

Town of Farmington
Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, May 9, 2017

Committee Members Present:

Randy Orvis, Chairman
Denise Roy-Palmer, Secretary
Ann Titus, Selectmen's Rep.
Martin Laferte, Planning Board Rep.
Angela Hardin
Sharon McKenney
Lisa Capone
Kathy King

Committee Members Absent:

Diane Blair

Others Present:

Arthur Capello, Town Administrator
Erica Rogers, Administrative Assistant

1). Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance:

Chairman Orvis called the meeting to order at 6 p.m. All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

2). Public Comment:

A). Timely Submission of Items- Mr. Capello said he wished to speak to the committee to clarify Administrative Assistant Erica Roger's role in assisting the committee. He asked the members for more cooperation in submitting items to Mrs. Rogers in a more timely matter. He said items for the monthly newsletter and the meeting agenda were received only a few days before the meeting and she has other responsibilities as the Welfare Director for the Town. He asked the members to submit things at least 1 week in advance of the meeting or there could be chance the items would not be addressed in time for the meeting. He added she is happy to assist the committee if given enough time to do so.

B). Source Water Protection Plan Committee- Mr. Capello told the members that DPW Deputy Director Jason Gagnon sought out a grant to develop a protection plan for the present and future water sources. As part of the project a committee will be formed that will meet on a monthly basis beginning in June to oversee the Source Water Specialist's work. The Town will receive a report with steps to preserve property and protect the water sources from contaminates. He asked if any of the members were interested in joining the committee.

Mr. Orvis volunteered to represent the EDC on the committee.

Mr. Capello said members will be notified of the first meeting date and time by e-mail.

3). Newsletter:

Mrs. Titus said the members were given a black and white copy of the EDC monthly newsletter in their meeting packets. She passed around a color version for members to review. She apologized to the members for not including more items in the newsletter due to dealing with a family member's illness.

Mr. Capello said all of the members should contribute items to the newsletter.

Mr. Laferte asked who the newsletter is sent out to.

Mrs. Titus said it is sent to all of the businesses listed on the Town website by e-mail. She said some people have asked to have it made available to the community.

Mr. Capello suggested it could be made more available by posting it on the EDC section of the Town website.

Mr. Orvis suggested a short stack of newsletters could be supplied around town similar to the locations where the Puddledock Press newspaper is available.

Mrs. Titus offered to deliver the newsletters if Mrs. Rogers would be willing to print up the copies.

Members then made the following changes/corrections:

First paragraph under the heading- 2nd sentence, “Realtors” is misspelled,

Add the time for the Ribbon Cuttings (RSA Realtors at 9 a.m., Blue Collar Barber at 9:30 a.m.)

Business of the Month- 2nd sentence, change “employees” to “employs”

Remove apostrophes from “it’s” and “Paint Nite’s”.

Don’t use a color print to make black and white copies for better appearance and easier reading.

Adjust the location of the title depending on the amount of space needed for other items.

Change font or font size as needed for more news space.

Mrs. Titus said she visited 5 or 6 businesses and spoke to them about being the featured business of the month in the newsletter. She said they have agreed to write about their businesses and forward it to her for future publication in the newsletter. She suggested a subcommittee review the business directory for errors or omissions and then send an e-mail blast to all of the businesses listed requesting that they write about their business for inclusion in a future newsletter. Once the newsletter with their business write-up is approved by the committee the business owner will receive a hard copy of that newsletter she said.

Mr. Laferte suggested it include activities conducted by the various Town depts. such as paving streets or flushing hydrants.

Mr. Capello said that can be done occasionally but it would be too cumbersome to try to print the schedule each month because of fluctuations due to weather, equipment/manpower issues or some unforeseen emergency.

Mr. Orvis said businesses considering coming to town may like to know about planned improvements to structures and utilities.

Mr. Capello said that information such as the hydrant flushing and paving schedules is already available on the town website and by e-mail blast.

Mrs. Titus said she is looking to include information about workshops and grants available for small businesses in future newsletters. She said she does not have access to what is available for small business and suggested that someone who works with or in a small business may be aware of where to find that information.

Mrs. King said that in her capacity as a member of the Friends of Farmington she has been trying to obtain information on workshops and seminars for the organization and will forward the information on to the EDC as she receives it.

Mr. Capello suggested Mrs. King forward the information to Mrs. Rogers even if it will not be used in the newsletter as it could be used in an e-mail blast to the businesses.

Mr. Orvis said he would like to see where to find information about signing up for Social Security and Medicare.

Mrs. King said Friends group plans to bring in speakers about financial planning and tax preparation for seniors.

Ms. McKenney suggested finding a speaker to help seniors figure out Medicare Part D.

Mr. Capello said the town's health insurance provider spoke with employees nearing retirement about those issues and said he will check on the possibility of them providing a similar talk to other groups.

