion among commissioners turns into "reply all," it becomes commission business subject to FOIA. Members should avoid reply-all exchanges and bring substantive updates to public meetings.
- **BluDot:** Gail received a suspicious request through BluDot, which she identified as spam. Both Shawn and Gail have lost administrator access to the BluDot account. Gail will contact Liv at BluDot to restore access.

5. Old business

a. Prior action items. Shawn confirmed that the planned development district question from September has been resolved (see 6e). Other prior items are addressed under the committee reports below.

b. Budget. The only new expense since the last update is the **$1,000** Connecticut Main Street Center invoice. The fee covers the rest of 2026 and all of 2027. Four Town Fair reimbursements have been sorted out. Shawn is reconciling the budget and will send a written update by the end of the week.

c. Special Board of Selectmen meeting on land use (October 22). Melissa presented the October Business of the Month, The Bra Ladies, at this meeting. Attorney Mike Zizka gave a presentation on land use. Under the town charter, the selectmen's only real oversight of land use is approving spending on legal fees. Responsibility for land use matters rests with the Planning and Zoning Commission. Members who attended said the session was informative but did not reveal anything new for the EDC.

Shawn also reported on a meeting with First Selectman Tim Keeney. Tim endorsed the Connecticut Main Street Center engagement and the EDC's small community workshops, and offered to state his support publicly if needed. Shawn asked that the EDC have a seat on, or be able to give input to, a committee or steering group for the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). Tim said the POCD belongs to the Planning and Zoning Commission. A member noted finding a 2004 email from Todd Rolland inviting a commission member to join the POCD committee then. Shawn has asked Jim Formica to meet to discuss the EDC, however this should now be taken by the new incoming chairperson once elected.

6. Committee reports and discussion

a. Business of the Month. Melissa has received responses from the November business and is writing its article. The presentation is scheduled for the Board of Selectmen meeting on November 19. Gail is unable to attend that date. Mal's Tattoo will be recognized in December. Melissa will reach out near the end of the month. The Board of Selectmen typically meets once, early in December. Melissa to confirm the date with Kim.

b. Planned Development Districts / Tax Increment Financing. Matthew reported no update. The PDD finding is recorded under 6e.

c. Business engagement — BluDot and outreach. Gail is coordinating a second round of activity with Tenley. She has partners lined up for a "Shark Tank"-style pitch event, targeted for June, including the Women's Professional Development Council, the Northwestern Entrepreneurial Center, and others. About **$5,000** available through the college may be designated for the event.

Shawn has built an offline BluDot file that combines the business databases the EDC has used over time. It is in the EDC Google Drive. BluDot renewal will rise to about **$1,750**, and the vendor is promoting a CRM at about **$5,000**, which Gail does not recommend. Shawn questioned whether BluDot serves the commission and suggested a community survey could show how residents look for business information. He also noted that the best long-term solution would be a single town-maintained business database, such as through the Assessor or Town Clerk. No decision was made.

d. Business networking and mentorship. No additional update was reported.

e. Somers Center — roadshow and community engagement. Shawn held one community workshop, with the Rotary, attended by about 12 to 15 people. The format used the vision boards from the September business networking event, an update on the planned roundabout, and small-group discussion around three questions:

- What do you value most about Somers Center today, and what should we be careful not to lose?
- What would make you spend more time there as a resident, customer, parent, or business owner?
- What concerns you most about change in the center?

Participants responded with appreciation for being asked. Shawn suggested setting time limits for share-backs in future sessions. The Republican Town Committee presentation has been put on hold, and a date will be set later. The Senior Center has asked to schedule a session soon. Other groups such as the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts could also be approached. Shawn offered to walk whoever takes this on through his outline and script, and said members are free to adapt the approach.

Shawn confirmed in writing with town staff that **there is no planned development district in Somers.** A pathway to create one exists in Somersville, but it depended on the Wynn development submitting and receiving approval for a site plan, which never happened. Somers Center is currently not eligible because the POCD requires public water and sewer for a PDD. The Village Business District designation does apply in both Somers Center and Somersville.

f. Connecticut Main Street Center. Melissa will lead the Connecticut Main Street Center walkthrough on **Wednesday, November 18, at 1:30 p.m.** The group will meet at Town Hall, walk Somers Center, and then drive to Somersville. It is expected to last two to three hours. Tim Keeney and Todd Rolland plan to attend. Jim Formica cannot. Gail and Matthew are unavailable. Shawn cautioned that if a quorum of the commission attends, the walkthrough must be noticed as a public meeting with an agenda and minutes. Shawn encouraged Melissa to coordinate with Carl at the Main Street Center in advance and keep the visit focused on fact-finding. He also recommended inviting the Conservation Commission, and will contact its chair, Joan Formeister. Melissa will bring Somers Center and Village Business District handouts.

Shawn noted that the Main Street Center's process includes an inventory of businesses, square footage, availability, and rents. The commission will need to discuss with the town what support the town can provide and what the EDC can realistically take on.

g. Special Projects Committee — 55 School Street and the mill site. Karen updated, the 55 School Street RFP received **one proposal**. It proposes a boutique of locally made goods, food trucks and vendors in the parking lot, and a by-appointment photography studio. Members raised concerns that the site's roughly 10 parking spaces cannot support food trucks or retail foot traffic. The proposer will be invited to interview with the committee next month.

