

Town of Farmington
Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes
Joint Board Meeting
Tuesday, September 12, 2017

Committee Members Present:

Randy Orvis, Chairman
Denise Roy-Palmer, Secretary
Ann Titus, Selectmen's Rep
Martin Laferte, Planning Board Rep
Sharron McKenney
Elise Haig

Selectmen Present:

Paula Proulx, Chairman
Neil Johnson, Vice Chairman
Jim Horgan

Committee Members Absent:

Angela Hardin, Vice Chairman, excused
Kathy King, excused
Lisa Capone

Planning Board Members Present:

David Kestner, Chairman
Bill Fisher, Secretary
Sylvia Arcouette
Richard Pelkey
Matt Stormann, Alternate

Others Present:

Arthur Capello, Town Administrator
Dan DeSantis, Town Planner
Karen Clark, Planning Dept. Secretary
Linda McElhinney
Bobbie Stormann
Alan Manoian, Director of Community
and Economic Development, Ayer, Ma.

1). Call to Order:

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

2). Pledge of Allegiance:

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

3). Public comment: None.

4). Table Agenda Items:

Motion: (Titus, second Roy-Palmer) to table agenda items 3 through 6 to allow Mr. DeSantis to make a presentation to the committee passed 6-0

5). Town Planner Dan DeSantis:

A). Discuss UNH Co-op Ext. Proposal- Mr. DeSantis said he had a two hour meeting with UNH Cooperative Extension Specialist Molly Donovan in August and learned that the Extension does not have the capacity to update the Master Plan themselves but may play a part in assisting the Town with the update of the Plan. He said their best fit may be with the community engagement portion of revising the Plan but the team is booked through December. He suggested everyone meet at the beginning of next year and determine what role the Extension can play in

updating the Master Plan.

B). Form Based Codes- Mr. DeSantis said that when he was hired one of the goals the Selectmen gave him was to simplify the regulatory approach to zoning. He said the regulations are complex and very detailed and do not allow for any movement. He proposed that a Form Based Codes (FBC) approach be integrated into the Master Plan. This approach considers the visual impact of buildings, parking and public spaces and has greater emphasis on the character, building features and public spaces rather than the traditional zoning emphasis on the use of a structure. He said the town is experiencing some sprawl and it will cost us more because it will increase the response time of our first responders.

C). Grant Application Sponsored by PLAN NH – Mr. DeSantis said the Town is applying for a NH Municipal Technical Assistance Grant (MTAG) which will allow the Town to create the platform for a wider range of economic development and housing options. The grant application is due Sept. 29 and the Town will apply for \$20,000. He said the purpose is to build up to updating the Master Plan and that he planned to try to bundle as much funding together as possible to cover the \$80,000 cost and not ask Selectmen to fund the total cost.

Mr. DeSantis then introduced his former colleague, Alan Manoian to the committee and noted that he is the first certified Form Based Codes Planner in New England. He said he previously worked with Mr. Manoian in Nashua, NH and Weymouth, Ma and he is currently the Planning and Development Director for the Town of Ayer, Ma.

6). Form Based Codes Presentation by Alan Manoian, Director of Community & Economic Development, Ayer, MA:

Mr. Manoian thanked the committee for the opportunity to speak to them and encouraged them to research the words “Form Based Codes” online which will result in a listing for the Form Based Codes Institute and to review the site for a better understanding of the issue. He said Form Based Codes were first introduced in the southern portion of the United States, then out West and have finally made their way back to New England about 10 years ago.

He began the presentation with an image of a traditional New England town. He pointed out the compact development of the town center and the walkable scale of the town which helps people to form human bonds and strong economies. This pattern of development was created in New England and many of his colleagues out west have told him they are going online and using maps of old New England towns as part of the development planning for their towns he said. Other slides depicted traditional New England design with historical art work and maps of buildings built right up to the edge of the sidewalk addressing the street that were at least two stories in height with varying rooflines and towns laid out in grid patterns that were all connected. He noted that the buildings and forms in downtown Farmington are all intact but lacked “juice” (energy).

