

Town of Farmington  
Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, May 14, 2019

**Committee Members Present:**

Angela Hardin, Chairman  
Denise Roy-Palmer, Vice Chairman  
Dave Connolly, Selectmen's Rep.  
Stephen Henry, Planning Board Rep.  
Chad York  
Brianne Varney

**Committee Members Absent:**

Sharon McKenney, Secretary  
Randy Orvis

**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:** None

**4). Review of Minutes:**

April 9, 2019 – No errors or omissions

**Motion:** (Henry, second Connolly) to approve the minutes as written passed 4-0-2 (York, Varney abstained).

**5). Board of Selectmen Report:**

Mr. Connolly said the board is waiting for the presentation from the Steering Committee/EDC at their June 3 meeting.

Chairman Hardin said she is scheduled to attend the May 20 Selectmen's meeting and it will be more of a discussion with the board rather than a presentation.

Mr. Connolly said some UNH students attended a Selectmen's meeting to make a presentation on their recent downtown assessment providing another piece of the puzzle.

**6). Planning Board Report:**

Mr. Henry said he was absent from the last Planning Board meeting and did not have a report.

Mrs. Hardin said Stuart Arnett of ADG was at that meeting to discuss the draft #4 of the revised Master Plan and that he is scheduled to meet with the Selectmen at their June 3 meeting.

**7). TIF District Report:**

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said there was no update from the Tax Increment Financing District Advisory Board. She said Town Administrator Arthur Capello is the current Chair of that board and he has

agreed to step down to allow her to become the new Chair.

She said she is awaiting a response from Mr. Capello (who was on vacation) to supply the names of the board members so that she could start scheduling the meetings which are supposed to take place quarterly.

Mr. Connolly advised that Mr. Capello was attending a summit this week and would not be available until the following week.

#### **8). Old Business:**

**a). ATV Club-** Tabled due to Mr. Orvis' absence.

**b). RFP and Steering Committee Update-** moved to later in the meeting

**c). Business Survey-** Mr. Connolly said he is still working on updating the contact information for the survey.

#### **9). New Business:**

**a). Adopt-a-Spot Program-** Chairman Hardin said the current Adopt-a-Spot program is loosely organized with no regulations or pro-active effort to look for spots or people to adopt spots and asked the committee to compile a set of recommended rules to present to the Selectmen. She suggested the guidelines should also include how they would identify the spots and how they would get individuals/groups/businesses to come forward to adopt the spots.

Mr. Connolly said over the years both the Rec. Dept. and the DPW have been in charge of the program and the current contact person is Mr. Capello. He asked if the first step should be to get approval from the Selectmen for the EDC to take on this task.

Mrs. Hardin said she planned to start the discussion with the committee and have a detailed proposal to present to Selectmen that would answer their questions about how it would be carried out to avoid some of the back and forth between the board and the committee.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer asked if they would like to see sample guidelines from other Adopt-a-Spot programs.

Chairman Hardin said she found some guidelines posted by other communities on their websites and gave copies of it to the members for review.

Mr. York asked how many spots there in Farmington currently.

Mrs. Hardin said she was aware of a handful of spots and there may be an opportunity to add more spots.

Mr. Connolly said the discussion with the Selectmen should include why the EDC wants to take on this project.

Mrs. Hardin said the Steering Committee wanted to do some work at a small location and one of the questions raised was what the regulations are and they found that there aren't any.

There was a suggestion made at that meeting that this is something the EDC could do she said.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer asked if the Town has ever been involved with the Arbor Day Foundation.

Mr. Connolly said the Conservation Commission has been involved with the foundation in the

past and that several years ago they tried to become a Tree City USA.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said she was leading up to suggesting that and explained if a certain amount of work is done the town would receive that designation and signage. She noted that as she drove through town she noticed that there are a lot of green spaces already and there is not a lack of trees and shrubs but there are ways to improve them.

Mrs. Hardin then named some Town owned spots that are nicely maintained now. She said there are some non-municipal places the committee could help to rejuvenate and asked how they would carry this out.

