

Town of Farmington
Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, July 14, 2020

Committee Members Present:

Angela Hardin, Chairman
Paula Proulx, Selectmen's Rep.
Stephen Henry, Planning Board Rep
Danielle Harris
Chad York

Committee Members Absent:

Randy Orvis
Sharon McKinney
Arthur Capello

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

Chairman Hardin welcomed new member Danielle Harris to the committee. She said Ms. Harris joined the committee just before they stopped having meetings due to COVID-19 virus and noted that she also served as a member of the Downtown Revitalization Steering Committee.

4). Review of Minutes:

February 12, 2020 – Public Meeting Minutes – No errors or omissions

Motion: (York, second Henry) to accept the minutes as written passed 3-0-2 (Proulx, Harris abstained).

5). Election of Officers:

a). Chairman- Motion: (Henry, second York) to nominate Angela Hardin for Chairman;
Mrs. Hardin accepted the nomination. There were no other nominations.

Vote: The motion passed 5-0.

b). Vice Chairman – Motion: (Henry, second Hardin) to nominate Chad York for Vice Chairman;
Mr. York accepted the nomination. There were no other nominations.

Vote: The motion passed 5-0.

c). Secretary – Motion: (Henry, second York) to nominate Danielle Harris for Secretary;
Ms. Harris accepted the nomination. There were no other nominations.

Vote: The motion passed 5-0.

6). Planning Board Update:

Mr. Henry said the Planning Board resumed meeting about a month ago and if there were no applications the board didn't meet and he did not know if there were any extensions granted.

He said at the committee's last meeting they talked about the items on the Town Meeting ballot and that everything proposed by the Planning Board passed.

Mr. Henry said they are currently working on the Master Plan revision and have asked some of the committees for their feedback on related chapters in the plan. He said the consulting firm Arnett Development Group (ADG) recommended that the EDC act as the follow up group for the economic development piece of the plan but the EDC has no authority and is an advisory committee and any changes to the zoning has to be done by the Planning Board.

Ms. Proulx said the EDC can make recommendations for changes.

Mr. Henry agreed but that it is unfair to say the EDC is responsible for the recommended actions and then things don't get done as there hurdles to whatever the EDC is trying to do.

Mrs. Hardin said it must be something they have the ability, skills and knowledge to do.

Ms. Proulx said if the action step was outreach to downtown businesses to get them more involved that would be something the EDC could handle and the actions taken by the Selectmen and the Planning Board could be based on recommendations provided by the EDC.

Mr. Henry said that the Planning Board is not "married" to any particular language in the Plan and is open to suggestions.

7). Board of Selectmen Update:

Ms. Proulx said the board is working with UNH on a possible overhaul of the Recreation Dept. and all of the Town's buildings and spaces are included in a study of the existing facilities and programs and potential opportunities. The old fire station lot is on the list as it is a Town owned lot but that does not necessarily mean that a recreational use is planned there she said.

She said the board has been operating under regular business procedures during the pandemic but it has put a damper on a lot of things that are going on. She said someone came to the board to discuss bringing a hot dog stand to town but she was unaware of the status of his plan.

8). Old Business:

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

b). TIF Committee – Postponed due to Mr. Capello's absence.

c). CRF – Downtown Sidewalks – Mrs. Hardin said at a previous meeting the committee discussed the possibility of establishing a **Capital Reserve Fund** for sidewalk improvements and asked if the members wished to continue the discussion.

Mr. Henry said that the town's sidewalks are in desperate need of significant work and the amount budgeted in the yearly operating budget for sidewalks is more of a maintenance amount rather than a reconstruction amount. He said a CRF would let us start to accumulate enough money for a \$250,000 project instead of a \$20,000 project where we could amortize the cost over a larger project and get more sidewalks for our money. The downtown sidewalks are not conducive to a walking and shopping experience he said.

