

Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, November 14, 2017

Committee Members Present:

Randy Orvis, Chairman
Angela Hardin, Vice Chairman
Ann Titus, Selectmen's Rep.
Martin Laferte, Planning Board Rep.
Sharron McKenney
Elise Haig

Committee Members Absent:

Denise Roy-Palmer, Secretary- excused
Kathy King, excused

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).Review of Minutes:

October 10, 2017- No errors or omissions

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

5). Newsletter:

Motion: (Titus, second Hardin) to approve the newsletter as presented:

Discussion: Mr. Orvis asked if the Business of the Month piece was written by the owner.

Mrs. Titus said the article was written and submitted by the business owner. She advised any Farmington business owner who would like to be featured as the Business of the Month to write a piece about their business and submit it to her or to Administrative Assistant Erica Rogers.

Mrs. Titus said there were not many submissions for the newsletter this month and asked each of the members to try to submit one piece of information, photo or thought to help make the publication more informative and helpful to town businesses.

Mr. Orvis said he would like to try to get the newsletter seen by more people and asked if it is put in any locations around town.

Mrs. Titus said she makes about 15 hard copies for placement around town and also posts it on the Town Office bulletin board and e-mails it to the businesses with working e-mail addresses.

Ms. Hardin said she also makes copies available at the TD Bank.

Mr. Orvis suggested copies be placed at businesses on Route 11 such as Honey Dew Donuts, Cameron's, Taylor Rental, Kelly's Country Store and NAPA to promote town businesses to

people passing through town.

Vote: The motion passed unanimously.

6). Goals:

Ms. Hardin said she did not have any updates at this time.

Mrs. Titus said the new booklet, "Planning Applications Guide", is now available from the Planning Dept. and will be included in the folders handed out to new or potential business owners. There are only 6 folders left so 50 more folders have ordered. She suggested the folders be updated yearly to keep current with any changes to codes, zoning, Master Plan, etc.

7). Planning Board Report:

Mr. Laferte reported that the Planning Board held 2 conceptual discussions at their last meeting.

The first discussion concerned a subdivision proposal on Paulson Road. The owner purchased the 11 acre parcel with the intent to subdivide a back section for residential use and the remaining acreage will be used for a commercial business. One of the potential problems is the existing bridge over the creek may not be sufficient for the intended business use and may have to be replaced or a new entrance found he said.

The second conceptual discussion concerned a potential change of use to put a stone countertop business in an existing building on Route 11 adjacent to Dana's Auto body repair.

The applicant met with the Town Planner the next day to start putting together the application paperwork and will return to the board for review possibly in December he said.

Mr. Laferte said that on Tuesday, Nov. 21 the Planning Board will hold 4 Public Hearings regarding subdivision applications and he will be acting Chair as Mr. Kestner will be out of state. The Public Hearings will begin at 6:30 p.m. and it is expected to be a long meeting he said.

Mr. Orvis said he was not aware that the discussion about the countertop business involved any changes to the building and had wondered why the business wasn't just permitted to move into the building. He said he has seen some instances where the Code Enforcement Officer has sent applicants to the Planning Board where, in his opinion, it wasn't necessary. He added the intended use is not all different from the previous business in that building (auto body shop) and suggested there may need to be a change made to the zoning ordinance or to definitions of the allowed uses for that zone.

Mr. Laferte said the Planning Board is working on some potential future changes to zoning ordinances with the possible adoption of Form Based Codes, additional permitted uses in some zones and definitions of some uses such as the definition of a "storefront".

Mrs. Titus asked for an explanation of Form Based Codes for the viewing public.

Mr. Laferte said the current zoning ordinances deal with setbacks, frontage and property lines, etc. while Form Based Codes deal with the visual aspects of the structures. A plan will be developed for the downtown and new businesses must meet those requirements he said.

Mr. Orvis said the forms are based around the existing structures rather than arbitrary setbacks and regulations. New construction would be allowed to be comparable to the existing structures and we would be able to preserve the old New England community that we have here he said.