Mr. Connolly said they would first need to identify those potential spots.

Chairman Hardin said there are some privately owned places your eyes are drawn to as you come through town that could use some work and asked how they would work with the property owners on putting up some flower boxes and maintaining them through the season. She added there would be some consideration about the related legal issues such as liability and waivers but that was beyond the scope of their discussion right now.

Mr. Henry said he would not present anything with the word “regulations” on it to a business where they are trying to get them to do something and suggested that “guidelines” is a better word choice.

Mrs. Hardin said the group maintaining the area will have to follow the guidelines and the property owner just has to give them permission to do it.

**Signage** - Ms. Varney asked how the signage for the spots currently works.

Mrs. Hardin said that the Public Works Dept. will make a sign for the spots.

Mr. Connolly said that way the signs are uniform throughout the town.

Ms. Varney asked what is allowed on the signs.

Mr. Connolly said he recalled that the signs say “This Adopt-a-Spot is maintained by...”

Discussion then included what content could be allowed on the signs such as logos, phone numbers, websites, business street addresses, number of lines and characters per line available, keeping the signs uniform in appearance and the printing capabilities of the Highway Dept.

Mr. Connolly asked if they were willing to help with the cost to change the existing signs to be fair to all of the program participants.

Chairman Hardin said that would depend on the cost as they have a very limited budget. She said if they can get enough people to participate she would go to the Selectmen or the Budget Committee next year and ask that an amount for this purpose is included in the EDC budget.

Mr. Henry asked what the EDC budget is for this year.

Mrs. Hardin said they have a \$300 budget and they have voted to spend \$100 of it. She said that potentially another \$30 will go to rent a booth space for the committee at Hay Day.

Mr. Henry suggested that the guidelines state that the program will provide the signs as a way to entice the businesses to participate with a chance to advertise their business.

**Commitment** – Mr. Henry asked what commitment they would look for from the adopters.

Chairman Hardin said other communities ask for a 2 year commitment and that she thought this was a reasonable request so that they wouldn't have to find out who is staying with program, find new adopters or change over the signs every year.

Mr. Henry said the commitment period should be included in the guidelines.

Mr. Connolly suggested Mrs. Hardin call the Highway Dept. to get the cost of the signs so it can be presented to the Selectmen.

**Guidelines** - Mrs. Roy-Palmer said the first bullet on the handout says "Give it lots of LOVE" and the last bullet states "We recommend giving your area a little extra TLC each spring and again in the late fall". She suggested they describe each statement a little more as she did not want the adopter to get the impression that they would only have to tend the site twice a year.

Mrs. Hardin said these were only examples and did not have to be used at all and they should be careful about strict the guidelines are.

Mr. Henry said they could recommend that the adopter pick a spot they frequently travel by so they would see what shape the site is in.

Chairman Hardin asked the members to start with some general seasonal guidelines for how often the spots need to be maintained. She added that they also need to resolve who will provide the mulch for the sites-the adopter or the Town.

Mr. York said he assumed if someone adopts a site they would provide everything for it.

Mr. Connolly suggested the guideline should say they are looking for the spots to be esthetically pleasing throughout the year.

Mrs. Hardin asked if they should request a weekly commitment to tend the spots through the season.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said the guideline should ask for on-going maintenance and to avoid getting into too much detail.

Mr. Henry said they could end the list with a reminder that the spot is representing their business and has their business name on it.

**"Do List"**: Mrs. Hardin said that so far the list includes:

1. Spring and Fall cleanup to include raking and general cleanup of the area
2. Keep the spot esthetically pleasing throughout the year
3. Provide on-going maintenance to weed, remove trash and other debris, mow and trim if necessary with regular watering and fertilizing as necessary
4. A sign will be provided
5. Recommend a 2 year commitment to tend the spot adopted

**"Don't Do List"** – The committee made the following recommendations:

1. Don't install plants that will grow over 4 feet tall- Mr. Henry suggested that "without talking to the EDC" be added to this line.

Mr. York added that it should depend on where the spot is located as plants taller than 4 feet would be fine in some areas.

