

Town of Farmington
Economic Development Committee
Tuesday, December 10, 2019

Committee Members Present:

Angela Hardin, Chairman
Stephen Henry, Planning Board Rep.
Dave Connolly, Selectmen's Rep.
Chad York

Committee Members Absent:

Denise Roy-Palmer, Vice Chair, excused
Randy Orvis
Sharon McKenney, Secretary, excused

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). Recess:

Chairman Hardin said there was not a quorum of the committee members present at this time and that Mr. Henry had informed her he would be there but would be a little bit late.

Motion: (Connolly, second York) to take a recess until Mr. Henry arrives passed 3-0.

The meeting reconvened at 6:17 p.m. when Mr. Henry arrived at the meeting.

5). Review of Minutes:

November 12, 2019 – Public Meeting Minutes – No errors or omissions

Motion: (Connolly, second York) to accept the minutes as written passed 3-0-1 (Henry abstained).

6). Board Of Selectmen Update:

Mr. Connolly said that this month the board would be seeing a first draft of an RFP (Request for Proposals) for the sale of the former Fire station property.

He said the board is also "nose-deep" into the proposed 2020 Town budgets.

Chairman Hardin thanked the Selectmen for their extra work on the RFP during budget season.

Mr. Connolly then said the Christmas tree lighting held on the prior Friday night went very well and that he received a lot of good comments about the event. He expressed his kudos to all of the organizations that ran the events that night and added that the little bit of snow fall made it "pretty cool".

Chairman Hardin noted that one sign of the good turnout was that she gave away all 150 of the hats she ordered for the event.

7). Planning Board Update:

Mr. Henry said the board has not had any big commercial developments come before them recently.

He said the solar power company came back before the board because some of their approvals had expired and some small changes were needed to the site plans. They are now saying they plan to break ground in the spring he said.

Mr. Connolly said the biggest holdup has been the NH Dept. of Environmental Services permit approvals for the wetland area near the river. Salamanders, newts and frogs (habitats) he said.

Mr. Henry said there would be a number of potential zoning changes on the ballot this coming year which includes potentially increasing the density requirements for residential uses and the way that it is allotted in the Village Center District (VC).

He said the amendments have not been finalized yet so he did not know what the new formula will be. Right now it's one residential unit per 5,000 sq. ft. of land and about half the lots downtown are 8,000 sq. ft. or less in size so that is one residential unit per parcel according to the current zoning he said.

Mrs. Hardin asked if the existing buildings would be grandfathered.

Mr. Henry said some of the building owners got variances for whatever their issue was but someone new coming in and wanting to develop a property is looking at one residential unit per 5,000 sq. ft. He said the owner of the building that his business is in has received a variance that will allow him to put in 2 apartments instead of one. This may make some of the other buildings more economically viable to rehab them and bring them "up to snuff" if they could be rented as residences otherwise they will sit there in different states he said.

Mr. Connolly asked if there is a proposed sq. footage.

Mr. Henry said they haven't worked that out yet and they are working on making it based on the sq. footage of building without regard to how much land is there. He said one number suggested by him is one residential unit per 500 sq. ft. of the building so if the building has 1,100 sq. ft. that is 2 units.

He said Public Hearings are planned to discuss the proposed amendments.

Mr. Connolly asked how this would affect parking downtown.

Mr. Henry said that parking has been a concern and a large part of the conversation. He said the parking requirements will probably be moved to site plan review so they need to have those regulations in place. The board will probably change those regulations right before or right after Town Meeting as those changes do not have to go on the ballot he said.

He said there hasn't been any strong support for an overlay or spot zoning for the old fire station property and that he felt that it is wrong to pick out one property that the Town owns and change the rules for it.

Mr. Henry said there is also an effort to prevent building owners from converting commercial space on the first floor to residential space.

Mrs. Hardin asked if it is currently a first floor store front that it can't be changed to residential. Mr. Henry said the preference of the board is to have that only be required from the Main Street Bridge through to the Old Town Hall and on Central Street up to the intersection of Spring Street and Lilac Street.

Mrs. Hardin asked if buildings on Mechanic Street would be included in this requirement.

Mr. Henry said it would not and that Mechanic Street is one area with development potential if the residential density is there. He said they are currently awaiting advice from Town Counsel as to whether they can have a rule that applies only to certain addresses and that answer may change what the board decides to do. Some members of the board are fine with applying this to the entire VC and some members are not he said.

Mrs. Hardin said they will probably end up with a lot of grandfathered properties but that she appreciated that the board is looking out for the feel and image of the center of the VC.

Mr. Henry said Mechanic Street is still zoned for commercial use and currently the only commercial use there is the bar at the end of the street. He said a lot of that strip is for sale and could be developed for first floor commercial use, residential use or a mix of commercial and residential uses.

