

Town of Farmington
Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, June 13, 2017

Committee Members Present:

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

Committee Members Absent:

Diane Blair

Others Present:

Arthur Capello, Town Administrator
Sylvia Arcouette
Packy Campbell, RSA Realty
Linda McElhinney
Bobbie Storrman
Robert Belliveau

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). Joint Board Meeting- Mr. Capello told the committee that a joint meeting with the Selectmen, Planning Board and the Economic Development Committee (EDC) as requested by Mr. Orvis will be scheduled in the next month or so. He said it will be difficult to get all of the members of all 3 committees together on the same night so he is asking the boards to select 1 or 2 representatives to send to the meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the economic development programs offered by the UNH Cooperative Extension and determine what direction the town would like to go in. He added that by then, the new Town Planner will have begun work and should be ready to assist the boards with the plans.

Mr. Orvis and Ms. Hardin volunteered to represent the EDC at the meeting.

Mr. Capello said he planned to schedule the meeting on a regular Selectmen's meeting night and as many of the members who are able to attend the meeting will be welcome. He will contact Mr. Orvis to inform him of the meeting date once it has been determined.

B). Timely Submissions- Mr. Laferte asked if the submissions to Administrative Assistant Erica Rogers made by the members were being made in a more timely fashion.

Mr. Capello said he did not hear of any problems with any of the submissions to Mrs. Rogers.

C). Packy Campbell said he wanted to plant a seed with the committee that we can't legislate good development or regulate our way to a place where we want to be and suggested the committee take a hard look at the Town's zoning. He said the current application process is a 2 step process where if you are not on the list of allowed business uses for that zone a Special Exception is required from the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA). Then when the applicant goes before the Planning Board he is usually looking at also obtaining a Special Use, Conditional Use or Limited Development Zone permits which create extra hurdles that aren't needed he said.

Mr. Campbell also suggested the town should not have so many overlay districts and that all of them are covered by the requirements for state permits. He added that the shift to overlays and large setbacks which began about 8 years ago has taken away developable land. He said the town should say if it is a legal business in NH then it is okay for the industrial and commercial zones in town.

He said the downtown area is home to many low income people who could benefit from having a discount store such as Dollar General but there is a regulation prohibiting buildings over 7,000 square feet in size. He said this type of regulation represses business development and offered to have his attorney review the town's zoning ordinances and "red line" the parts of it that should be removed.

Mrs. King asked if the building size limitation includes the Route 11 corridor.

Mr. Campbell said the limit covers the entire town and that the Town should buy into less regulations and more development.

Mr. Laferte said the Planning Board is in a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" situation. He read a letter from a business planning to come to town which recently withdrew their application from the Site Plan Review process. The letter said that the application for a warehouse was withdrawn due to the cost of construction and was not indicative of the assistance from the Town boards or dept. staff. He said if they can't get the financing it is not the board's fault.

Mr. Laferte said that sometimes the Planning Board members are the "good guys" and sometimes they are the "bad guys" and noted the work done by the board members to get the TIF District approved by the voters and the town and state regulations they have to deal with. He said the town has a gold mine on Route 11 but it must be done the right way. The Planning Board is not against anyone but the board has to do what it has to do and the applicant has to do what he has to do he said.

Mr. Campbell said his message is that the zoning book is too thick. He suggested the book could be reduced to 10 or 12 pages and asked the committee if they supported making the book less thick and if they felt that would be good for economic development.

Mr. Orvis said that when the state passed the Shoreline Protection Act they did not have a permit process so the Town adopted a permit process. He said in 2004 the state adopted a permit process and agreed that the Town does not have to have a permit process any more. It makes somebody do double duty to get a state permit and a Special Use permit from the Town he said.

Mrs. King said Mr. Campbell was speaking about 2 different visions- one for Rt. 11 and one for the downtown area. As a community we need to decide how to get what we want without getting what we don't want she said.