Chairman Hardin said they need to think long term and not make a spot undesirable because of the complexity of care and create a burden on the Town down the line. She suggested “unless otherwise approved” be added at the end of the sentence.

Mr. Connolly said having an application for potential adopters was mentioned earlier and suggested a space be included on the application for the adopter to detail their plans for the spot and have the committee approve their plans.

Mr. Henry said replacing a tree such as the dead tree in front of the TD Bank could become an Adopt-a-Spot if the adopter provides the tree and maintains it.

2. Don’t plant non-native plants

3. Don’t plant or prune trees – trees on municipal property are maintained by the Town and improper pruning can kill a tree; please talk with us if you are interested

4. Don’t use any type of pesticides

5. Don’t install lights or reflective materials

6. No private signs are allowed

7. Don’t install irrigation systems

8. No plants with thorns (?) Mr. Henry asked if this should be included.

Mrs. Harding said thorny plants such as roses and raspberry bushes require pesticides and a fair amount of maintenance to be grown successfully.

9. No fences (?) – Mr. York asked if they should prohibit fencing around the spots.

Mr. Connolly said he thought it should depend on where the spot is located.

Mrs. Hardin asked if that would also include brick or stone edgings and said she didn’t want to rule it out but that it should be included on the application where the adopters are asked to spell out their plans for their spot.

Mr. Connolly asked if there would be a contingency plan for when the adopter’s 2 year commitment is up and they can’t find someone else to adopt the spot.

Chairman Hardin said they would keep track of spot locations, their adopters and their commitment period. They would need to contact the adopter 6 months before their commitment is up and ask them if they plan to renew and continue maintaining their spot. If they said no we would have time to seek a new adopter she said.

Mr. Henry said he hoped that there would a waiting list for potential spot adopters and suggested they promote the people that have adopted spots.

Mrs. Hardin said they could take pictures of the current spots and include them in a “plug” for the business maintaining the spot on the EDC page of the Town website.

Mr. Henry said the guidelines could note that there would be further promotion on the website with the full business details.

Mr. Connolly asked if the EDC has a Face book page.

Mrs. Hardin said they do not have a Face book page and she would not include pictures or business information on Face book without their permission unless the Town Attorney said it

was okay to do so. She said an EDC Face book page would be something for them to consider at later date.

Mr. Connolly said he would like to see a Welcome Wagon type program for new businesses in town.

Mr. Henry said he would like to see a guide book about how to start a small business in Farmington for the person who has never done it before. He said he would be willing to spearhead such a project and he would include all of the other steps needed besides navigating the planning regulations to set up a business such as how to register the name of the business.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said she advises her clients to have a second business name in mind in case of a conflict with another business with the same name and that if it is done in person the name change can be done right away.

Mr. Henry suggested they identify the current and potential Adopt-a-Spot's on a town map.

Chairman Hardin said she would ask Mr. Capello for a list of the current spots.

Mr. Henry suggested she also ask the DPW for suggestions for additional spots to be adopted.

Mr. York said talking to the DPW is a good idea as a customer told him he had applied for a job where he would be mowing Town property which could be potential Adopt-a-Spots.

Chairman Hardin said they may want to consider starting with the Town owned sites and then expand to the non-Town owned sites in the future in case there is any push-back from Selectmen about maintaining private properties.

She said she would develop a draft of the presentation to the Selectmen for the committee to review and request to be placed on the Selectmen's meeting agenda in June.

Mr. Henry said he didn't think there would be enough time for new spots to be adopted this year.

Chairman Hardin said setting up the program will be a back and forth process for a couple of months as the EDC only meets once a month and the Town Attorney will have to be involved so she was looking at getting more adopters/spots for next year.

Mr. Connolly said that it would be useful to talk to people about the program and ask them if they would be interested in participating so they could show the Selectmen the level of interest in the program.

Mrs. Hardin said they could also ask people for suggestions for spots to be adopted.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said that someone may want to replace a tree in memory of a loved one.

Mrs. Hardin said she had the same idea but someone knowledgeable about trees asked about the emotional challenge for the family if the tree died and suggested it would be better to set up a non-living memorial.

