

Town of Farmington
Economic Development Committee
Thursday, March 9, 2017

Committee Members Present:

Randy Orvis, Chairman
Ann Titus, Selectmen's Rep.
Martin Laferte, Planning Board Rep.
Angela Hardin
Sharon McKenney

Committee Members Absent:

Denise Roy-Palmer, Vice Chairman, excused

Selectmen Present:

Charlie King, Chairman
Neil Johnson, Vice Chairman
Paula Proulx
Ann Titus

Others Present:

Arthur Capello, Town Administrator
Charlie French, UNH Program Team Leader
Molly Donovan, UNH Extension Specialist
Approx. 25 audience members

1). Call to Order:

Chairman Orvis called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

2). Pledge of Allegiance:

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

3). Public Comment: Postponed until later in the meeting.

4). Review of Minutes:

December 13, 2016- No errors or omissions.

Motion: (Titus, second Hardin) to approve the minutes as written passed 3-0-2 (Hardin, McKenney abstained).

February 14, 2017- No errors or omissions

Motion: (Laferte, second Titus) to approve the minutes as written passed 4-0-1 (McKenney abstained).

5). TIF District Status:

Mr. Laferte reported that the TIF District was not discussed at the last Planning Board meeting. He said it was his understanding that the Town was waiting for one more volunteer to complete the required number of members for the TIF Advisory Board.

Mrs. Titus said she spoke with a resident who expressed interest in becoming a member and that she will contact the Town Administrator or Administrative Assistant Erica Rogers for more information about becoming a member of the committee.

6). Review of By-Laws:

Mr. Orvis said the by-laws are set by the Board of Selectmen and the EDC can't amend them. Mrs. Titus clarified that EDC can suggest amendments to their by-laws but they must be approved by Selectmen.

Mr. Orvis then noted the EDC is an advisory committee to the Selectmen and has no power to

approve or disapprove things like the Planning or Zoning Boards.

Mrs. Titus said the reason for the review was due to past member attendance issues that were not sufficiently addressed in the by-laws. She added the requirement to notify the Chairman when a member would not attend a meeting was not included in the rules.

Mr. Orvis then read aloud the EDC By-Laws which include a pre-amble defining the purpose of the group, four policies outlining the work of the committee and Articles I through Article VIII that cover membership and meetings, officers, fiscal year, budget, confidentiality, conflicts of interest and amendments.

After reading Article II, Item #11, Removal, which states any committee member may be removed from office by a three-fifths vote of the Selectmen, Mr. Orvis asked the members if they wished to add a requirement to remove a member for non-attendance to this section.

Mrs. Titus suggested a member be removed after missing 5 meetings without notifying the Chairman.

Mr. Orvis said it is very easy to contact the committee and let someone know that they are not coming to a meeting and suggested they recommend a member be removed after missing 3 consecutive meetings without contacting the committee.

Members agreed 3 missed meetings without contact was a fair requirement.

Motion: (Titus, second Hardin) to recommend to Selectmen that Article II, Item #11 be changed to add that any member may be removed after missing 3 consecutive meetings without contacting the committee passed unanimously.

Mrs. Titus asked if similar wording should be added to Article III, Item #5, Removal, which concerns the removal of officers.

Ms. Hardin said the rules should apply equally.

Motion: (Titus, second Hardin) to add the same wording from Article II, Item #11 to Article III, Item #5 passed unanimously.

7). Presentation from UNH Cooperative Extension:

Mr. Orvis invited UNH Community and Economic Development Program Team Leader Charlie French and Extension Specialist Molly Donovan to begin their presentation.

Mr. French said he was contacted by resident Bobbie Stormann who asked the representatives to visit Farmington and explain the role of the Cooperative Extension in local economic development. Both representatives gave a brief synopsis of their backgrounds and duties.

Mr. French said the Cooperative Extension is an UNH outreach program that brings services and planning support to towns focusing on economic development, natural resources management, forestry practices, the 4H youth and family development programs, food, agriculture and farmers' programs.