Motion: (Titus, second Hardin) to approve the newsletter as amended passed 8-0.

4). Ribbon Cuttings:

Mr. Orvis said the Ribbon Cutting ceremonies for RSA Realty and Blue Collar Barbershop are scheduled for Friday, May 12 at 9 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. respectively.

Mrs. Titus requested that the Police and Fire Chiefs be present at the ribbon cuttings.

Mr. Capello explained that the Chiefs are not available due to their attendance at a conference.

Mrs. Titus asked Mrs. Rogers to request that the next person in charge in the Police and Fire Depts. attend the ceremonies.

5). Review of Business List on the Website:

Members received a copy of the Farmington Business Directory as posted on the Town website.

Mr. Orvis asked if the members wished to review the printout and make corrections or take the directory home for review.

Discussion included some businesses not included on the list and if businesses that provide multiple services or products are listed in more than one category,

Mr. Capello said the list could be set up to list a business in multiple categories or to list a business with all of its services under 1 listing if the information is available to the Town.

Consensus of the committee was to review the directory at home for discussion at the next meeting.

6). Review of Sarah Greenfield Business Park Covenants:

Mr. Orvis said he briefly reviewed the document and in his opinion the covenants are overly restrictive. He said that the easiest time to amend them is when the Town is majority owner of the lots in the park which would allow the Town to be the majority vote of lot owners. He said the covenants do not need to be any more restrictive than the Town Planning and Zoning Regulations and the lot owner should have to go before the Planning Board for Site Plan Review. He added that after reading some of the covenants he knows that they have not been followed. He said it seemed when the document was written, it was written with the idea that all of the buildings/lots would be the same when we don't know what will come to Town or the type of facility they will need.

Mr. Capello told the committee that he met with a representative of a sign company and

requested a quote for a For Sale sign to advertize the sale of the Town owned lots in the park. Mr. Orvis said the covenants were written 17 years ago and have been amended once since then. He said as a businessman he would not buy a lot in the park because of the availability of lots close by at a competitive price that don't have those restrictions.

Mr. Laferte said that in the 4 years he has been on the Planning Board no one has come before the board to discuss making any modifications to the deed restrictions as noted in Section 5 of the business park regulations. The town has regulations for setbacks and the applicant will have to deal with that he said.

Mr. Orvis agreed but said the setbacks in the deed restrictions go above and beyond what is required by Town Ordinances.

Mr. Laferte said the setback requirements are based on what zone the lot is located in but that most of the setbacks are required to be at least 30 feet. He said he did not think there would be a "green light" for Sarah Greenfield lots as each proposal for each lot would have to be deal with individually. He said the covenants are set up to cover 100% of the people which can't be done.

Mr. Orvis said he did not understand the purpose of Required Deed Restriction 2 (I) which prohibits the lot owner from actively utilizing more than 80% of the property and requiring the remaining 20% of the property to be reserved as a buffer zone with a green space and landscaping. He asked why you would expect someone to buy a piece of property and then not be able to utilize it 100% somehow.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer suggested telling the Planning Board that the EDC is concerned about the restrictions in the covenants and to ask them to review the document and suggest some changes. Mrs. King suggested the committee could make suggestions to the board for restrictions they'd like to see changed.

Section 5 of the deed restrictions states changes/modifications may be recommended by Selectmen or the Planning Board but the changes must be approved by a majority vote of the Selectmen and current lot owners at a noticed meeting of the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Laferte said the Planning Board would review the document, listen to the concerns of the EDC and then make recommendations to the Selectmen.

Mr. Capello recommended the committee send their recommended changes to the Board of Selectmen for consideration.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said she was concerned that as an EDC member she does not have the expertise in planning regulations to be making recommendations for changes. She said with the Planning Board's expertise with the regulations they could make recommendations to Selectmen. Mrs. Titus suggested the committee could circle the particular sections they are not comfortable with and bring it to the Selectmen's attention.

Mr. Laferte suggested they contact the Planning Board Chairman and ask him to request that the board review the covenants and respond to the EDC with their recommendations on what should be changed in the document.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said they are looking to make the town more business friendly and still comply with the regulations and questioned if the covenants need to be more restrictive than the town

ordinances. She said the idea is to get the lots sold and back on the tax rolls and employ people and if the restrictions are prohibiting the sale of the lots it is something they should look into. Mr. Capello said he would first want to know why the covenants were made so restrictive in the first place.

Mr. Orvis said the park is 20 years old now and at the time the covenants were written it was prior to the revision of the town zoning ordinances and the ordinances may have been too loose. He said the zoning has changed dramatically since then.

Mr. Capello said in his opinion, the covenants should not even exist and the lots should be governed by the current zoning regulations.