Ms. Proulx said there is a section of downtown sidewalk slated for work this year but she didn't

know the status of the project with the COVID-19 issues. She said that there was a grant put forth 2 years ago by the **Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC)** for an overhaul of the downtown which included bump outs, sidewalks and medians. The Town Administrator is working with SRPC to develop a different plan that may better fit the grant although the Town scored very well for Strafford County during that application process she said.

She said money has been put into a CRF for the roads but it took forever to get enough money into it for a big enough project. We have been more successful with **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)** because we have a low and moderate income demographic she said.

Mr. Henry asked if the CDBG grants require matching funds from the Town.

Ms. Proulx said she did not know if any of these grants require matching funds.

Mr. Henry said the CRF could also be used to provide matching funds for a related grant. He said that the Planner said the next grant is transportation related and that sidewalks wouldn't meet the criteria for that grant. The Town hasn't been very successful with sidewalk grants and the School District was able to get new sidewalks for the Tiger Trail to the schools he said.

Ms. Proulx corrected that it was the Town that received a transportation grant for those sidewalks and they looked at extending the Tiger Trail at one point but were "out-granted" by another town. She said the town has to put its best foot forward in the Master Plan because it is used by many funding sources to see what the town's plans are and if it has its stuff together.

Mrs. Hardin suggested taking a percentage of the unassigned fund balance to be deposited in the CRF with a "not to exceed" amount so you are not asking the taxpayers to commit to certain amount year after year no matter what (i.e. 5% of the balance not to exceed \$50,000).

Mr. Henry said the way the Town and School District fund warrant articles is different with the way they can carry balances. When the Selectmen put warrant articles to be funded from the unassigned fund balance they already knew the money was there and the audit was already known and they knew what they were going to allocate to each fund he said.

Mrs. Hardin asked if this CRF would be repeated on the Town Meeting Warrant each year.

Mr. Henry said yes and one Town Meeting can't bind the next one and that the article could be amended from the floor of the meeting. He asked if the Town still has to fund the articles approved at Town Meeting last March.

Ms. Proulx said they had to fund the new fire and plow trucks because they are funded through taxation but they don't have to fund the other articles if the funding comes from the fund balance and they don't have the money.

Mrs. Hardin said it is also based on projected revenues and they may not receive the revenues.

Ms. Proulx said when it gets closer to budget season they could make a suggestion for a CRF.

Mrs. Hardin asked what kind of homework they need to do to make a recommendation to the Budget Committee or the Selectmen.

Ms. Proulx said the Town Administrator would craft the wording for the warrant article itself.

d). Adopt-a-Spot – Mrs. Hardin said she brought in the applications she received to give the

members an update on the status of the program.

Old Fire Station- Turner Liberty Insurance and the Farmington Historical Society together have adopted the spot in front of the former fire station. Mr. Capello approved their application during the time the committee wasn't meeting as he was in charge of the program before the committee took it over. The sign for the spot will be installed by the DPW.

Central Street -The Farmington Woman's Club has been caring for the section in the middle of Central Street for years and this was a matter of completing and submitting the paperwork. They are happy with their existing sign and do not want a new sign.

Spring Street - The Farmington NH Democrats adopted a section of Spring Street near the intersection with Route 11. Mrs. Hardin asked if anyone could recall if there is a sign there. Cable TV Coordinator Robert Hall said there is an Adopt-a-Spot sign there.

Mrs. Hardin said she would find out if they want a new sign.

Main Hill - Stuart Pease, owner of the Village Bouquet has been maintaining the site where the old pump is located at the top Main Hill for several years and he would like to continue to do so. He wants to repair the granite slabs that hold the bottom of the box as it shifted and is cracked and then keep the top of the box full of flowers and other plants.

Mrs. Hardin said the challenge for this spot is where to put the sign and the safety of the workers and the passing traffic while the work is being done. She said she will suggest that he check with the Town, the Police Dept. or the DPW before the work begins.

Mr. Henry said there is not a lot of space for a sign at that location and asked if they wanted to consider using multiple smaller signs instead of one large sign.

Mrs. Hardin said smaller signs could be affixed to the sides of the box. She said she will have a conversation with Mr. Pease about what he would like for a sign and get a price for the sign and bring the information to the committee next month for approval.

