

Town of Farmington
Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 11, 2018

Committee Members Present:

Angela Hardin, Chairman
Denise Roy-Palmer, Vice Chairman
Dave Connolly, Selectmen's Rep
Breanne Varney
Chad York
Randy Orvis

Committee Members Absent:

Sharon McKenney, excused
Martin Laferte, Planning Board Rep
Elise Haig- (resigned)

Others Present:

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1). Call to Order:

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

2). Pledge of Allegiance:

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

3). Public Comment:

Chairman Hardin welcomed new member Chad York, owner of the Blue Collar Barbers in downtown Farmington to the committee.

4). Review of Minutes:

November 13, 2018 – No errors or omissions

Motion: (Connolly, second Orvis) to accept the minutes as written passed 4-0-2 (Roy-Palmer, York abstained).

5). Resignation:

Chairman Hardin informed the committee that she accepted the resignation of member Elise Haig as she wasn't able to keep her commitment to the committee due to her time restrictions. Mr. Connolly requested that a copy of Ms. Haig's resignation be forwarded to the Town Clerk.

6). Planning Board Report:

There was no Planning Board update due to Mr. Laferte's absence.

7). Board of Selectmen Report:

Mr. Connolly said the new Executive Director of the **Strafford Regional Planning Commission** (SRPC) introduced herself to the board at their previous meeting and gave them a brief outline of the Commission's goals and aims for the coming year.

He said the Selectmen are still "plugging away" at the proposed 2019 budget which will be presented to the Budget Committee in mid-January.

8). Old Business:

A). ATV Club – Mr. Orvis said he did not have anything new to report as they are still in the process of identifying potential trail corridors in town. He said he is putting together a list of property owners so that other members of the club's trail committee can speak with the landowners about allowing their land to become part of a trail system.

He said they are currently considering where they would like to put the trail corridors, obtaining the landowners' permission or figuring out where to make detours around landowners who don't want to be part of the trail corridors. We have a potential for 3 miles of trails located in Farmington and the process should begin in earnest this weekend he said.

Mrs. Hardin asked Mr. Orvis if he had contacted NH Trails Bureau Chief Chris Gamache following the previous committee meeting to discuss the potential use of land owned by the NH Custodial Trust.

Mr. Orvis said Mr. Gamache is the sole Chief of the Trails Bureau which covers the whole state and he has not been able to connect with him yet.

B). Sarah Greenfield Business Park (SGBP) - Chairman Hardin said there was no update on the plans to hold a discussion with lot owners about potential changes to the park covenants as she has not been in contact with all of the property owners.

Mr. Connolly suggested that she inform Mr. York about the meeting plans.

Mrs. Hardin said that now that all of the lots in the park have been sold the committee thought they should set up a forum with the owners to review the covenants and facilitate the process.

Mr. Orvis said while reviewing the covenants it came to their attention that the covenants are more restrictive than the Town Zoning Ordinances. He said the Site Plan Review regulations are sufficient and the covenants are an extra burden on the property owners so they may want to relax the covenants so that they are more in line with the Town's Site Plan Review regulations.

Mr. Connolly asked who is responsible for the FOR SALE sign at the business park.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said the sale of the Town owned lots was not listed through a commercial realtor so she assumed the sign belongs to the Town.

Chairman Hardin said there may be potential for future sales at the park and suggested that it be taken down and stored. She said she will find out who owns and is responsible for the sign.

C). Economic Revitalization Zone (ERZ) Forum- Mrs. Hardin asked for suggestions on what individuals or agencies might be available to make a presentation at an ERZ forum. She said she has address labels for every property owner in the downtown ERZ so they could send out formal invitations to an educational forum about the ERZ and 79-e programs.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said that non-profit organizations are ineligible for the ERZ program because they don't pay the state Business Enterprise Tax. She said that \$825,000 a year is available and there are always more applications than funding so all of applications are never totally funded. She said the ERZ program sunsets next year and that she hoped the state will extend/renew it and make it a more improved system with more money available. The business owner would

invest in improvements, equipment or to create jobs and then complete the application and submit it along the required supporting documentation and if approved they would be awarded tax credits she said.

Chairman Hardin said with the 79-e program, if the property owner made improvements to their property they could use the lower assessed property value prior to the improvements for tax purposes and not pay taxes on the value of the improvements for 5 years.

Mr. Connolly asked if these programs are just for businesses.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said the 79-e is mostly for property owners/landlords so they can make improvements to their buildings.

Mrs. Hardin said the target area is mostly centered on the downtown area with some portions of Central Street and in the Cardinal & Glidden/Cumberland Farms area included.

Mr. Connolly asked how far down Main Street is included in the ERZ.

Mr. Orvis said it goes as far as the Main Street Bridge and that there are businesses down as far as the golf course so he would like to see the zones for both programs expanded in town.

Mr. Connolly reviewed a map of the zone and said many of the properties are residential only.