Mr. Manoian said we are talking about the “economics of place” which considers the place rather than the use when creating or preserving great places. He said people often get turned off when reading zoning regulations because it tells them what “thou shall not do” but does not say what the town would like to see or how the regulations relate to each other and is very confusing.

The next series of photos showed building design from the 1920's where the architecture addresses and activates the street in contrast with modern zoning that encourages structures with no front doors and small windows, strip malls with parking lots and residences with driveways and garages in front. He said modern culture says we need to pull our cars right up to where we are going which results in parking lots and the building entrance at the rear of the buildings. When people stop walking on the sidewalks that is when the retail shops start to disappear he said.

He advised residents if they see a place they love the look of to measure it out such as sidewalk width, how far the buildings are set back from the sidewalk, window proportions, etc. and then code it and deliver it.

He then asked if anyone could spot the differences in a photo of a residential neighborhood recently constructed. Differences included underground utilities, no driveways or curb cuts and on street parking. The driveways are integrated into the rear of the homes he said.

Next up was a map of Farmington with its "cranky" street pattern meaning that it is not a perfectly laid out grid. A series of old postcards included the former high school building, the Roosevelt House, Central Street and the Central Block Building which were once all retail store fronts he said.

Mr. Manoian said he spent a portion of Labor Day photographing the downtown area and said that the town has a great downtown in terms of physical form and suggested the town move to a Form Based Codes approach to protect the form that has survived over the years. He said some of the good points include the former Masonic Building which has all of its display windows intact, several buildings with proportional windows, former shoe factory building and the design/size of the VFW Building.

Some cons included closed in or small windows, sidewalks that are need of repair/widening and raised stairs/entrances. He suggested that the businesses be encouraged to participate in outdoor retailing wherever possible. He said Farmington needs a good downtown development person to get the juice going again and that he plans to use the photos of Farmington's structure for other Form Based Codes presentations.

Mr. Manoian then asked about plans for the area surrounding the Main Street Bridge project. Form Based Codes could be used to connect the area to the downtown and would only apply to new construction and not to existing construction he said.

He said the buildings with highest revenue generated are downtown properties, especially those with 2 or 3 stories. They take up very little land but hold great value. The new sprawling commercial uses provide the least of amount of revenue for the town and cost the most in terms of services needed he said.

Mr. Orvis asked how FBC would affect the rest of the town.

Mr. Manoian said that conventional zoning focuses on use, then management and then form. FBC focuses on form first, then management and then use. He said it is all about simplifying and a good FBC manual should be no more than 30 pages in length.

He explained that urban to rural transit, represented as T1 through T6, in a town begins with the

most intense development in the downtown core and the intensity is reduced as one travels out away from the downtown area. The layout of the transit from dense development to less dense could be presented with graphic images in the zoning regulations. He suggested it would be a good exercise to determine where the T1 through T6 areas currently exist in town.

He said FBC is not about how a street looks but how it lives and functions. Vision the place, measure it and code it as every FBC designed for that community. This approach allows the town to select a certain district or area and “ease into it” by providing codes with visual descriptions of frontage, physical form, height and windows to show developers what the town wants. He asked the board members to think visually, prescriptive, illustrative, compact and concise. Pick out where you might want to think about it and try it out he said.

Mr. Laferte asked if traditional setback requirements are “out the window”.

Mr. Manoian they are not necessarily thrown away as the code could contain maximum setbacks which say you can put a structure anywhere in this plane but no further back than a certain point.

Mr. Laferte asked if the setbacks would be decided on a case by case basis.

Mr. Manoian said it would be decided by whatever street it is on as all of the buildings there would have to run along a line so they relate and function together.

Mr. DeSantis said FBC looks at how the street works and not at the zone. He asked the members to consider looking at each street, talk about the goals for each street and what has to be done to make that occur.

Mr. Manoian said that this approach is natural and indigenous to New Englanders and how small towns were originally laid out.

Mr. Orvis said he could see how FBC would work in a compact downtown area but that “Farmer Joe out in the sticks” is not going to be told he can’t take a 3 acre portion of his property off for his kid.

Mr. DeSantis said the regulations are telling him that now with requirements for lot sizes, side yards, etc.