Mr. French said there are 8 members on the team who work to help town leaders with downtown business expansion, stewarding natural and cultural resources and to engage the public to foster a connection between the town and its government so they work together toward a common goal.

He cited an example of their work in Franklin where residents once categorized their city as having amazing architecture but as "unwelcoming" due to dilapidated infrastructure, drug abuse, an aging population, a high unemployment rate and young people leaving town and not returning. The first step was to set up a steering committee made up of community leaders and

volunteers and find out where residents would like to see their community in 5 to 10 years. They visited the schools, nursing homes and businesses in an attempt to find common ground among age groups. They learned that some common points included increasing work opportunities, fixing aging infrastructure and the desire to “bump elbows” which led to adding outdoor seating along business areas bringing more people to the area and revitalizing the parks by removing hidden or closed in areas to make them more open, accessible and visible so that older residents were more comfortable and safer patronizing those places.

Mr. French said Franklin chose to partner with Plan NH which is a group of architects and engineers whose mission is to foster planning and design to meet the vision and needs of the people. They held a community forum and created action committees focused on marketing the city, revitalization of Main St., revival of old buildings for business or housing and the city's parks. He said the process took about 1 year and the committees are still active today.

One of the results of the process is a new coffee shop in the downtown area. The owner said she was not so much interested in making a large amount of money as she was in starting things moving there and to provide an anchor business to attract people to the downtown. Other projects included an old mill that will be rehabbed through a grant to provide new housing for working families, addition of an art space and a kayaking business he said.

All of these small projects came together and it shows that a city with a lot of challenges can build a head of steam around something and work in collaboration with the city and the various groups in the city to bring positive results he said.

Ms. Donovan said the team has also worked in Colebrook which has challenges similar to other towns. She said the community members had lots of ideas but didn't know where to begin so the team advised them that the best place to start is with who you are and what you can do. They discussed what a resilient economy would look like and how to address issues such as young people leaving town and the lack of skills to take on new jobs. Then a group of volunteers prepared a survey for the local businesses to see what skills they are looking for in employees and what training is needed for more skilled employees. After gathering the information they provided links to resources to the business owners to help address what the businesses said they needed. They also needed to let people know they exist and get them to stop in on the way to their destinations so a consultant was brought in to instruct them on how to market their community she said. She added that they were interested in getting the Canadian tourist business so they put up Canadian flags and the business owners learned French to speak to the French- Canadian customers.

Ms. Donovan said the team has recently worked with the City of Rochester to try to make their downtown area more vibrant. Using a program called “First Impressions” Rochester was matched with the town of Littleton and volunteers from each municipality visited the other's downtown areas and assessed items such as where to eat, shop, sit and park downtown. Each group identified some things to work on in both downtown areas.

She said there are a million more examples like these but that she wanted to share was that the team doesn't come into your town as experts or wanting to research your town. We want to come in and help you identify what your challenges are, what your opportunities are and who in the community can come together to work on those opportunities she said.

Mr. French then asked to open the meeting to questions from the audience.

Mr. Orvis asked Mr. French to speak about the cost for the services provided by the

Cooperative Extension program if the Town were to contract for those services.

Business Retention and Expansion Program- Mr. French said this program was founded on the premise to create the most jobs from existing businesses. It focuses on finding ways to steward those existing businesses and how make the town more attractive to new businesses. The idea is to make a connection between the business community and civic leaders to build an understanding of what businesses need to build, thrive and stay in the community. It begins with a steering committee that reaches out to the businesses to ask questions about challenges they face such as regulatory and work force challenges and the opportunities to expand and remain in the community. A report is then generated with the opportunities the town might take to foster stronger support systems for the businesses within the community.

He said that often it is the simplest things that a community can do to change such as creating a one-stop permitting process with a navigator to guide applicants through the process as was developed recently in Rochester. The needs of businesses differ depending on the size of the business and the community and identifying those needs can make a big difference in the lives of those businesses. The fee for the program only covers a portion of our costs as we are involved from 1 year to 18 months and when we leave we try to make sure the committees are ready to take over the program and have the resources to do so he said.