Mrs. Hardin said they would not be able to take advantage of the money from the ERZ program but may be able to qualify for the 79-e tax credits.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said she would check into who is handling the ERZ program and would be available to make a presentation at a committee meeting.

Mrs. Hardin suggested they plan to hold the presentation at the regularly scheduled Feb. or April EDC meeting at the Town Hall.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said she was not sure when the ERZ program will sunset which may affect the availability of a speaker as well. She asked about the percentage of out of town landlords.

Mrs. Hardin said she did not know and would check the list of property owners to find out.

Ms. Varney asked if the Town has the technology to hold a “webinar” so out of town property owners could participate in the forum.

Mrs. Hardin said the meetings are currently broadcast on the local cable TV channel which can’t be accessed by out of town viewers.

Mr. Connolly said they could not view the live broadcast but they could access the video on demand online at fctv26.viebit.com.

Ms. Varney said there are free apps that would allow people to call in and ask questions and participate in a live forum. She said she will look into what may be available for Town use.

Mr. Connolly suggested the Public Safety Building as another potential venue for forums.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer suggested they consider joining the NH Economic Developers Association which allows members to participate in 3 meetings a year in various towns that have taken on economic development projects and provides speakers and tours.

D). Community Development Block Grant Workshop – Mrs. Hardin said that last month she attended a CDBG workshop hosted by the Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA).

She noted that previously the town had used a CDBG to fix up the Farmington Children's Center and that there is a lot of money available for this type of grant.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said there were 2 grants awarded for the daycare center- one about 25 years and one just recently to make the needed improvements to the center. She said 3 Phase Line company and the Commerce Park also received CDBG grants.

Mrs. Hardin said there is money available for economic development, housing projects and public facilities and the process is run by the U. S. Housing and Urban Development Dept. and administered in this state by the CDFA. She said that following the meeting she had a discussion with Town Planner Dan DeSantis to brainstorm potential future uses for the grant.

Mrs. Hardin said it is important to note that for \$1 of CDBG funds requested \$1 of non-CDBG money must be committed to the project from the business or other sources. She said some of the money could be used toward water and sewer services to assist a business to bring in jobs but it would not be given to a municipality to upgrade or improve their water/sewer systems in general.

Mr. Connolly asked if this would affect the Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District in any way.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said when the funds are used for public facilities such as water/sewer, 60% of the beneficiaries have to be low to moderate income.

Mr. Connolly asked if this means that property owners in the Sarah Greenfield Business Park would be ineligible for grant funds.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said there has been a recipient of CDBG funds there that was tied to economic development and job creation. The applicant would apply through the Town and the business would be the sub-recipient and there has to be 1 job created for every \$20,000 of grant funds received. She said she could provide further information to interested members.

E). Brainstorm Ideas for Old Firehouse Site- The committee reviewed the Community Forum Summary Report and the Key Informant Interviews conducted by the Steering Committee.

Mr. Connolly said the summary report was approved for posting on the Town website by the Selectmen at their previous meeting.

Mrs. Hardin said the Revitalization Steering Committee will take the data gathered and formulate a proposal to take to the Selectmen as their recommendation for the old fire station site which could be used to find a developer for the site. She said she would like to see the EDC involved as much as possible and asked the members for their feedback to bring back to the Steering Committee.

Mr. Orvis suggested that the entire site be used for a big flea market which would become a destination to bring people to Farmington. He said they could see how it pans out and if then warranted a big building could be put up with indoor rental spaces. It would be a low cost project and there are flea markets that attract a lot of people to town which is what we want to do he said.

He said of the concepts that were presented at the forum there was more of an emphasis on

residential uses, no parking for the commercial uses and he didn't see anything that would attract a lot of people to come to Farmington.

Chairman Hardin said the end result for the site does not have to look anything like the concepts presented. She said development of the site is not going to cost us anything as they would bring in a developer that they would give or sell the land to them cheap (which has yet to be worked out) and that the developer would pay the construction costs and take on the liability to fill the spaces.

She said that in order to have a vibrant downtown area you need people who live there walking around and frequenting the businesses there. This attracts other people and potential business owners who might be driving through town and see people there she said.

Mr. Orvis agreed if any potential business owners happen to be driving through town and see that it's vibrant they might want to bring their business here but we have to have something to bring them here to begin with.

Mr. Connolly asked if the flea market would be open on weekends only or open all week.

Mr. Orvis said he has seen some that are open all week, on weekends and others that are a combination of week and weekend days such as on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Mr. Connolly asked what would be a good use of the property on the "off days" that the flea market was not open.

Mr. Orvis said the area could be used for parking.

Mrs. Hardin said they plan to assist the SRPC with a parking study downtown to get data on the current parking situation there and then use it to try to forecast future parking needs. The parking concerns were heard loud and clear and we will be looking into it she said.