Mr. Laferte said the Form Based Codes are a lot more architectural and talk about window and door types and sizes, the exterior appearance of the building and the materials used and will be a massive change from what the town has now. He said the board has about a year and a half to work it all out before putting it before voters at the 2019 Town Meeting.

8). Natural Gas/OHRV:

Mr. Orvis said he did not have anything to report on these issues due to dealing with some health issues. He said he was happy to report that he is feeling better and that he planned to contact the gas company to find out if a representative would speak to the committee in the near future.

9). Old Business:

1). Mural Proposals- Members reviewed the letter drafted by Ms. Hardin seeking proposals from student artists to paint a mural on the side of the Subway building downtown. She suggested the letter be sent to local college art depts. to invite the students to submit ideas for the mural. She then read the letter aloud for the benefit of the viewing audience.

Ms. Hardin said she sent the letter to Mrs. Roy-Palmer and she suggested the language be changed to include that the project is open to a group of students and not just to a single artist. Mr. Laferte suggested the size of the area to be painted be included in the letter and that if it is a large enough area a whole class may want to participate in the project.

Mr. Orvis said the Conservation Commission has requested that the Farmington High School Art Dept. students paint a mural inside the old water tower located on the McCarthy Trail.

Mrs. Titus asked about the proposed date to complete the downtown mural project.

Ms. Hardin said she picked the dates based on an earlier discussion where members said they wished to start the project in the spring and the date of the May EDC meeting.

Mrs. Titus then asked if the art teacher will be present when the high school students are painting the water tower mural.

Mr. Orvis said the teacher attended the last Con Com meeting but he was not sure if she will be on site when the tower is painted.

Mrs. Titus said the letter could be sent to the high school to seek interested high school student artists but expressed concern about liability, safety and supervision issues.

Mr. Orvis asked about parking on the side street next to the Subway building.

Ms. Hardin said she did not think parking was allowed on that street and suggested they put some traffic cones on that side of the street next to the building to prevent parking there while the project is being completed.

Ms. Hardin asked if insurance coverage exists for students and if she should include an insurance requirement in the letter to the schools.

Mr. Orvis said the each year the warrant at Town Meeting includes a statement about holding the Town and its employees harmless but did not know if the School District warrant includes a similar statement.

Mrs. Titus said that when a non-profit group uses Town property they must have their own liability coverage or if a group were to use the bank parking lot they must have liability insurance.

Ms. Haig told the members that she has a contact for a professional artist and said she would be willing to inquire if he has insurance coverage. She said that although it seemed the members wanted the students to paint the mural it would be a great learning experience for them by observing a professional artist at work.

Mrs. Titus said the surface is an exterior building wall and they need to have the right materials and preparation to ensure that the building won't be damaged, that the artwork will be applied properly and will last as long as possible. She suggested Ms. Haig invite the artist to attend a committee meeting and speak to the members about the preparation, proper materials needed and an estimated cost to complete it. She added if the artist gives the committee a good deal that maybe someone else will want a mural on their building.

Mr. Laferte suggested the time to discuss insurance is during an interview and that the insurance requirement should not be included in the letter.

Ms. Hardin said she will find out if there is insurance coverage provided by the schools when students go off campus to work on a project.

Mr. Orvis said the committee could also contact a local insurance agent to see if short term coverage is available for the project participants if needed.

Mrs. Titus suggested that since Mrs. King has contact with the Subway building owner that she should be included as a contact in the letter.

Mr. Laferte then suggested that Town Administrator Arthur Capello may be able to answer some the questions raised by the members.

Mrs. Titus said she will contact Mr. Capello.

Other Old Business- Ms. Haig said it is sad to see that the Broken Lance has gone out of business and to see a dark building now.

Ms. Hardin said the owner had a great concept for a business but didn't "charge it right" by only making money off of the food served with no admission or per game fees.

Mrs. Titus said she attempted to schedule a ribbon cutting for the business 3 times and asked if there was anything else they could do to help but received no response.

10). New Business:

Cracked Skulls- Ms. Haig said she contacted the owner of the bakery/coffee shop/book store about bringing a second location to Farmington and was told that they are "busy enough" with

one location.