Motion: (Henry, second York) to approve Stuart Pease's application passed 5-0.

Mrs. Hardin said some of the applications were for existing adopters and were to update to the required paperwork and have it on file with the Town.

Town Hall/Tappan St. – The owner of Steve's Lawn Care was taking care of the front of the Town Hall and the spot on Tappan Street near Rite Aid and has decided to retire from that duty. Mrs. Hardin said she spoke to another landscaper in town about taking over the care of those spots and she will follow up to see if he is still interested and get the necessary paperwork.

Municipal Office Building – New England Furniture expressed interest in maintaining the spot in front of the Municipal Office Building and Mrs. Hardin will get the paperwork from them.

Mr. York asked who is maintaining that spot now.

Mrs. Hardin said the Town does it now and some of the office staff plant flowers occasionally.

Possible Other Spots -She said the committee also talked about potentially adding Fernald Park and Edgerly Park to the program.

Mr. York asked about including the island at the Circle K convenience store.

Mrs. Hardin said that is state property.

Mr. Henry asked if state property is restricted from the program and noted that the island at the intersection of Main and Central Streets is at the intersection of two state roads.

Mrs. Hardin said that was a fair point and jokingly whispered to Mr. Henry not to make trouble.

Mr. York said there is a list of the spots somewhere.

Mrs. Hardin said the committee also discussed taking pictures of the spots and posting them on the Town website but it was never completed.

Mr. York said the committee discussed the spot at Spring Street and Central Street which was an Adopt-a-Spot in the past.

9). New Business:

Master Plan-Draft Chapter IX-Economic Development- Mrs. Hardin said on the first page of the chapter, page 47 the second quote in the “What we said...” column says “ ...will necessitate have very vibrant downtown” and needs to be corrected.

Mr. Henry said these are exact quotes from the survey and the Planning Board has already discussed paraphrasing them as they are not attributed to anyone in the plan.

Mrs. Hardin suggested putting (sic) after any incorrect language/spelling (meaning it was transcribed exactly as it was written in the original source).

She said on page 47, fourth paragraph, third line “Stratford” should be changed to “Strafford”.

She said her overall thoughts regarding this chapter were that there is a lot of stuff that the EDC doesn’t deal with on planning and zoning issues and they don’t have any authority to make the decisions and enact the changes recommended in the chapter. This is the economic development chapter and it doesn’t say “Dear EDC, Here’s what we want you to do” because economic development comes from every board and committee in town she said.

Mr. Henry said the RSA states that the Master Plan is the Planning Board’s document. He said the Selectmen have had some input and they hired the firm that helped develop the plan but it is the Planning Board’s document.

He said there is not much about the schools in it because the RSA doesn’t require them to be included and is pretty specific as to the requirements and the responsibilities for the plan. It is a big omission to not allow the school system to participate when you look at the tax rate and see they are a big chunk of it he said.

Mrs. Hardin said we should be on the same page if we want an economically viable town where we have people moving in and wanting to be here and the schools are a big part of it.

Mr. Henry said there will be statistical components included in the plan but goals such obtaining or maintaining an accredited high school seem to be irrelevant.

Ms. Proulx said she has not been a fan of how this Master Plan has been put together by the individuals that did it but she does like Objective #2 that says to adopt obtainable objectives that the School District and the Town agree to pursue such as tax rate stabilization because if you are looking at economic viability it’s great to have a good school but if the rest of your town

is falling apart because you can't raise enough revenue to get everything else done that needs to be done for the town it doesn't look any better. Not everyone comes for the schools and if you were a business planning to come here you would look at many different facets she said. She said tax rate stabilization is a big thing and that is part of what the CIP does. Hopefully you are on the same page and if the first entity had a big project then the second entity can say we'll back off this year and then the next year entity #2 can go forward and entity #1 backs up so the taxpayers are the ones that benefit.

Mr. Henry said the CIP is something that involves both the Town and School District so you have long term planning for both. It's not a Master Plan for the community but a Master Plan for the Town government he said.