Mr. Orvis said he would like to see towns have more flexibility in their frontage requirements. He said that there have been instances when he has had to make a boundary line at 250’ when there is stone wall 7’ away.

Mr. Manoian said FBC would take the location of the stone wall into consideration because we would be seeing a street instead of a zone. He added that he would send some examples of how rural and agrarian towns have implemented FBC.

Mr. Pelkey asked what the implementation, timeline and involvement to set up FBC looked like in Auburn, Maine.

Mr. Manoian said he was hired by the city in 2013 and it took approx. 18 months to complete the process. He said the key to the process is to set it up incrementally. He suggested the town does not need to hire a consultant to complete the process as it can be done with town staff and the community at your own pace. Auburn asked the Planning Board to literally write the new codes because they will be the ones to administer it and now they could start their own FBC consulting firms he said.

Ms. Haig said the downtown has the structure along the street and asked how Section 8 housing could be integrated into the area when you are trying to develop store fronts.

Mr. Manoian said by not permitting residential units on the ground floor in the downtown area for economic and quality of life issues. The FBC needs to include a requirement to restrict residential units to the second floor or above he said.

Ms. Haig then asked about the rules in regards to leaving furniture outside over night at outside dining areas.

Mr. Manoian said it depends on the town or the city. He said some have gone with permanent fixtures and others take the furniture in at night. He said Farmington residents may have a better idea about whether furniture left out at night will still be there in the morning.

Mr. Orvis said the fixtures will probably have graffiti painted all over them.

Mr. Manoian said things left out in the public space probably will be attacked at first but if the fixtures are fixed after the attacks the perpetrators will get bored with it and they won't even notice them anymore. He added the owners could run a non-severable cord and padlock through the furniture to keep them from being stolen.

Ms. Haig then asked if he would recommend using large planters or landscaping for the sidewalk landscape.

Mr. Manoian said towns have had success with both types of plantings and advised the landscaping be magnificent and properly maintained as something weak or neglected will hurt the area's image and is worse than doing nothing at all.

Ms. Arcouette asked about how FBC would address a situation where the windows were high or closed in or for elevated staircases. She said it would be costly for building owners to change those things and some people would say they couldn't afford to make those kinds of changes.

Mr. Manoian said those businesses would be as they exist now. He said it would not be fair to impose that cost on them but once they see other buildings with things out in the open they will change. It may take some time but all smart business people follow a good lead he said.

He recommended the revitalization of the downtown begin with café restaurants and folks driving by will want to stop in. Then the next restaurant will see it working out for them and want to do it too. He noted that the space in front of some of buildings is free operational space and advised business owners take advantage of the additional space. Someone looking to rent a business space could see customers patronizing the restaurant at night and decide to rent the neighboring empty space to take advantage of the "captured market" there he said.

He said the downtown has lost the social part of the place and advised the town to make it a place where people want to linger, spend time and socialize. The golden rule of retailing is people don't follow retail- retail follows people. With FBC you know exactly how the street is going to be as it will all be composed together and a developer will know what to expect he said.

Ms. Haig said the town has a unique feature- extra telephone poles used to hang the Christmas lights. She asked if hanging white lights during summer would get people to linger downtown.

Mr. Manoian said it has been done in a number of places and it is a good idea as people are fascinated by them.

Mr. Manoian said he forward some examples of other communities that have adopted FBC such as Dover, Durham, Stratham and Milford. He then offered to assist the Town in adopting FBC in any way he can and advised the Town doesn't need to hire an \$80,000 consultant to do so.

Recess- Motion: (Titus, second Laferte) to take a 5 minute recess passed unanimously at 7:15 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 7:25 p.m.

7). Review of Minutes:

August 8, 2017- No errors or omissions

Motion: (Laferte, second Titus) to approve the minutes as written passed 6-0.

8). Newsletter:

Mr. Laferte said that he received a copy of the newsletter along with the meeting minutes to review before the meeting and said that he thought this is a good idea.

Ms. Roy-Palmer asked if this edition was approved at last month's meeting.

Mrs. Titus said this is the new monthly edition for September.

Mr. Laferte then thanked Mrs. Titus for the good job she is doing on the monthly newsletter. He asked if she has gotten responses from the businesses she spoke about at the last meeting.