The Game Store- Ms. Haig said she spoke with owner Matt Brown who posted an inquiry on the Community Face book page asking what people would like to see in town and the majority of respondents said they would like to have a coffee shop/bakery in town. Mr. Brown was considering renting more space in the building where the Broken Lance was but the spaces there have kitchens making the rent more expensive. She said this is why she felt converting commercial space to apartments on the first floor should be prohibited because reconverting the space back to retail use is almost impossible and valuable retail space is lost. Mr. Brown was also considering getting a group of people together to consign some space which was successful in another area she said. She added that more apartments on Main Street downtown will also take up more parking spaces where parking is already limited.

Mrs. Titus said she researched the plans of some of the downtown rental units and found that many of the units have at least 1-2 parking space assigned to them that is included on their Site Plans. Some of the apartments have parking in the rear of their buildings and residents of units without parking spaces or needing more parking spaces must park in the Municipal parking lot. She added there is no on-street parking privileges and that the landlords should be making sure their tenants are parking in the proper places.

Negative Commentary- Ms. Haig said she was concerned about the negative talk about any new business coming to town on the Community Forum Face book page. She said a lot people read the forum page and there is so much negativity that it is embarrassing and not to see a new business as progress is very discouraging. There are also some out of town agitators she said. Ms. Hardin suggested discussing the issues with the page administrator.

Ms. Haig said she doesn't see this type of activity on other forum pages and sees support for local businesses.

Mrs. Titus said the people who are complaining about Farmington don't live here or have a problem not resolved to their satisfaction. She advised them to come to a board meeting, make a phone call or e-mail and say it to the people who may be able to resolve the issue. She said Farmington is a town of over 7,000 people and there are many dedicated people and a lot of good things happening in town.

Ms. Haig added there is a good side to the forum where there is a lot of community help such as when she needed a new windshield for her car. She the person who ended up helping her was from Rochester and shows that residents of other towns read the Farmington forum. The good outweighs the bad when you need a service or a recommendation she said.

Ms. Hardin also noted the positive reaction to her posting of an article about the Farmington Police Dept.'s response following the last storm and how the posting went "viral" online in a very short period of time. She suggested that if they focus on posting more positive things on the forum the "negative ninnies" will find somewhere else to go.

Mr. Orvis and Mrs. McKenney said the Barnstead and Alton Community Forum pages also

contain about the same amount of negativity as the Farmington page.

Ms. Hardin said most people are pretty savvy and have the ability to weed through the posts and not let things posted on Face book make their decisions for them.

Ms. Haig then disputed the town's reputation for not being business friendly and said that since she has been on town boards she has not seen any business turned away.

Mr. Laferte said he represents Farmington on the Strafford Regional Planning Commission which is made up of 18 cities and towns. He said after listening to what is going on in other towns, he has determined that Farmington is not doing too badly with the new Public Safety Building and the state replacing the Main Street Bridge and the addition of the turning lane and paving of Route 11 while they are complaining about not having enough money to complete the projects that need to be addressed. He noted that he been on the Planning board for 5 years and during that time they have never attacked a business that was coming into town. We have rules we have to go by whether we like it or not he said.

Memo from the Town Administrator- Mr. Capello sent Mr. Orvis a memo informing him that the Town is attempting to sell Town owned land on Route 11(across from Taylor Rental) and asked if there is anyone they should inform that the land is up for sale.

Discussion included the potential uses for the 12 acre lot, site conditions, access road conditions, and advertising and sale methods.

Mr. Laferte asked about the sale of the Town owned lots in the Sarah Greenfield Business Park.

Mrs. Titus said a new For Sale sign was installed near the entrance to the park and that the lots are not listed with a commercial realtor. She said that the Town Administrator posted a RFP (Request for Proposal) for the lots and placed an ad in the newspaper but she did not know if he received any "hits" from the ads.

She explained that the Town is not in the real estate business and that normally a RFP is sent out and the highest bidder gets the property. She suggested that even with the realtor's commission on the sale, it still may work out for the Town to use a commercial realtor for the sales.