Mr. Campbell told the committee to pick one project they would like his help with and he would spend his time on it even though it is probably not worth his time financially. He then asked them to support listing the town-owned Sarah Greenfield Business Park lots with him and he would get them sold.

Mr. Orvis said he agreed the business park covenants don't need to be any stricter than the town

Site Plan Review regulations.

He added the new regulation which prohibits building an accessory structure unless you have a primary structure prohibits someone with 2 side by side lots from building a garage on the vacant lot because there is no primary structure on that lot. He said they could merge the lots but that would affect the tax base as the taxes on one larger lot would be less than the total amount for 2 separate lots.

Mr. Laferte said the agenda from the previous Planning Board meeting included a voluntary lot merger on 2 adjacent lots and they will still pay taxes on the property. He said if the owner were to build a garage on lot he will get taxed on the garage so it will equal out in the long run.

He said the Planning Board also reviewed a conceptual site plan and advised the potential property owners about the rules and regulations and things they need to watch out for. He added that the board is trying to do the right thing and the potential owners left the meeting in a good mood because they knew what they need to do to bring the project forward.

Mrs. King said it all comes down to planning and what we want the town to look like. She said residents were asked if they want to live out in the country with houses right on top of one another and the town said no so that is why there is a 3 acre minimum lot size for development.

Mr. Campbell spoke against “sprawl” and said if the minimum lot sizes were smaller it would preserve the country/rural character of the Town longer and make it easier for the community services to provide those services.

Mrs. King said there are subdivision rules where a bonus is given for cluster type subdivisions.

Mr. Campbell said the provision was stricken from the subdivision regulations because he utilized it for one of his developments. He said there was a “knee jerk reaction” to 60 houses being built on 40 acres with town water and sewer and noted that thirty acres of the property were put into a permanent green space through the downtown corridor. Adding additional residential space downtown creates a market for personal services, shopping and restaurants he said.

Mrs. King said that as a community we have not looked enough at what we want it to look like.

Mr. Orvis thanked Mr. Campbell for attending the meeting and sharing his thoughts with the committee.

3). Review of Minutes:

May 9, 2017- Page 1, Committee Members Present- Mrs. Roy-Palmer noted that she is now the committee Secretary and not the Vice Chairman as listed.

Motion: (Titus, second Laferte) to accept the minutes as amended passed 9-0.

4). Resignation:

Chairman Orvis announced that he was notified that Diane Blair has resigned her seat on the committee.

5). Newsletter:

Members reviewed the June edition of the monthly newsletter.

Ms. Hardin suggested the word “Division” be added after “Secretary of State Corporate” at the

right side bottom of the page and that the link to the website should be placed under the line. Mr. Orvis noted that the newsletter advises people seeking more information about available commercial real estate to contact the EDC through the Selectmen's Secretary and asked who she will contact regarding the information requests.

Mrs. King said this is how the information is worded on the Town website.

Mrs. Titus suggested the Secretary would direct them depending on what type of information the caller or writer was requesting.

Mr. Orvis suggested in future editions they may want to include activities planned at the Friends of Farmington building such as the NH Small Business seminar held recently.

Mrs. King said the group will host a forum regarding "The ABC's of Medicare- Preventing Healthcare Fraud" on Monday, July 17, 2017 from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at their building located at 480 Main Street.

More Public Comment- Mr. Orvis re-opened the Public Comment portion of the meeting to allow Mr. Belliveau to speak to the committee.

Mr. Belliveau said he would like see a more professional type of business come to town that can bring up the income of the whole community and increase the tax base.

He suggested the town promote its youth, stressed the importance of social media and that the Town needs an official presence on a social media platform so events and opportunities can be advertised quickly.

He asked the committee to research businesses that would also benefit the Town by being environmentally friendly and active in charitable causes such as the outdoor equipment retailer Burton's and Tom's of Maine for the Route 11 corridor.