Mrs. Titus said she has three more featured businesses for future newsletters but some of the business owners have yet to respond to her attempts to contact them. She said she also included contact information in the newsletter for any business owner that would like their business to be featured in a future newsletter.

Motion: (Titus, second Laferte) to accept the newsletter as presented passed 6-0.

9). Update Goals: Tabled until the next meeting.

10). Planning Board:

Mr. Laferte said there was nothing to report because the Planning Board has not met for a month. He said there is a meeting scheduled for the following Tuesday. There are 3 or 4 cases scheduled for review which he will report on at the next EDC meeting he said.

Ms. Roy-Palmer asked if Mr. Laferte could provide any information about the cases scheduled for review next week.

Mr. Laferte said he was told there were 3 cases but did not know who the applicants are or any of the details about their applications.

11). Natural Gas:

Mr. Orvis said he had nothing to report on this issue as he has not had time to address it due to some health issues. He added that he also did contact any one about OHRV trails or at the NH Liquor Commission as discussed at the last meeting.

12). Old Business:

A). Ribbon Cuttings- Mrs. Titus said she spoke with the owners of the Farmington Depot and Game World and was told they are not ready to hold a ribbon cutting just yet. She said she told

them to contact her when they are ready and that she will inform the committee when the events are scheduled.

B). Sarah Greenfield Business Park- Mr. Laferte asked if there is an update on the business park.

Mrs. Titus said she had not heard any new information regarding the sale of the town owned lots.

C). Old Brush Company- Ms. Haig said she spoke with the owner of the business who said he is experiencing a lot of furniture sales. She said he also told her that Mr. Sacco, who owns ACM Specialized Materials (the Metal Farm), has also been purchasing antiques from him that he intends to sell at his auctions. It seems there are a lot of changes going on in the field of antiques she said.

Planning Board member Bill Fisher said Mr. Sacco has not received final approval to hold auctions at the Metal Farm and that his application is still before the board.

Mr. Orvis asked if Mr. Sacco has received a variance from the Zoning Board of Adjustment for the auctions.

Mr. Fisher said Mr. Sacco did obtain a Variance from the ZBA at their last meeting. He said Mr. Sacco is scheduled to attend the next Planning Board meeting to complete the approval process for his auction plan.

Mr. Laferte asked if Mr. Sacco discussed any plans to serve food during the auctions.

Mr. Fisher said Mr. Sacco may offer some coffee or a few refreshments but does not plan to have food items for sale. He said the board talked him out of having a snack bar at the site.

Mr. Laferte added that Mr. Sacco's original approval had 11 conditions which weren't met and they ended up in court over the issues. The revised site plan will have 11 conditions which Mr. Sacco stated he will meet.

Mr. Fisher said the approval to hold auctions at the site is the last piece of the amended site plan approval process.

13). New Business: None

14). Any Other Business to come before the committee:

Members expressed their thoughts about the FBC presentation given by Mr. Manoian.

Mr. Orvis said he understood and liked the concepts of the approach but said he thought it will be a tough sell to the town.

Ms. Roy-Palmer agreed it would be a change for the town but noted that people want things to be more direct and simplified. It is a whole different concept that involves taking what you have and enhancing it she said.

Mr. Orvis said if it actually simplifies things people will like it but said he is trying to figure out how to integrate it into existing zoning without making the existing zoning more complicated.

Ms. Roy-Palmer said the FBC method could replace some existing zoning in those areas where it is used.

Mr. Laferte said he was concerned about how the FCB approach would affect the rural portions of the town.

Mr. Orvis shared his concern and noted that 80-90% of the town is rural.

Ms. Roy-Palmer said the town could begin to implement the FBC concepts in the downtown area and then work it out further later.

Mr. Orvis said he thought the town showed their intent to preserve the tradition of the downtown area when they voted to keep the Christmas lights.

15). Next Meeting: October 10, 2017 at 6 p.m.

16). Adjournment:

Motion: (Titus, second Roy-Palmer) to adjourn the meeting passed unanimously at 7:40 p.m.

Respectively submitted

Kathleen Magoon

Recording Secretary

Randy Orvis, Chairman