Mr. Orvis said he didn't think the Town should be looking to make money on the sale of Town owned land. He said that Milton is practically giving away lots in their industrial park and is now receiving \$25,000 a year in taxes off that property.

Mr. Orvis suggested the lot would be a good location for an industrial facility as it is located in the industrial zone. He said he didn't think a retail facility would do as well because the lot is 3 miles up the road from the Ridge shopping plaza and Wal Mart.

Ms. Hardin said Mr. Orvis or Mrs. Titus could take back some suggestions for businesses to contact to Mr. Capello but the businesses are going to need details about the property.

Mr. Orvis said they should promote the fact that there are about 15,000 cars a day traveling Route 11.

Mr. Laferte asked if the sale property is beyond the area included in the TIF District.

Mr. Orvis said it is not included in the TIF and is beyond any plans for the sewer line extension. Mrs. Titus said she planned to contact Mrs. King to discuss the letters previously sent to businesses at a time when there wasn't any land available for them and use those contacts to reach out to some bigger businesses.

Members also discussed the possibility of constructing a vocational school to provide a skilled work force for future employers or an urgent care facility at the site.

Ms. Haig said she would mention the available property to her employer, Wentworth-Douglas Hospital as a possible location for an offsite medical facility.

Mr. Laferte advised that the side of Route 11 where the sale property is located contains ledge and with the need for a private septic system there the entire 12 acres may not be buildable. Consensus of the committee was to suggest that the property be listed with a commercial realtor. Mrs. Titus said she would relay the committee's suggestion to Mr. Capello.

Any Other New Business- Mrs. Titus said she had planned to hold a ribbon cutting but the business owner decided to wait until spring.

She said she will contact Mr. Brown (Game Store) to plan a ribbon cutting for his business as soon as he returns from vacation.

Mr. Laferte noted that the Aroma Joe's coffee shop is almost ready to open and may want a ribbon cutting.

Mr. Orvis said it also looks like the Vape and Smoke Shop will be opening soon.

Ms. Haig asked if anyone had information on the sale of the Eastman House.

Members said they did not know the outcome of the sale.

Ms. Haig also noted that former Doc Quinn's house at the corner of Spring and Central Streets has activity with a new family now occupying the home. She the new owner is interested in the history of the house and is restoring it to its previous stature.

11). Any Other Business:

Mr. Orvis said the members previously discussed asking landlords to consider putting lighting in the windows of vacant upstairs units in the downtown area and asked for an update on the matter.

Mrs. Titus said the Friends of Farmington agreed to leave lights on upstairs at their building, the former Masons' building, but she did not remember who was supposed to contact the manger of the other buildings with vacant units.

Mr. Orvis said inexpensive lighting could be had by installing a solar powered light in the windows.

Mr. Laferte asked when the Christmas lights would be turned on.

Ms. Hardin said the Christmas lights will be lit starting Friday, December 1.

Mrs. Titus said the Christmas Tree lighting and a tribute to the late Tom DeJulio who spearheaded the plan to install the poles to hang the Christmas lights, replacement and installation of the light strings and the banners and other decorations in the downtown area

will also be held that night and urged everyone to come out in appreciation for all of Mr. DeJulio's efforts to retain the Christmas traditions downtown.

Ms. Haig asked about creating a skating rink in town.

Mrs. Titus said the First Night Committee plans to have a bon fire and skating rink behind the Turner Insurance building along with other activities downtown on New Year's Eve. The event will be kid friendly from 7 to 10 p.m. and then geared toward adults after 10 p.m. she said.

Mrs. McKenney said a resident is trying to bring back the skating rink that once was located in the area of the Union Street swamp.

Mrs. Titus suggested the 500 Boys and Girls Club, Fernald Park or the softball field at the school campus may also be good locations for a skating rink.

12). Next Meeting: December 12, 2017

13). Adjournment:

Motion: (Laferte, second Hardin) to adjourn the meeting passed 6-0 at 7:25 p.m.

Respectively submitted

Kathleen Magoon

Recording Secretary

Randy Orvis, Chairman