Mr. Connolly said he told the Selectmen about the study last month and they were concerned about how the validity of the study because we currently don't have a vibrant downtown.

Mrs. Hardin said they need to have a baseline and know what is there now to forecast for the future.

Ms. Varney suggested it may be a good location for an independent film cinema with food/drink service, a restaurant that is not pizza, a green space for community events, a satellite location for UNH or an indoor sports complex.

Mrs. Hardin said that ideally they would like to get the land back on the Town tax rolls so the more green spaces or community space the less taxable spaces there are. It could also add a burden to the Town in that they would have to maintain those spaces she said.

She said it would be possible to find a balance of retail and a conservative number of housing units at the site and there are a lot of questions still to be answered.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said they need to keep in mind that it would nice to get all the things they want to see there but to the developer it's all about numbers and the numbers have to work. The more "asks" or restrictions put on the more difficult it will be to find a developer to develop the property she said.

Mrs. Hardin said the Steering Committee is aware they can't go to the Selectmen or to a developer with a laundry list of things that have to be the way we say it must be. We can have a few specific requests so we want to make sure that they are really important she said.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer asked if after the Town is planning to send out a **Request For Proposals** or a Request for Quotes after the Steering Committee and the consultants have finished their work.

Mr. Connolly said that an RFP would have to be sent out.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said there is a another Town with a property downtown that sent out an RFP to developers and that she would provide a copy of it to the committee for review.

Mrs. Hardin said a proposal based on the feedback from the townspeople and the consultants would be presented to Selectmen for consideration and then the next steps will be up to them. She added that if any of the members have any other ideas for the site to e-mail them to her.

E). Master Plan Discussions- At the previous meeting Chairman Hardin provided the members with copies of the EDC chapter from the current Master Plan and the revised edition of the Barrington Master Plan for review.

Mrs. Hardin said that Barrington used a "SWOT" (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis approach and suggested the committee may want to have a similar discussion in the future about the Farmington Master Plan. She said that the Farmington plan has more pages and is more "wordy" and suggested that they set up to 4 major goals and to keep it concise and simple so they can actually follow through on the goals.

Mr. Connolly said when they first talked with the Town Planner his biggest point was there is a lot of negativity in the current Master Plan which doesn't need to be there. The Master Plan is a guideline to steer the town to certain goals but the negativity could be something to learn from he said.

Mrs. Hardin said the negativity could be recognized as a weakness or a threat and to include a goal to resolve it.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said the Master Plan is a Planning Board document and asked if the Planning Board is looking for the EDC's assistance in developing the EDC chapter.

Mrs. Hardin said that Stuart Arnett of Arnett Development Group who is assisting with the revision and the Planner have both said they would like input from the EDC for that chapter but she has not yet spoken with any of Planning Board members about it. She said they would not be looking for the EDC to write the text or to come up with the data but they would like the members' opinions and thoughts on the subject and that their input would be valued.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said she posed the question to clarify how much involvement the committee would have in the process as it is done differently in different towns.

Mr. Orvis said he would expect they would be asked for a lot of input similar to what was done previously with the Conservation Commission and the Natural Resources Chapter of the Plan. He asked if the Arnett Group would write the new Master Plan or if the SRPC would actually write the plan as was done before.

Mr. Connolly said both groups submitted RFP's and the contract was awarded to ADG.
Mrs. Hardin asked the members to be prepared to have a SWOT analysis discussion about the downtown area at the next meeting.

9). New Business:

A). Business Survey- Mr. Connolly asked if the committee has ever sent out a survey to the current business owners to get their opinions about doing business in this town.

Chairman Hardin said there has not been a recent formal survey of the business owners.

Mr. Connolly asked if a survey would be beneficial to the committee/town.

Mr. York said he was one of the key informant interviewees and those types of questions were a part of the interview.

Mrs. Hardin said interviewed 2 other downtown business owners.

Mr. Connolly said he wasn't just talking about the downtown businesses only but if any of the businesses in town have been surveyed.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said that the UNH Cooperative Extension has a business retention/expansion program which was recently revised and that she will get more information for the committee.

Mrs. Hardin said it would be a good idea to find out what resources are available and suggested if a survey is done it should also include past business owners for input on their experiences doing business in town.

10). Any Other Business to Come Before the Committee:

TIF Committee- Mrs. Roy-Palmer said the TIF District Advisory Board meets quarterly so their next meeting should be in Dec. She will report the results of the meeting to the committee.

Revitalization Steering Committee- Mrs. Hardin said the Steering Committee will not meet in Dec. and their next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 16, 2019.

11). Next Meeting: Tuesday, January 8, 2018 at 6 p.m.

12). Adjournment:

Motion: (Orvis, second York) to adjourn the meeting passed unanimously at 7:12 p.m.

Respectively submitted

Kathleen Magoon

Recording Secretary

Angela Hardin, Chairman