Mr. Orvis noted that Section 2J states that the buyer shall have one year to complete all construction, landscaping and paving. He said it should be changed to require the owner to submit a site plan review application to the Planning Board within a certain time period and to occupy the site within a certain time frame following approval of the plan.

Mr. Capello said he did not agree with setting a 1 year time frame for occupancy as the owner may need an extended time period to secure financing or deal with other issues before they can occupy the building.

Mr. Laferte drew the members' attention to page 2, sections K, L and M regarding prohibited uses on the lots and read the sections aloud. He said the uses prohibited in the sections are commonly prohibited elsewhere and any buyer would know these types of uses are not allowed.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said if the Town is the majority owner in the park and chooses to make changes to the covenants it should be mindful that for the most part the previous owners have complied with the existing covenants.

Mr. Capello said the Town owns 3 lots in the park and asked for the total number of lots there.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said she thought that there are 4 buildings in the park now so the Town may not be the majority owner any more. The other owners would have to agree with the recommended changes she said.

Mr. Capello said the Board of Selectmen has the purview to change the covenants.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer asked if that is true even if the town is no longer the majority owner in the park.

Mr. Orvis said the covenants state that each lot shall represent one vote for its owner.

Mr. Capello said the Town would represent 3 votes and there would be 4 other individual votes.

Mr. Laferte warned if the Town does not "play the game" by the rules it could get sued and lose.

Mr. Orvis said bringing in more tax base is as good for business owners as it is for residential property owners. If it lowers the tax rate for residential property it lowers the tax rate for business properties too. It is in the best interest of the current owners to encourage development of the rest of the lots he said.

Motion: (King, second Titus) to forward the Sarah Greenfield Business Park Regulations to the Planning Board for their review to bring them more in line with current land use regulations and to request they forward their recommendations to the Board of Selectmen passed 7-0-1 (Laferte abstained).

Mr. Capello suggested the request for the Planning Board review of the covenants be made by a letter from the committee to the Planning Board Chairman David Kestner.

7). Individual Thoughts on Committee Focus:

Mr. Orvis asked the committee to discuss their thoughts about economic development. He said he did not want the focus to be his personal focus but what the majority of the members want the focus to be. He added that the committee by-laws state that the EDC's focus is supposed to be on the Route 11 corridor.

Mrs. King said one goal would be to be more proactive within the county and the state letting everyone know that Farmington is open for business. That would mean networking with other towns, attending economic events, attending "Business After Hours" in other communities to network with other attendees and positively promote the town and what it has to offer she said. Mr. Capello and Mrs. Rogers then left the meeting.

Mrs. Titus said she would like see Route 11 developed but acknowledged that it will take some time. She said when a new business comes into town she would like to help make the transition easier for them. She said the folders developed earlier by the committee also need to be updated. Ms. Hardin said she echoed the sentiments of Mrs. King and Mrs. Titus. She suggested making the downtown area more vibrant with a short term goal of getting the vacant buildings filled and making it look better. She said the downtown area should be the town's "business card" and if it is kept thriving then we can then expand our efforts outside those borders.

Mrs. Titus congratulated some of the new and existing downtown business owners for the work they have done fixing up their buildings and sprucing up the area.

Mrs. Hardin agreed and said most of the problems are with the vacant buildings.

Mr. Orvis said he agreed with Ms. Hardin's idea to make the downtown more vibrant like it was when he first moved here in 1978. He said a lot of the second floor levels are vacant and there are several vacant storefronts/office spaces as well. We need to market the downtown to get it filled up he said.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said one of the programs offered by the UNH Cooperative Extension is to help prioritize economic development goals. She said she was unaware of any feedback from the community since the presentation was given by the Cooperative Extension at a previous EDC meeting. She asked if there has been any interest shown in moving forward with one of the programs offered by the Cooperative Extension.

Ms. Capone said that a steering committee of residents has been meeting at the Goodwin Library and that she has attended the last 3 meetings. She said the group has been exchanging ideas and have discussed some potential types of companies to try to attract, marketing the town as the "Gateway to the Lakes Region" and how to get them to stop in town on the way to their destinations.

Mrs. King said solicitation of businesses should come only from the Town with the collaboration of the group. She suggested it would be more professional if the Town put together a packet promoting Farmington and sent it to the businesses instead of 10 individual people contacting the businesses.

Ms. Capone said they have not contacted anyone but have done some research on green companies. She said some of the bigger companies may be willing to open another location in Farmington and added that some of those companies have a policy where their employees donate their time to the community.

Mrs. Titus suggested that once a Town Planner is hired the committee could forward their ideas and suggestions to the Planner and have him/her contact the businesses.

Ms. McKenney said she agreed with the members that Route 11 and the downtown area need to be developed and the area looks unfriendly and not like we are a community.