Mrs. Hardin asked if the Master Plan gets approved and accepted at the Planning Board level.

Ms. Proulx said it has to be adopted at Town Meeting.

Mrs. Hardin said she liked that the chapter is simple and to the point. She said the economic development chapter from the 2005 Master Plan is 10 pages long and very wordy. She said she likes that things are bullet pointed, that there are some specifics included but that it leaves it open to what they decide some of the objectives should be.

Ms. Harris asked if they wouldn't find anything on sidewalks in this chapter.

Mrs. Hardin said part of the problem with the last plan was that it was too specific.

Ms. Harris there were a lot of things the community wanted that she is not seeing in this.

Mr. Henry said a Master Plan is a 10 year plan that should receive annual or biannual review and updating and that he hopes it will be done annually.

Mrs. Hardin said the first objective points to having a community wide economic development strategy based on certain factors and that the committee already knows that improving the look of the downtown is a community priority. It's broad enough that it allows us to take the feedback from the community and to implement what's important without having a specific list that you're stuck with she said.

Ms. Harris said people drive through downtown and see the condition of the buildings and keep driving and that is why we're not getting money into town because people don't want to go into some of the businesses there. That's part of what I think of when I think of economic development-making it look nice so people want to stop there and spend money she said.

Ms. Proulx said people need a reason and a destination.

Ms. Harris suggested someone should help out the new bakery with a couple coats of paint on the exterior of the building.

Mr. York noted that owner Jason Lauze is planning on putting a lot of money into the exterior of the building where Mr. Henry's Yard Sale Shop is located.

Mr. Henry said Mr. Lauze has been dealing with the rear access to the building and there are lots of things in the works.

Ms. Proulx said Mr. Lauze's building has been designated as a historic place so there are certain

criteria he will have to follow.

Mr. Henry said the town has adopted RSA 79-E that allows eligible property owners to lock in an assessment of the property for a certain period of time and then make improvements to the building without it resulting in the owner incurring additional property taxes.

Ms. Proulx said the period of time depends on what you do with the property. It could be 5 years or longer such as where Mr. Lauze has a historic building designation and is adding residential units upstairs which added more years to the lock on the assessment she said. She asked if they have ever reached out to the downtown business owners or the landlords.

Mrs. Hardin said one of the projects they talked about last fall was putting together a forum and to invite the property owners in the **Economic Revitalization Zone (ERZ)**. She said she still has the list of all of the property owners (at that time) who may not be Farmington residents but are the actual owners of the buildings and now that large gatherings aren't a big thing something like a letter would be a good next step.

Discussion then included the letter should include making the owners aware of the assistance available, a summary of the changes to the zoning, how the tax incentive programs work and related information posted on the Town website.

Mr. Henry said the intention of the program is to be a benefit to the whole community because the community is holding off on collecting some taxes to allow property owners to afford to do this stuff. He said sometimes the old buildings need so much work it would be more cost effective to tear it down and rebuild and if you are trying to keep your historic buildings you don't want to do that. Sometimes it's more cost effective to tear it down and then stop and we don't want to see downtown either he said.

Ms. Harris asked if the 79-E program is the only incentive to bring business to town.

Mr. Henry said he was not aware of any overt acts from the community to spur development downtown.

Ms. Harris asked if they have looked into taking 4 businesses in the VC and giving them special care and painting them similar colors if they are historic buildings.

Mr. Henry said that would be form based codes for zoning where they regulate the look and feel of individual buildings and that didn't really gain a lot of traction with the board.

Ms. Harris said a lot of buildings are burgundy or a hunter green and a lot of the paint is peeling. She said it looks like at one point there may have been some connection with the historic aspect of the buildings but it didn't continue.

Mr. Henry said the Selectmen have asked the Planning Board for their recommendation on the administrative fees for planning and code enforcement in the ERZ.

Ms. Proulx said the Selectmen asked how other communities look at fees for applications, appeals, etc.

