

City seeks grants for Meriden Green, former factory rehab, co-working space



View of Meriden Green from the corner of State Street, bottom, and Mill Street on July 27, 2021. The city has applied for a \$5.5 million grant to expand the Green, including the elimination of Mill Street. Dave Zajac, Record-Journal



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By Michael Gagne, Record-Journal staff

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MERIDEN — The City Council on Tuesday night voted to back three applications for Connecticut Community Investment Fund grants.

One application would support proposals to expand the Meriden Green, another would launch a co-working space and a third would help convert a vacant factory building into apartments.

The grant program is administered by the state Department of Economic and Community Development. According to a description of the program, up to \$175 million in grant funds will be awarded annually over the next several years to municipalities.

More than 50 municipalities, including Meriden, are eligible because they have been designated as Public Investment Communities or Alliance Districts. Meriden has been designated as both.

The first of the applications approved Tuesday is a \$5.5 million request to enable the city to pursue expansion of the Meriden Green, including the elimination of Mill Street.

The funding sought in the second application would enable the city to establish a co-working space at 24 Colony St. The space, if created, would serve as an incubator for small businesses and entrepreneurs through the use of a common space and sharing costs of maintenance, utilities and support staff.

The council on Tuesday night voted unanimously to support the proposal, but Mayor Kevin Scarpati expressed reservations.

He said the proposal is something that hasn't gotten off the ground, despite having been floated on multiple occasions over the past few years.

"It's not a project I'm overly enthused about. I would rather see funding for a senior center," Scarpati said, adding there are other businesses and organizations that specialize in co-working spaces.

Scarpati said he is not opposed to the idea, however, he would "leave it up to the experts to run and manage" such programs, not the city.

Former factory conversion

The third request would provide \$3 million in funding to assist developers seeking to convert the former Aeolian factory at 85 Tremont St. into 82 apartments.

Dan Drazen, vice president of development for Trinity Financial, the firm behind that proposal, told the council the apartment units would be set at four different income levels, including market rate and affordable.

Drazen said the investment to rehabilitate the building would be around \$52 million. That includes gutting the building, bringing it up to code and brownfield remediation.

Scarpati said he supports the project is because it will reuse "a very underutilized, somewhat blighted piece of property." Such a reuse, he said, "will help turn around that whole neighborhood."

Also, he added, the developer would have a stake in the project as its owner and manager.

"I think this will help lift up the entire north end," Scarpati said.

Councilor Michael Carabetta asked Drazen whether there is sufficient parking for the number of apartments proposed. Carabetta added he is concerned that new apartments would impose new burdens on the Board of Education and first responders.

Drazen said the site plan called for 106 spaces.

Scarpati said he appreciated Carabetta's comment on the potential burdens of adding more housing. He described the discussions around density reduction and alleviating such burdens as ongoing.

No limit, no guarantee

During discussions about the Community Investment Fund, Councilor Bruce A. Fontanella asked Coon whether the city will be able to submit other applications during the second funding cycle, or if the city would be limited.

Coon said there is no limit. He explained the city was advised of the program at the beginning of June so officials opted for projects that were already on the table at that time.

"We need to have projects immediately ready to go with well qualified and well vetted budgets, so our chances of success in the first round would be as high as possible," Coon said.

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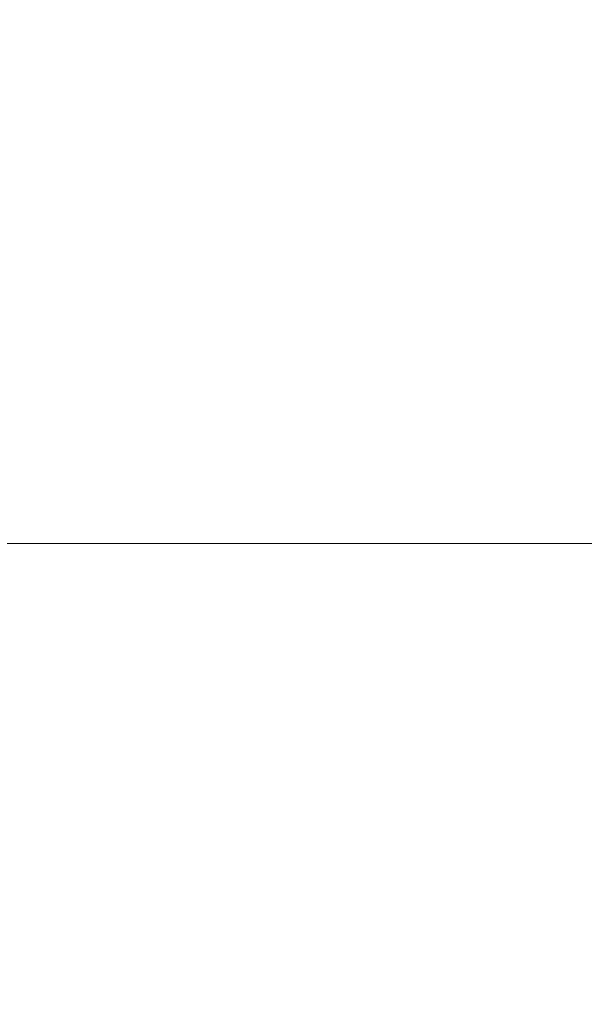
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FRI 5 **Summer Love with Joe *Monica & Jon B**
Toyota Oakdale The... | Wallingford, CT

TUE 2 **GMChorale welcoming new members of all voice types for their 2021-2022 season: Creation's Bounty**
Greater Middletown... | Middletown, CT

TUE 2 **Summer Arts Adventures (ages 7-12)**
Southington Commun... | Southington, CT

TUE 2 **Kids Entertainment Series**
Community Pavilion... | Plantsville, CT

TUE 2 **Birding 101 with Connecticut Audubon Society (online program)**
Berlin-Peck Memori... | Berlin, CT

WED 3 **Music on the Green**
Southington Town G... | Southington, CT

WED 3 **Play Setback at 1741 Pub & Grill**
1741 Pub & Grill | Middlefield, CT



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