Economic Profile- Ms. Donovan said this program focuses more on the town's vision for the economy and how you get there and less on the businesses. The program lasts from 1 year to 18 months depending on how many action groups are involved with the process. She said that from the first day we help identify who should be on a task force for a particular project, teach you how to work on a project, help you make decisions and help the volunteers who are ready to take action on the those decisions.

First Impressions Program- This program is specifically focused on the revitalization of the downtown area as mentioned earlier in the meeting and would apply to Farmington she said.

Economic Development 101- This basic program primarily works with volunteer Economic Development Committee members to instruct them on the components of economic development, why it is important to attract big businesses and entrepreneurs to town, how to hold successful meetings, discuss priorities and where to find information.

Mr. French said that all of the above programs require a \$2,500 fee to participate.

Mr. Orvis opened the meeting to questions from the committee.

There were no questions from the members.

Mr. Orvis then opened the meeting to the public for questions or comments as follows;

Can the Cooperative Extension help Farmington with applying for grants?

Mr. French said the USDA Rural Development Grant discussed previously is not good to start something but is for when there is a concrete idea to create something as jobs must be created related to that grant. The USDA can partner as a guide to the town as to which programs may be suitable after they have a better understanding of your vision for the town. If you have a good vision there are resources out there but you have to start with a plan he said.

Is improving the appearance of the "gateway" to the downtown such as in the area where the new Main St. Bridge is going in, a good place for Farmington to begin and of significant value to the community?

Mr. French said that could possibly fit into the First Impressions Program but for things related to physical design the Plan NH program may be more applicable. They will hold a design

charrette where they ask people to talk about what they would like the area to look like. Then the architects create multiple visual renderings of the buildings and what the streetscape would look like. It may be an area where one of our programs may be suitable he said.

Ms. Donovan said the First Impressions Program could address appearance issues. If a group of residents from a different town came in they would look at the town from gateway to gateway and look at the building facades, parking, lighting and the types of businesses that are here and share their impressions of them. The program would probably tell you a lot of what you already know about your downtown but also about some issues you may want to address. The beauty of it is one town can say this is where we were 20 years ago and this is what we did to change it.

Mr. French said when Rochester folks went to Littleton one person joked they could fall over on the floor and lie there for an hour before anyone noticed. Their perception of Littleton businesses was that they were not engaging with the customers right away. This is a great opportunity to find out how to be more engaging to your customers. There is now a working group going around teaching business owners how to be more friendly and engaging to their customers he said.

He said that another group is working on "way finding" as they found out that often if you are not from Littleton you don't know how to get to the heart of the downtown area. There were no signs telling you how to get to the coffee shop or to restaurants which can be an issue for businesses.

Will you help with absentee landlords who do not take care of their buildings and are running them down, making the rents very high and difficult for businesses to rent?

Mr. French said that is not the team's role. Action committees can identify that issue as a challenge and we can work with them to identify strategies to address it. Our role is an educational one and we wouldn't be the ones to work directly with absentee landlords he said.

Would you help a coffee shop go through all of the zoning regulations and other problems?

Mr. French said they are not planning technicians by training and would not be providing zoning and planning regulatory guidance which is the role of the Planning Board, Regional Planning Committee and the different planning entities.

A resident commented that signage is an excellent idea as there is so much money coming through town on the weekends. She added that a quaint little downtown would be a good thing to do. We need to get it esthetically looking good and business friendly she said.

Farmington is a rural town with not much economic development. What program would you recommend that we begin with?

Mr. French said that is a tough question to answer as they don't know the communities as well as the residents do. We would ask you what are the goals and priorities of the EDC and the various groups in town. If there is common interest and common goals across groups it would help you to know where to begin. We could say that one program is a good program to go with but if there is no entity to drive it then it's not going to go anywhere.