He said the board is also working on an amendment that would allow people to build something they don't live in on a piece of land that they own such as a garage on an adjacent lot. We would be redefining primary uses to get rid of some of the technicalities and it would still require a variance. The intent is to allow people to use their abutting properties or their land across the street he said.

8). Old Business:

a). ATV Club – no update due to Mr. Orvis' absence.

b). Adopt-a-Spot – Chairman Hardin confirmed that the DPW will provide the sign posts and help with the installation of the signs at the Adopt-a-Spot locations and the EDC will get the signs.

She said their budget request is still in the budget process and that is where it stands now.

Mr. Connolly said if the committee still has money left in the 2019 budget they can still move forward to purchase some of the signs. He added that they could encumber the funds for use next year if they have a contract in place to purchase the signs.

Mrs. Hardin said if they wanted to squeeze in the purchase of the signs for the three spots they have applications for within the next few weeks they would have to vote on it at this meeting. She said those 3 spots are for the Farmington Democrats, the Woman's Club and Stuart Pease. The Woman's Club is happy with their existing sign and wants to keep it and she did not know if Mr. Pease was ready to install a new sign as he planned to make repairs to the concrete base that holds the post and sign she said.

Mr. Connolly asked if that is something the Town should do.

Mrs. Hardin said that is a conversation she should have with the Town Administrator but they

still could get the signs and have them ready.

Mr. Connolly asked if a 12"x18" sign will be big enough for the Farmington Democrat's sign.

Mrs. Hardin said their spot is the island at the end of Spring Street and Route 11 and that she would install the sign to have it facing in toward Spring Street as people driving by on Route 11 are not going to see it so the 12"x 18" size should be big enough.

Mr. Connolly updated Mr. Henry on the committee's decision last month to work with Bruce Hunter on Rte. 153 in Middleton to purchase signs with a white reflective backing and matte green lettering.

Mr. Henry said the existing signs are blue.

Mr. Connolly said Mr. Hunter will print the information on 12"x18" signs regardless of the number of letters, numbers or format for \$40 each with no minimum order. If the adopter has a longer name and needs a bigger sign the price would increase from there he said.

Mr. Henry said he would order the signs when they are needed and not spend the money just because it is in the budget.

Mrs. Hardin said she had no problem spending \$80 out of their budget.

Mr. Connolly asked if they wanted to get the signs now even though they can't be installed until spring.

Motion: (Connolly, second York) to get 2 signs, one for the Farmington Democrats and one for Stuart Pease for their Adopt-a-Spot locations passed 4-0.

Mr. Connolly said if Chairman Hardin would give him the details of what needs to be on the signs he would contact Mr. Hunter and order them.

Mr. Henry asked if the committee has already agreed what would be allowed on the signs which would include the individual/business name and one piece of contact information whether it is an address, phone number or website.

Mrs. Hardin said that is correct.

Mr. Connolly asked if they are putting the Town logo on the signs and that Mr. Hunter already has it on file.

Mr. York asked if the logo would be visible on a sign that size.

Mr. Henry said you don't really have to see it to know what it is and it makes it look official and that they are partnering with the Town.

Consensus of the committee was to include the Town logo on the signs.

Mrs. Hardin said she would give the Town Administrator a "heads up" to expect an invoice for the signs.

Mr. Connolly said he would ask Mr. Hunter to put "EDC" on the bill so that the right budget gets billed.

c). SRPC Interviews Update – no update due to Mr. Orvis' absence.

9). New Business:

a). 2020 Goals and Priorities – Chairman Hardin said this item would remain on the agenda for

next month to get some additional feedback from the missing members. She asked the members present what they would like to see the committee accomplish next year.

Mr. Connolly said the committee had planned to get together with the Sarah Greenfield Business Park property owners.

Mrs. Hardin said she still thinks this is important but she did not know how successful their efforts would be right now. She said that there are 8 lot owners there including the Town and that 2 of the more recent purchasers are already looking to sell so they won't be interested in attending a meeting with the committee.

Mr. Henry asked if she knew why the 2 lot owners were looking to sell their properties.

Mrs. Hardin said she did not know if the properties were actually on the market and that one of owners had some potential environmental issues with their plans for the site and it is her understanding they won't be moving forward with their plans for site. The other owner has other reasons she said.

Mr. Henry asked what they hoped to get from this meeting.

Mr. Connolly said the purpose was to review the park's covenants which were written by the Board of Selectmen back when there were no businesses in the park. He said the covenants state that every one of the property owners has a vote on any changes made to the covenants and that they planned to discuss if there was anything they would like to see changed.

Mrs. Hardin said that Mr. Orvis had previously stated that some of the covenants are more restrictive than the site plan review regulations and had questioned if it needed to be that way.

Mr. Henry said he thought the owners looking to sell their lots would be interested in participating because a reduction in the restrictions would make it easier to market their lots.

Mrs. Hardin said she has tried to contact them on numerous occasions with no luck. She said she would be happy to try again but was skeptical on how much participation they would get.