Mrs. Titus the EDC newsletter goes out to businesses by email and that any business wishing to receive a copy should contact the Selectmen's Secretary for inclusion on the e-mail list. She added that she felt that the current community Face Book page would not be suitable place to post the newsletter.

Mr. Orvis said he often hears the phrases "we should put this here" or "put that there". He said the businesses should be invited to come to town but we don't put anything anywhere because we are not the business. He added that he often sees posts on Face Book asking why the town doesn't open some type of business and noted that the town doesn't open anything and a business has to have a market to want to come here.

Mr. Belliveau said that is what social media is for.

Mr. Orvis said social media does not create the market.

Mr. Belliveau said he was talking about the businesses out of the area or out of state that will not receive the newsletters and don't know that the town even exists. He said individuals could send them the newsletters but it would probably be treated as spam mail.

Ms. Haig asked if he had called any companies or sent them a brochure.

Mr. Belliveau said he had not but was willing to do so.

Mrs. Titus said real estate agents have called Dollar General but were told they are not interested in coming here.

Mrs. King said social media is a good place to get out quick messages such as meetings or activities but interactive social media is not constructive. She cautioned against having individual citizens contacting businesses as it does not look professional. She suggested that if Mr. Belliveau would like to create a brochure to promote the town that he should show it to the committee and the Town Planner so everyone is on the same page before contacting any businesses.

Mr. Belliveau said he was asking the committee to consider creating a future for the young people in the town and not just low skilled jobs that are close by where their education and skills may not be utilized.

Members credited Mr. Belliveau with a “great job” discussing the issues with the committee and thanked him for attending the meeting.

Ms. Capone said the town once had manufacturing jobs with substantial salaries and benefits but they were removed. We still have service industry jobs paying minimum wages which will not enable someone to buy a house she said.

Mrs. Titus said that a distribution center may bring in as many as 100 40 hour jobs with benefits and would add to the tax base.

Mr. Laferte said people don’t understand that when a business announces it is coming to town it was 2-3 years in the making. He said the businesses do studies and if we fit their requirements they will come here. Dollar General said no because they had already done the study so they knew it wouldn’t work and they don’t take chances he said.

Mrs. Titus said the Planning Board is going to take a look at the regulations but suggested someone also needs to look at the reasons behind the regulations.

Mr. Laferte said the Planning Board has to live within the rules and do the best they can when the town throws rules at them and says “Here, make it work”.

Mr. Orvis said the town does not “throw rules at you”. He said the Planning Board proposed them to the town, they got on the warrant and then the town passed them because the board recommended them.

Mr. Laferte said that sometimes the board may not favor a regulation but it ends up on the Town Warrant because it is required by the state. We are all sitting here because we think we want something better for the town. It’s that simple he said.

Newsletter (continued) - Chairman Orvis brought the members attention back to the monthly newsletter and asked if there is link to it on the Town website.

Ms. Hardin said the link could be found under the EDC section of the website.

Motion: (Titus, second Hardin) to accept the newsletter as amended passed unanimously.

Mrs. Titus said the next committee meeting is scheduled for July 11 and asked members submitting anything for the next newsletter to submit it to Mrs. Rogers at least one week in advance of that date. She added that anything a member thinks is important should be submitted and suggested every member could come up with something to make it a better newsletter.

Mr. Orvis suggested all submissions be made before July 4.

6). Ribbon Cuttings:

Mrs. Titus said a ribbon cutting was held for the new barber shop, Blue Collar Barbers located at 510 Main Street.

Ms. Hardin asked if a ribbon cutting was scheduled for the Broken Lance game shop on Main Street.

Mrs. Titus said she contacted the owner twice previously and he was not ready for the ribbon cutting. She said he did not respond to her last attempt to contact him and that she will try to reach him again on Face Book.

Mr. Larferte announced the conceptual review that came before the Planning Board was for a potential solar power generating facility at the corner of Cocheco Road and Main Street. He said the next board meeting is scheduled for July 3 and he will update the committee following the meeting.