There are different boards trying to do different things and you need an outside entity to guide them a little bit before you make a commitment on a program or otherwise you just keep going in circles. Will you help us choose a program or provide any guidance or guidelines to go by?

Ms. Donovan said this is a question in every community. We are not ready tonight to say this is the one you should go with because it takes 3 or 4 meetings with different groups to understand where you are in your process. One group might have a vision but three other boards don't

share that vision. That's a problem- how to get on same page. Or maybe you all have a common vision but aren't sure how to implement it. It takes all of us some time together to figure out what you need and tailor the programs to what you need. We may pull one piece from one program and another piece from another program so it makes sense for your community. We never do the same thing in every town she said.

Mr. French agreed and said it can several meetings to figure what the right fit is and what the group is ready to work on.

If architects and engineers are needed to complete the project would that be an additional cost?

Mr. French said they do not bring architects or engineers to the table. The scope of the work includes forming the steering committee, training, to design and administer the survey, analyze the data, create the report and bring together resources from across the state. It is possible that Plan NH could come in but they have no control as to whether they come in or not. Part of the program is to work with the action committees over the long run to make sure they know what the steps are to move a vision to an action so the process doesn't fail. In some cases there could be a faculty member available with the necessary expertise that could be utilized within the community. He added they bring the process and the neutral facilitation to make it happen.

If we are able to move forward and there are grants we may qualify for are you able to help us write those grants or do we have to do those things on our own?

Mr. French said the information that comes out of the process is useful for grants because when the work that is done it results in a plan with steps and that is what a grant will ask you to articulate. The information in the report is often well suited to cut and paste and put into the grant without a lot of extra work. We are not going to do the paperwork for the grant but we can guide you if there are questions such which grant might be appropriate and then review it.

Ms. Donovan said in addition to UNH faculty being available they like to share best management practices from other communities. The Extension is nationwide so we can call on another community if it seems applicable to your community. For example there is a guy in rural New York who created a model to revitalize their downtown where the community comes together to create "vibrancies" where you create and be active before the businesses arrive which is a different way of thinking about it. We have wide network of communities trying to do the things we think you may want to do she said.

I see that a quorum of the Board of Selectmen is here tonight. I would like to put them on the spot a little and ask if they would commit to \$2500 for the program.

Mr. Capello said the board cannot vote or make decisions on anything tonight.

Mrs. Stormann said she plans to make an amendment to the EDC budget for \$2500 at Town Meeting.

Is it common for towns to start 2 business related economic development programs at the same time?

Mr. French said that there would not be enough volunteers to take on 2 programs at the same time but one program could lead into the other.

What should the priority program be?

Mr. French said they first need to discuss it and then choose the program that suits what the EDC focuses in on.

What data sets should be used to create the survey form to reach out to the town?

Mr. French said they tend to shy away from surveys so people will engage each other and have

community meetings or forums. He suggested they could link the program with the schools and do an art project, ask students for their vision and ask them to share it with their parents. Put up posters and have people write in their opinions. Then compile all of the information and get a vision. He said the key is to get an action committee going.

What is step 1 before we pick a program?

Ms. Donovan said this is step one. Talk to the EDC, look at the website, meet with other boards, talk to staff and community leaders and then identify which program to use.

Would we be able to start a program this summer?

Ms. Donovan advised the town to have discussions during late spring but doubted the program would begin this summer. She said it would be best to plan to pick a program in Sept. and be ready with a defined process and to make decisions.

If Town Meeting voters decide to appropriate funds to the Selectmen should we then contact you and pick a program?

Mr. French said that is one way to go but that the town is not the only source of funds.

If an organization provides the funds it may not have the commitment of the Town to go with it.

Ms. Donovan said the town could sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the funding source.

Are larger grants available such as what would be needed to bring natural gas to town?

Mr. French said there are some larger grants available but that they are pretty competitive. He said the funds run the gambit from small grants to larger grants and tax credits.

If we say we are going to go with one program but it doesn't work out can we change to something better?

Mr. French said if you get into a program and start the planning process you can tweak it. There is high degree of specialization.