Mr. Henry said the environmental issues with the one property are that it abuts water and he wanted to store paving equipment there. He said the Planning Board wanted the wetlands to be delineated and to make sure that they keep any run off from the equipment out of the water.

Chairman Hardin said they will keep the covenants discussion on the list of goals for 2020.

She then asked if they wanted to keep a focus on the educational aspects such as the presentation by the Small Business Administration held at last month's meeting. She said at one point the committee talked about putting together a forum for property owners in the **Economic Revitalization Zone** (the downtown area). We would bring in presenters and talk about what it means to be in an ERZ zone, what kinds of programs are available and what they may qualify for she said.

Mrs. Hardin said the committee ended up postponing holding a forum because the program was "sun-setting" and they were not sure where it was going to go.

Mr. Henry said it is important to know if those programs apply to the businesses in the

buildings or to the people that own the buildings.

Mrs. Hardin said this program is for the people who own the buildings and that she did get a list of the property owners a while back and that she would check to see if anything has changed.

Mr. Connolly asked if there is any type of program for the businesses in those buildings.

Mr. Henry said the businesses downtown would qualify for assistance from the SBA as they are all small businesses except for the Cumberland Farms store and the bank.

Chairman Hardin said she would put education for small business in general on the list. She said the RSA 79-e program (a community revitalization tax relief incentive program) should also be included in the educational forum topics.

Mr. Henry asked how the Town was doing with getting a long term improvement plan for the sidewalks downtown.

Mr. Connolly said he brought it up for discussion at a Selectmen's meeting a few weeks ago. He said there was some discussion about increasing the sidewalk repair line in the DPW budget but that did not happen as of the previous night's meeting. I believe the majority of the board is in favor of creating a **Capital Reserve Fund** and we will have to write up a warrant article and bring it to the voters. My feeling is the board does not have a problem with doing that he said.

Mr. Henry said if they want to revitalize the zone the Town has to do its part too as the building owners can't tear up the sidewalks and rebuild them.

Mr. Connolly said there was some negativity to the idea of creating a CRF due to the past history of some CRF's that were formed and never used so the hesitation is a rightful hesitation. We now have an administration and dept. heads that when they say they are going to do a project, the project will get done and not just keep asking the taxpayers for \$20,000 for that line and it never gets used he said.

Mr. Henry said the difference between a budget and a CRF is the budget line can get moved to other things and a CRF allows the voters to set priorities for what they want done. He said with a CRF if we accumulate a larger sum of money and do a larger project we will get more bang for the buck.

Mr. Connolly said with a CRF in place, when the Town starts looking for grants to help pay for the work, it shows the Town has a vested interest and is serious about the projects.

Discussion also included how a CRF works, how long we should plan to save for the projects and what else could be done in the meantime while waiting for the savings to accrue.

Mrs. Hardin asked Mr. Connolly to keep them posted on this issue and added it to the list.

Mr. Henry suggested some benches should be put in downtown to help create an environment that people want to come to and be in.

Mr. Connolly said another goal is to continue to promote the Adopt-a-Spot Program. He said they should also continue to hold ribbon cuttings for new businesses.

He then asked what the EDC could do to promote the TIF (Tax Increment Financing) District.

Mr. Henry asked if the TIF District Advisory Board has had a meeting yet.

Mrs. Hardin said she did not know.

Mr. York asked how the TIF District works.

Mr. Henry said they take the value of all of the properties in the district and after a certain date any increases to the value of those properties the taxes on the increase goes into a special fund. That fund is to bring water and sewer service out to the properties in the district he said. He said in this case it's to fund a bond and the amount of money going into the fund should increase each year as the value of the properties increase and more businesses come to the district. Once they are comfortable there is enough money going into the fund on a regular basis to cover a bond payment the Town will float a bond to do the work he said.

Mrs. Hardin asked if they should have a conversation about creating a TIF District for the downtown area.

Mr. Henry asked what they would do with the money from a TIF District downtown. He said he has heard past suggestions to use it to paint the buildings but he did not think taxpayer money should be used to improve private businesses. He said he would be in favor of using it to fix the sidewalks there.

Mrs. Hardin suggested it could also be used to improve the lighting, add benches and greenery.

Mr. Connolly asked if a TIF District there would conflict with a 79-e covenant.

Mr. Henry said the 79-e sets the tax rate for those properties and their assessment wouldn't change for a certain number of years so they would not be contributing to the TIF for a while. It might take a long time to come up with enough money for sidewalks doing it that way he said. Chairman Hardin said these goals are a good place to start and after getting feedback from the absent members next month they could prioritize their goals.

10). Any Other Business That May Come Before the Committee: None

11). Next Meeting: Tuesday, January 14, 2020 at 6 p.m.

12). Adjournment:

Motion: (Connolly, second Henry) to adjourn the meeting passed 4-0 at 7:06 p.m.

Respectively submitted

Kathleen Magoon

Recording Secretary

Angela Hardin, Chairman