Mrs. Titus said that the out of state owner of one of the vacant buildings downtown is asking a top price for the building which is not helping to sell the building.

Ms. McKenney said that the out of state building owners often have a different idea of what the building is worth than what they are actually worth in this area.

Mr. Laferte noted that last year the committee often had difficulty achieving a quorum of members for the meetings. He congratulated everyone who decided to become involved with the committee. He said the monthly newsletter has a lot of potential and it should be maximized as much as possible. The ribbon cuttings are a good idea as the businesses like a little publicity. The Sarah Greenfield regulations should come to the Planning Board and they will do something with it. He said there is massive difference in what the committee is doing compared to what they used to do.

Ms. Capone asked if there is a Historical Society in Town.

Mr. Orvis said the Historical Society exists and meets in the library monthly.

Ms. Capone said the town is known for its history and we should promote it and attract visitors by having a museum downtown. She also suggested asking the businesses to post local events, encourage use of the stage in the Town Hall, promote the hiking trails in town and the things the Town already has.

Mrs. Titus said the 500 Boys and Girls Club holds a lot of tournament events and the attendees always ask where to eat or sleep. She suggested more signage is needed to attract visitors to the downtown area.

Mr. Orvis said he would like to see a 5-star prime rib restaurant come to town.

Mrs. King said at the last Selectmen's meeting an audience member mentioned using the Old Courthouse for the Historical Society.

Mr. Orvis asked what happened to the Business Association in town.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said that the large employers, whose employees were members of the Association left town so it fell apart.

She noted that the Moose Mountains Regional Alliance (MMRA) is developing a list of assets for each of the 7 towns in the group. She said they have launched a Face Book page entitled "Explore Moose Mountains" or "The Moose" to promote recreation, historical assets, cultural assets, places to eat, places to stay, antique shops, artisans, agriculture and businesses. She added there is currently no Farmington Rep. to the MMRA.

8). Old Business:

A).Review of Minutes of April 11, 2017- No errors or omissions

Motion: (Hardin, second Titus) to approve the minutes as written passed 7-0-1 (King abstained).

B). Nomination of Vice Chairman-

Motion: (King, second Titus) to nominate Angela Hardin as Vice Chairman passed 8-0. Ms. Hardin accepted the nomination.

C). Joint Meetings-

BOS -Ms. Hardin asked if a joint meeting with the Selectmen has been scheduled as was discussed at the previous meeting.

Mr. Orvis said he left a message with the Selectmen's Secretary requesting a date to meet with the board. He will revisit the matter at the next meeting.

PB- Mrs. Titus said she contacted Planning Board Chairman David Kestner to request a joint meeting with the Planning Board. She said she asked Mr. Kestner to contact Mr. Orvis to discuss when the 2 committees could get together.

Mr. Orvis said he has not yet heard from Mr. Kestner.

D). Citizens Group -

Ms. Capone said there is meeting of the steering committee to discuss economic development in town scheduled for May 25 at the library. She said the group is in the process of collecting ideas and refining them down to 1 or 2 core issues and is not yet ready to recommend participation in any of the programs offered by the Cooperative Extension.

E).Existing Plans-

Plan NH- Mrs. Roy-Palmer said she was unable to find her copy of the feasibility study conducted about 10 years ago by Plan NH which contains work by engineers, designers, architects and landscapers to redesign the downtown center. She suggested the Planning Dept. may have a copy of the plan.

Ms. Hardin said she will follow up with the Planning Dept. Secretary and get copies for the next meeting.

Master Plan- Mrs. King asked when the Master Plan was last reviewed and if the Planning Board has any plans to review the documents.

Mrs. Hardin said the 180 page plan was last reviewed in 2005. She said the newer ordinances do follow the recommendations of the plan.

Mrs., King said this would help the town look like it is "on top of things" to anyone coming into town and looking at the plan.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said if the list of tasks in the plan has been completed then it needs to be updated and include future goals for the town.

Ms. Hardin said she will provide copies of the Economic Development chapter of the Master Plan for review at the next meeting.

9).New Business:

Former Mason's Building- Mr. Laferte congratulated those involved with the revitalization of the former Mason's Building.

10). Any Other Business That May Come Before the Committee:

Next Meeting- Tuesday, June 13, 2017 at 6 p.m.

The agenda will include: Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance, Public Comment, Review of Minutes, Newsletter, Ribbon Cuttings, Review of Business List, Goal Setting, Review of Master Plan, Old Business, New Business, Any Other Business and Adjournment.

11). Adjournment:

Motion: (Laferte, second Roy-Palmer) to adjourn the meeting passed unanimously at 7:30 p.m.

Respectively submitted

Kathleen Magoon

Recording Secretary

Randy Orvis, Chairman