She said the Trustees of the Trust Funds informed that there are funds specifically for trees although there are no specific plans at this time. She said she is in the process of getting price quotes for the replacement of 2 dead trees and one stump in front of the bank and Town has agreed to remove the trees as long they can fill in the holes.

Mr. Connolly asked if it is known why the trees died.

Mrs. Hardin said the cause of death is unknown and she is also gathering information about the types and full grown size of the replacement trees.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said there are trees that don't have large root balls and stand up better to salt that are good candidates to be planted in downtown areas.

Mr. Henry asked how they would accommodate contributions of fixtures such as benches or fencing from people who are unable to or don't want to maintain a spot.

Mrs. Hardin said that ties in with the UNH students' observation that there is no place to sit downtown other than the 1 bench outside the church and the stoops and window sills.

Mr. Connolly asked for the downtown areas that are Town property beside the bus stop.

Mrs. Hardin said all of the sidewalks are Town property.

Mr. Henry said he didn't think the sidewalks were wide enough for benches.

Mrs. Hardin said the spot next to the Laundromat could be a potential place for benches.

She said the items numbered 1-8 at the bottom of the handout were redundant to the items at the top of the page so she didn't see the need for further discussion about them but agreed to add reporting the graffiti and vandalism to the list of do's. She said what recourse the Town would have for vandalism is good question for the Selectmen and the Town Attorney.

Mr. Henry said a site frequently vandalized would be a good location to allow the planting of thorny plants.

**b). ERZ Program Update** - Mrs. Roy-Palmer said new legislation has been proposed to continue the Economic Revitalization Zones program and to increase the tax credits cap. She said the total amount of available tax credits for the ERZ was set at \$850,000 and every year there was more value submitted in the applications than what they could grant so they will increase the cap but the new total is unknown at this time.

Chairman Hardin asked if the proposal has a Senate bill number assigned to it yet so that she could follow its progress through the process.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said she did not know and would try to find out. She said the continuation of the program is good news for the towns with current ERZ that were wondering what would happen to them if the program was to sunset this year.

Mr. Connolly said at a previous Selectmen's meeting Mr. Orvis mentioned getting additional signs to designate the zones and asked for a status update on the signs.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer recalled that Mr. Orvis said he would look into it following a discussion about some ERZ signs on Route 11 in Rochester at a previous EDC meeting.

Chairman Hardin said there was also some discussion about contacting the state prison in Concord as a source for the signs but the issue may have fallen off the priority list while waiting for the state legislature to determine the fate of the program.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said the committee could revisit this issue within the next few months and that she would send the Senate bill information to Mrs. Hardin.



**c). NH Economic Developers' Association** – Mrs. Roy-Palmer said the summer meeting of the NH EDA will be held on Friday, June 21 from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Newmarket Mill Space, 55 Main Street, Newmarket. The focus of the session will be a workshop on Public/Private Partnerships in NH to help communities to successfully structure their economic development projects. She said she would forward the session information to Chairman Hardin for distribution to the members.

**d). RFP and Downtown Revitalization Steering Committee Update** – Chairman Hardin said all of the data from the key informant interviews, the Oct. 2018 resident forum, the UNH students' downtown assessment and the parking study has been received. She said it is a lot of information that needs to be pulled together in a few months' time and present it to the Selectmen so they can decide how to move forward with a Request for Proposal (RFP) or Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for the old fire station lot. She asked the committee for some "high level" recommendations such as we want to see a mixed retail/housing development there and that she would take their thoughts to the Steering Committee meeting next week. Mr. Connolly said they need to recommend what the community has told them.

**Strafford Regional Planning Commission Parking Study** - Chairman Hardin said they counted a total of 274 spaces of which 186 are public parking spots. If we were to eliminate the spots at the old fire station there would be 155 public parking spots (Page 10).

Mr. Henry said the lot contains a lot of open pavement that is not parking spaces because it's lined for fire trucks to enter and exit.