For the mill site, a developer has shared renderings of about 60 apartments with no retail component. The project is not designated as affordable housing. Members raised parking concerns. Shawn noted the town owns a nearby parking lot. He urged the town to define a vision

for the Village Business District rather than handling properties one at a time, so prospective businesses can see what the community wants.

h. Tolland County Chamber of Commerce. See Correspondence. Matthew will serve as liaison.

i. North Central Chamber of Commerce. No EDC member has attended recent events. The Chamber is in a leadership transition and will hold its annual meeting in December. Shawn recommended that the commission keep its chamber memberships when they come up for renewal, as a signal of support to the business community.

j. Somers Farmers Market. Holly and Melissa have been in contact with Stephanie and Jason, local bakers who sell at the winery and are interested in starting a farmers market. Melissa may hand over the vendor list so they can serve as market master and choose a location, keeping the EDC's role hands-off. Vendors contacted were enthusiastic about selling in Somers.

k. State of Connecticut commissions. Shawn attended the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) Fall Conference on October 21 at his own expense, with no cost to the town or commission. Sessions covered economic development strategies for small towns (Michelle McCabe, Connecticut Main Street Center), new state housing laws including "middle housing," regional housing plans and grants, new zoning requirements (presented by Attorney Ken Slater of Halloran Sage), and AI in town government. Keynote speakers included State Comptroller Sean Scanlon and Secretary of the State Stephanie Thomas. Other town officials also attended.

Shawn also noted that Aaron, Enfield's economic development director, is the incoming president of CEDAS and is a valuable neighboring contact. CEDAS membership is relatively inexpensive. Because the town belongs to the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), the EDC can take part in many CCM events.

7. New business

a. Holiday Festival. Gail will follow up with Recreation and Leisure Services and with local businesses about special hours or promotions for the December 5 festival. Any Facebook post can be coordinated through the EDC page.

b. Resignation of the Chairman and handover. Shawn announced his resignation from the commission for personal and family reasons. He thanked members for their support and offered to help in an unofficial capacity during the transition.

Shawn recommended that the commission ask the Town Clerk for guidance on operating without a chairman until officer elections, which normally take place in January. He also suggested the commission consider electing a vice chairman. He will ask the Town Clerk to contact the commission about the process.

Shawn urged members to keep asking the town for training and clear procedures, including spending approvals, expense reports, and where revenue such as Shop Local sign sales should go. He said commissioners have previously not received any formal training.

Shawn has created a **Handover** folder in the EDC Google Drive. It contains account information for the EDC's town email (Microsoft 365, about $77 a year, reimbursed to the town), Facebook page, BluDot, CEDAS, CCM, the North Central Chamber portal, and Patch, along with contacts for the Connecticut Main Street Center, COST, the Tolland County Chamber, and local media. Login details will be given to Karen as Secretary to share as needed.

Shawn noted several open items. The EDC Facebook page is still attached to Vicki Clark's business account and needs to be moved; the steps are in the page's Messenger history. Only Melissa currently has admin access. Shawn recommended that all official business be conducted through the EDC town email address. He also noted that commission files in the future would ideally live on a town server for security.

Shawn turned over his Somers Center materials, including Village Business District handouts and POCD excerpts, for the Main Street walkthrough. Display boards and leftover fair materials (signs, tablecloths, and business cards) will be stored in the Town Hall storage closet. Gail will confirm the arrangement with Kim LaFleur.

c. Business data. Shawn and Gail each compiled lists of Somers businesses using town GIS data. Shawn's analysis maps each known business to its zoning district. He found that GIS classifications do not match the current zoning map. Members agreed that town business data should be validated with the Assessor or Town Clerk before it is relied on, and that correcting town records is a town responsibility.

8. Decisions reached

- Approved the September 2026 minutes.
- Matthew Beggs will serve as the EDC liaison to the Tolland County Chamber of Commerce.
- Gail Kulas will lead the EDC's follow-up on the December 5 Holiday Festival.
- Melissa Zelek will lead the Connecticut Main Street Center walkthrough on November 18.

9. Action items and follow-up

Owner	Action	Timeline / qualification
Shawn Curtis	Forward the Tolland County Chamber email to Matthew.	Following the meeting
Matthew Beggs	Connect with the Tolland County Chamber as the EDC liaison.	No date stated
Gail Kulas	Contact Liv at BluDot to restore admin access and address the spam request.	No date stated
Gail Kulas	Follow up with Recreation and Leisure Services and local businesses on the Holiday Festival.	Before **December 5**

Owner	Action	Timeline / qualification
Shawn Curtis	Send the budget update.	End of the week
Melissa Zelek	Complete the November Business of the Month article and presentation; contact Mal's Tattoo for December.	**November 19**; end of November
Melissa Zelek	Confirm the December Board of Selectmen meeting date with Kim.	No date stated
Melissa Zelek	Lead the Connecticut Main Street Center walkthrough and report back to the commission.	**November 18**, 1:30 p.m.
Shawn Curtis	Contact the Conservation Commission chair about attending the walkthrough.	Before November 18
Melissa Zelek	Share the farmers market vendor list with Stephanie and Jason.	No date stated
Shawn Curtis	Ask the Town Clerk to advise the commission on the process for officers after the chairman's resignation.	Before the next meeting
Karen Murdoch	Receive Handover account details and share them with members as needed.	No date stated
Gail Kulas	Confirm storage of EDC materials in the Town Hall closet with Kim LaFleur.	No date stated
All members	Decide who will lead community workshops, including the Senior Center and the Republican Town Committee.	Next meeting

10. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Gail Kulas and seconded by Melissa Zelek and passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:55pm.

Respectfully Submitted: Karen Murdoch, Secretary