Mr. Henry said as a resident he asked the Planning Board to look at the two ERZ's in town-the Sarah Greenfield Business Park and the Village Center. He said he thought the border for the

downtown ERZ is the same as the VC but has not confirmed this.

Chairman Hardin returned to the letter to the property owners in the VC and asked Mr. Henry to write a few paragraphs about the recent zoning changes and how it benefits those owners to put in the letter.

Mr. Henry agreed to write the paragraphs.

Mrs. Hardin said she would summarize the information on the Town website and add Mr. Henry's paragraphs and bring the letter to their next meeting. She said she would also like to invite them to a forum where someone from the state would make a presentation.

Ms. Proulx said some of landlords may choose not to attend because they live out of state but they would still be getting the information through the letter.

Mr. Henry said this may also tip the needle of someone local looking at buying one of the buildings.

Ms. Harris asked if they would consider setting up a Zoom meeting particularly in the light of the COVID-19 and the people that are out of state could participate in the meeting.

Mrs. Hardin said she would consider it but she does not know how to go about doing that.

Ms. Proulx suggested that the meeting could also be broadcast on the local cable TV channel and to put a link to it on the Town website.

Mrs. Hardin said the initial letter could be used to gauge interest in a virtual meeting where more information could be shared about how this works and how they would benefit from it.

Ms. Proulx said we have a TIF District and the 79-E and they could do blast out to anyone who might be interested and if their budget allows they could put a small blurb in the newspaper advertising the meeting.

Mrs. Hardin said some of their budget was to go toward professional development/training which includes attending meetings.

Ms. Harris suggested they get on the e-mail list for the UNH Cooperative Extension for information on free programs that could assist the town.

Chairman Hardin said she would get back to the Planner with the feedback from the committee on this chapter and so far the overall feedback is they like it and could support this. She asked if there was anything to the contrary besides they would like some more specifics on the recommended actions.

Consensus of the members was overall they are good with the content of the chapter.

10). Any Other Business before the Committee:

Ms. Harris asked if the ATV Club report is always included on the monthly agenda.

Mrs. Hardin said she usually leaves it on the agenda in case Mr. Orvis has an update for the committee. She said he has been working with various communities including Farmington but is focused in the New Durham area right now on expanding/creating ATV trails.

She said it's a fairly substantial industry and the businesses in park/ride and trail areas will benefit from having those extra people around who are buying gas, snacks and meals, etc. We

talked about drafting a letter of support for him to take to the Town of New Durham saying the Farmington EDC supports his efforts in this area and we never got together to work that out before the meetings stopped she said.

Ms. Proulx asked if the Planner said something about multi-use trails during the discussion of the Recreation chapter in the Master Plan (at a previous Planning Board meeting).

Mr. Henry said the trails are multi-use but anything with motorized tires is not an allowed use. He said federal money was used to purchase that land during the 1980's with a stipulation that ATV's could not use that trail. The money would have to be repaid and it would take an Act of Congress to change what the land could be used for he said.

He said that he is trying to convince someone to make improvements to the Rail Trail as an Eagle Scout project but he is not eligible to go before the Eagle board for project approval until he advances a rank. He said he has been trying to find a way to bring it to downtown Farmington and he has found some land and has a potential route in mind and now must get permission to use it. He said there is good example trail in Wolfeboro called the Cotton Valley Trail which has a stone dust surface and is hard packed and drains water well and is easy to walk on, roll on or push a stroller on.

Mrs. Hardin asked if they get their funding through registrations.

Mr. Henry said the snow mobile clubs get money through registrations and there is a lot of federal money available for rail trail conversions and getting money for this is easier than getting money for the sidewalks downtown.

Mrs. Hardin then suggested they turn the downtown sidewalks into trails.

Mr. Henry said you shouldn't need a mountain bike to get down the sidewalk.

Chairman Hardin then asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

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

12). Adjournment:

Motion: (Proulx, second York) to adjourn the meeting passed 5-0 at 7:25 p.m.

Respectively submitted

Kathleen Magoon

Recording Secretary

Angela Hardin, Chairman