Mrs. Hardin said the parking study came out of the community forum where there was concern about losing parking if the lots were fully developed as depicted in the conceptual drawings on display at the forum.

Mr. Connolly said he didn't think the concern was about losing spots but more of a concern about maintaining adequate parking in the that area.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said the parking study shows that whatever happens at the old fire station lot there will be some parking there. There won't be 49 spaces but they need to remember that the study shows there are plenty of parking spaces available. If we get to the point where there isn't enough parking available it will be a wonderful problem to have she said.

Mr. Connolly asked Mr. Henry if there are any regulations requiring a certain number of parking spaces per square feet of a business.

Mr. Henry said he was unsure if there is such a requirement in the Village Center (VC) District because of the availability of municipal parking. He said he didn't have to show how much parking would be available for his business because of the on street parking there.

Mr. York said he was only asked how much parking he expected would be used by his business.

Mrs. Hardin said when a developer starts to formulate an idea for a certain space part of what they do is figure out what they need for parking and if it is already there or do they need to provide it.



Mr. Henry said developers would “low ball” the amount of spaces needed because parking costs money or restricts what they can develop there.

Mrs. Hardin said this would be a matter for the Selectmen and Planning Board to fight out after the RFP has gone out. She suggested that verbiage such as “maintain adequate parking that current parking could not accommodate” be added to the RFP.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said that in keeping with the downtown look and theme they would hope that the developer would have a building(s) along the (Main Street) sidewalk and that the building(s) would face the street to provide the continuity of the downtown village character.

Mr. Connolly said that maintaining the continuity of the appearance of the downtown should be an important bullet point in the presentation to Selectmen.

Mr. York noted that many of the existing buildings downtown have commercial uses on the first floor and residential uses on the upper floors and suggested the same could be done with the potential new buildings along Main Street at the front of the old fire station lot.

Mr. Connolly said they also need to keep in mind that this property consists of 3 separate lots.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said that most developers planning to put a good project in there would want to purchase all 3 lots and merge them to avoid having to deal with setbacks for each individual parcel.

Mr. Connolly said there is also the possibility that a developer does not have a large project in mind and may not want to purchase all 3 lots. He said the Selectmen are also aware of a potential for a right-of-way easement across the lot.

Mrs. Hardin said the RFP could state that the size of lot to be purchased is flexible depending on the project’s size and that the lots can be purchased separately or merged as needed.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said part of the challenge for small commercial or residential development is the prohibitive cost of materials and the shortage of labor/contractors so they are looking for larger projects. That is why there are not a lot of small homes or commercial projects being built she said.

Mrs. Hardin asked if there was anything that could be included in the RFP to overcome that challenge.

Mr. Henry said the only way they could help with that is the cost of the real estate but that is not up to the EDC.

Mrs. Hardin said they could make a recommendation that the property be sold for a bargain in order to attract a developer to a small project by not charging or not charging a lot for the land.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said that is an option where the Town’s goal is increase tax revenue and they are not receiving any tax revenue from the parcels now.

Mr. Henry asked if the Selectmen have the ability to waive taxes for a certain number of years to a buyer.

Mr. Connolly said there are guidelines for tax abatements but he did not think this situation would fall under those guidelines.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said in another town it took a significant injection of money from a developer to rehab a building and the town didn't increase their taxes and gave them a 5 year period where they paid the base rate of taxes that the building had been assessed for.

Mr. Connolly said the Selectmen have made a PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) agreement for projects that provide some benefit to the town such as a medical or solar power facility.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said the afore mentioned workshop on public/private partnerships put on by the Economic Developers Association should be very informative and may fall into what they may want to consider for this project.

Mr. Henry asked if the Selectmen would consider leasing the land as another possible way to make the land more affordable.

Mr. Connolly said he did not know the board's thoughts on that as it hasn't been discussed.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said she did not think a developer would want to be involved with a leased property.

Mr. Henry said developers build on leased land all the time.

Mrs. Hardin asked what would be in it for the Town to maintain ownership of the land.

Mr. Henry said it allows the Town to collect taxes on the building and offer the land at a low price.