Mr. Orvis said one of his clients is also looking at that property which has the potential for 15 acres of solar panels.

Mr. Laferte said there is a potential problem with the ownership of the entrance to site that use to be Route 11 before the road was relocated.

There are no new ribbon cuttings planned.

7). Review of Business List on Town Website:

Ms. Hardin suggested they submit any revisions to her instead of spending time reviewing the list for errors or omissions at the meeting.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer will make the revisions and send them to Ms. Hardin.

8). Goal Setting:

Mr. Orvis asked if the members were ready to set goals for the coming year.

Sarah Greenfield Business Park- Mr. Orvis suggested the members attend the Planning Board and Selectmen's meeting when the business park covenants are discussed as the committee has no authority on the matter.

Ms. Roy-Palmer suggested changes to the covenants could allow the existing tenants to expand at their current site which they couldn't do earlier.

Mr. Orvis said a business in the Milton industrial park years later bought the lot next to them to expand and there may be a good market to expand the existing businesses in the Sarah Greenfield Park.

Ms. Hardin suggested that each member come up with 1 committee goal to discuss at the next meeting. The committee can then narrow them down to 3 or 4 goals for the next 12 months she said.

9). Master Plan:

Members received copies of the Farmington, NH Design Charrette for review. Ms. Hardin said what the committee had been referring to as the feasibility study is actually called a Design Charrette which was compiled in 1998 as a step toward realizing the Master Plan.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer suggested the members read the charrette for discussion at the next meeting.

Ms. Hardin noted that the focus of the study was the Main Street School building which is now the Municipal Office Building. She added some of suggestions in the plan may still be relevant because still so much usable space upstairs.

Mrs. Titus said the Town is renting some office space on the second floor to the state for \$500 a month while work is being completed on the Main Street Bridge. She added that some of the space is also being used for file storage.

Ms. Hardin said she sent the online link to the entire Master Plan which is 180 pages long to the members and printed out the Economic Development Chapter (Chapter 5) for members to review.

Ms. Capone asked for the 2005 tax rate which was not included in the section to compare with the current tax rate.

Ms. Hardin said the tax rates and tax base information are available and would be provided to the committee.

Mr. Orvis said he has lived here since 1979 and purchased a house in 1981. He said the property taxes stayed the same for 25 years and did not vary by more than about \$100 per year.

Farmington had the steadiest taxes in the state and then about 10 years ago they started to climb about the time the Augenblick Formula which funded education went away he said.

Ms. Capone said the town lost manufacturing companies at that time too.

Mr. Orvis the town lost most of its manufacturing facilities in late 1980's and early 1990's.

Mrs. Titus suggested the tax increases were due to building the elementary school about 12 years ago and the major renovations done to the Henry Wilson School about 15 years ago. She added that we also have another school now (Farmington High School).

Ms. Hardin noted the tax increases are basically due to the school portion of the tax rate as the town portion has stayed flat.

Mr. Orvis added that the assessed property values have also gone up.

Mrs. Titus said the town has a good school system and that she has been told several times that people have moved here because of the school system.

Consensus of the committee was to table the discussion of the Master Plan Chapter 5 until next month to give members a chance to read it.

10). Old Business:

A). Steering Committee- Ms. Hardin asked Linda McElhinney to update the EDC about the community Steering Committee's recent activities.

Ms. McElhinney said the group planned to meet with a representative of the UNH Cooperative Extension on June 22 but it was cancelled and a new agenda has yet to be determined.

She said the group plans to attend the joint board meeting as a citizens' group.

Mrs. Titus said that meeting will be a public meeting and the group will have an opportunity to participate in the discussion during the public comment portion of the meeting.

Ms. Hardin asked if the group has been focusing on any particular economic development program offered by the Cooperative Extension.

Ms. McElhinney said she hoped to get more information on the programs offered to determine a good fit for Farmington as the information on the program brochure is somewhat vague.