What is the opinion of the EDC and are they supportive?

EDC members said they were not at a point to make a decision and would like to meet again and discuss it further.

What more information is there?

Mr. French said to first figure out what you are looking for and what you need.

Some residents commented that the boards need to make a decision and get the ball rolling. Others said the matter can be brought up at town meeting and ask if a majority of voters favor moving forward with the program.

Mr. Orvis said he was not against the program but that he was not going to be railroaded into making a decision now. He then said the committee needed to move on with the rest of the meeting agenda and invited everyone to stay for the rest of the meeting.

8). Old Business:

A). ATV Trails- Mr. Orvis said the New Durham Valley ATV Club has scheduled a meeting later this month which he plans to attend. He will report on that meeting at the next EDC meeting.

B). Natural Gas- Mr. Orvis said that when he spoke with a representative from a natural gas company in Sept. he was told to call back in about 6 months when the "political climate" is expected to be better. He said he will call him back and report the results at the next meeting.

C). Monthly Newsletter- Mrs. Titus said the featured business next month will be NAPA which has been in town for 31 years. She said the businesses often write their own stories with

interesting results. This edition will also contain information about the TIF District she said.

D).Ribbon Cuttings- Mrs. Titus said she contacted the 3 new businesses in town to set up a date for a ribbon cutting ceremony. She said she has not received a response from the Broken Lance and the Blue Collar Barbershop is unable to open due to a conflict with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Mr. Campbell of RSA Realty responded and said he would like to hold a ribbon cutting for his new real estate office. The members then discussed possible dates and their availabilities. Consensus of the members was to have Mrs. Titus schedule a ribbon cutting with Mr. Campbell for a Friday morning and inform the members of the chosen date.

9). New Business:

A). Business Poster- Mr. Orvis said many businesses have bulletin boards where other businesses display their business cards. He suggested the committee ask businesses for their business cards and create a poster with those cards that could be displayed anywhere in the business. Discussion included who would make the poster, where to have it printed, posting the cards on the Town website, send them by e-mail to all of the businesses listed on the website or to have someone on the committee compile the list and put it up at local businesses.

Ms. McElhinney asked if the Town provides a welcome packet to new businesses and residents.

Mrs. Titus said there is a welcome packet for new business owners available at the Town Office and residents could request one if desired.

Mr. Fisher said the Moose Mountain Regional Alliance had compiled a list of regional businesses and asked if the committee had an updated version of the list.

Mrs. Titus said the update was done by a former member and that Mrs. Roy-Palmer now updates the Moose Mountain list of businesses.

Mrs. Stormann said there is a northern Maine advertiser who coordinates the restaurant place mats containing business ads and suggested the Farmer's Kitchen might be interested in working with the committee to print similar place mats for Farmington.

Mr. Orvis said the advertisers charge the businesses to print up those place mats and he didn't want to compete with the other advertisers. He suggested they approach the businesses and get their thoughts on the matter.

Mrs. Titus suggested they could also make one poster and move it around from business to business.

Ms. McElhinney said Farmington is not a member of the Rotary International or the Chamber of Commerce and asked who one would go to if they were interested in starting a chapter of either organization in town.

Ms. Hardin said the Chamber is a national association and that one should contact the national organization for information on starting a chapter in Farmington.

Mrs. Titus said the town previously had a Downtown Committee which provided a welcome packet similar to the current one and Welcome to Farmington stickers for businesses to display. She said the committee has discussed returning to providing those stickers to local businesses again.

10). Public Comment: None.

11).Any Other Business to come before the Committee:

Thank You Note- Mr. Orvis read a letter from the Friends of Farmington thanking the committee for allowing them to make a presentation about the organization and their initial project to purchase the former Mason's building at the previous meeting.

12). Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 11, 2017 at 6 p.m.

13). Adjournment:

Motion: (Titus, second Hardin) to adjourn the meeting passed unanimously at 8 p.m.

Respectively submitted
Kathleen Magoon
Recording Secretary

Randy Orvis, Chairman