Mrs. Hardin said the Steering Committee obtained some information from the key informant interviews about some ideas for the outdoor space on the lot including green and public use space (art space, relaxation/congregation areas), lighting, a dog park and public restrooms. She asked if this is something they would want to include in the RFP.

Mr. Connolly suggested this would be a good place for the park benches mentioned earlier in the meeting by Mr. Henry.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said as the developer goes through the Planning Board process some of these issues are in the regulations regarding the design for the proposed project.

Mr. Connolly said that from the information he has seen so far the community is looking for a little bit of everything. In my opinion we can do a mixed retail/offices/housing development and still be able to provide a common area/green space for the community he said.

Mr. Henry said the property does not have a lot of road frontage.

Mr. Connolly said there are also a couple of side roads that can come into play.

Mrs. Hardin said if they can include enough high level information about what the community wants in the RFP they could let the developer's creativity come into play with ideas and how they would deliver on it. She asked if the members had any other ideas they would like brought to the Steering Committee next week.

Ms. Varney said although they couldn't include everything that everybody wants at that site the more diversity there is the less likely it is to fail.

Mr. Henry noted the current demand is for residential units not commercial units.

Mrs. Hardin said there is a demand for mid-priced housing in this community. She said we have

a lot of houses that are expensive to maintain and rent controlled areas that accommodate a certain segment of the demographic but we don't have a lot of in between type of housing for people who can afford a little more but can't afford a house or don't want the maintenance that goes with a house. She asked if this property is the right spot and how many units could be constructed there.

She then asked the committee to review the reports and said that she would keep this topic on the agenda until they are ready to make their recommendations to the Selectmen.

**10). Any Other Business that may come before the committee:**

**Sidewalks-** Mr. Henry asked what the committee could do to encourage the improvement of the sidewalks downtown which are in pretty rough shape.

Mr. Connolly said there is a maintenance schedule from the DPW to address the sidewalks. He said he was not privy to the specifics of the schedule at this time.

Mr. Henry asked if there is money to do the work to go along with the schedule.

Mr. Connolly said sidewalk repairs are included in the Town budget.

Mrs. Hardin added that last year the Town applied for a \$440,000 TAP (Transportation Alternatives Program) grant with 20% of that to come from taxation. The money would have been used for sidewalks, lighting, traffic calming measures and the connection between the Tiger Trail and the other trails in the downtown area but the Town was not awarded a grant. She said "Plan B" is for the Town to hire a new Town Planner and encourage him/her to reapply for the TAP grant. She said she believed they are still within the timeframe to submit the application before the deadline.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said the application that was submitted by the Town scored very well in the application process.

Mrs. Hardin agreed and added that no community in Strafford County was awarded any money.

Mr. Connolly said some of scoring was based on the Town's ability to pay the matching portion of the grant.

Mrs. Hardin said the town would receive more points if they had already received voter approval to expend the matching funds or if they already had the cash on hand.

Mr. Connolly said the Town knew it had been denied the grant before Town Meeting and pulled the warrant article from the Town Meeting Warrant.

Mr. Henry suggested they consider establishing a Capital Reserve Fund (CRF) for the matching funds so the money is on hand if the Town decides to apply for a grant again.

Mrs. Hardin asked Mr. Connolly to bring Mr. Henry's suggestion to the Selectmen for consideration.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer said the CRF could be established for the purpose of downtown improvements or matching funds to grants for downtown improvements.

Mr. Henry said he would like to see it earmarked specifically for improvements to the sidewalks such as reconstruction of the sidewalks or matching funds for grants to improve the sidewalks.

Mrs. Hardin said if the Town had received the \$440,000 grant we would have had to raise \$88,000 in matching funds.

Mr. Henry said he thought it would be more cost effective to do a major reconstruction project on the sidewalks rather than doing the work in chunks.

**11) Adjournment:**

**Motion:** (York, second Connolly) to adjourn the meeting passed 6-0 at 7:50 p.m.

Respectively submitted

Kathleen Magoon

Recording Secretary

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Angela Hardin, Chairman