Ms. Hardin said the programs can be custom fit for each community so the Extension may have examples of how other towns fit the programs to their town's needs. She added that Mrs. Roy-Palmer could speak to the details about what Wolfeboro did when they picked the economic development plan for their town.

Ms. McElhinney said she planned to ask UNH Cooperative Extension Team Leader Charlie French for any available case studies or other information and hoped to get a response before the joint board meeting so the members would have an opportunity to review it before the meeting. UNH is looking for a firm commitment from the Town boards she said.

B). ATV Trails- Mr. Orvis said he tried to contact the New Durham Valley ATV Club and found that they only meet once a year to be eligible for state money and concluded they have no interest in growing. He said he will contact the Tri- City ATV Club who has trails in Rollinsford with the goal of expanding the trails to Rochester. He said he will suggest the club consider starting the trail expansion in Farmington and then work toward Rochester and back to Rollinsford. He added that the trails have been a real boon for the North Country's economy and could do the same for Farmington.

11). New Business:

A). Small Business Center- Mr. Orvis said that he and Mrs. Titus went to a forum hosted by the Friends of Farmington.

Mrs. King said about 10 people attended the presentation and round table style discussion worked well for the participants.

Mr. Orvis said he invited the speaker to make his presentation at an EDC meeting this fall.

B). Rent Study- Mrs. King suggested a study of the rents charged for business space downtown be done to compare to other towns in the area. She asked if there is any assistance available to conduct a rent study.

Mr. Orvis suggested that the Strafford Regional Planning Commission may have that information available or be able to assist in a study.

Mrs. King said it would be good to know what some of the challenges are to renting the vacant spaces such as high rents or the condition of the buildings downtown. She also suggested the building owners put something in the windows of the upper floors such as curtains or a light to make it look nicer while vacant.

Ms. Hardin said the Master Plan includes a downtown development plan to encourage owners to make updates to their buildings.

Mr. Orvis said the building facades were "prettied up" in the 1980's and that it needs to be done again. He agreed that making the upper floors of the buildings look occupied makes the downtown look more vibrant.

Ms. Hardin said the Master Plan also mentions looking into grants for downtown beautification projects.

Ms. Haig said two radio personalities recently visited the downtown area and said it looks abandoned. She said she would like to see an “antique Mecca” created there where the antique shops were advertised as a destination with maps and signs directing visitors to their locations. Ms. Capone suggested including the hiking trails and tours of the town on the local bus route. Mrs. Titus said that there is a lot of the traffic through town but it is not foot traffic so people don’t know about things here. She suggested a brochure be created with places to stay and eat, local events, shopping and points of interest. She added that the economic development folders need to be updated and the brochure could be included in the folders and other places around town.

Ms. Capone said many of the businesses in Rochester have brochures available advertising other businesses and points of interest in the area. She added that she uses social media if she plans to travel out of state for a visit.

Mrs. Titus said Selectmen are working on a policy for an official Town Face Book page and that the Recreation and Police Depts. currently have their own Face Book pages.

12). Any Other Business to come before the Committee:

Mr. Orvis asked the members for other promotional ideas to get the public to come to EDC meetings. He recalled the presentation by the Dept. of Resources and Economic Development (DRED) held last year which packed the meeting room and said he would like to see the committee host more presentations/speakers like that.

Ms. Hardin suggested someone may be available from the “small business world” to make a presentation and she will check on their availability.

13). Next Meeting: Tuesday, July 11, 2017 at 6 p.m.

The agenda will include: Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance, Public Comment, Review of Minutes, newsletter, ribbon cuttings, goal setting, Master Plan, Old and New Business, Any Other Business.

14). Adjournment:

Motion: (Laferte, second King) to adjourn the meeting passed unanimously at 7:55 p.m.

Respectively submitted
Kathleen Magoon
Recording Secretary

Randy Orvis, Chairman