

Town of Farmington
Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, August 11, 2020

Committee Members Present:

Chad York, Vice Chairman
Paula Proulx, Selectmen's Rep
Danielle Harris, Secretary
Randy Orvis
Arthur Capello, Town Administrator

Committee Members Absent:

Angela Hardin, Chairman, excused
Sharon McKinney
Stephen Henry, Planning Board Rep

1). Call to Order:

Vice Chairman York 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:

July 14, 2020 – Public Meeting Minutes – No errors or omissions

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

5). Planning Board Update:

Postponed due to Mr. Henry's absence.

6). Board of Selectmen/Town Update:

Letter to Property Owners - Mr. Capello said at the previous meeting the committee discussed sending a letter to businesses and residents in the Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District and the Village Center (VC) District. He said they have materials from when the districts were set up that he could reprint and provide to the members for review at the next meeting.

Master Plan - The committee received copies of Planner Kyle Pimental's 07/08/20 memo containing his comments on the final draft of the Master Plan that was sent to the Selectmen and Planning Board. Mr. Capello said on page 3 of the memo Mr. Pimental listed his issues with what is currently in the Economic Development chapter and asked the members for their feedback on it.

Mr. York said the committee looked at the draft chapter at the last meeting and compared it to the chapter in the existing Master Plan which is really "wordy" at 10 pages long and that the members liked that the new chapter is more open.

Mr. Capello asked if the members were happy with the content of the chapter.

Ms. Harris asked if there is a reason to have direct quotes and if they were meant to represent one person or the whole community.

Mr. Capello said he believed that the Planning Board has addressed this and they are correcting the spelling and grammar of the quotes without changing their intent.

Ms. Proulx said the Planning Board did address it but she did not know if they discussed taking them out of the Master Plan and it is unclear if the quotes are one person's opinion or meant to represent the feelings of the whole community.

Mr. Capello said he will tell the Planner that the EDC feels that there should be a synopsis of people's opinions rather than having direct quotes since it may be only one person's opinion.

Mr. York said the Planner's comment in section f says the tax rate should be backed up with data and that is a good idea because the number is higher but the property values are lower.

Mr. Capello suggested that the committee put out a "blurb" (short notice) about the RSA 79-E and TIF districts in town with their locations and how they relate to economic development.

Mr. Orvis asked if there are plans to expand the 79-E district that ends at the Main St. Bridge.

Mr. Capello said he was not aware of any plans to expand it and that they would need to bring this to the Planning Board so they could put it on the Town Meeting Warrant.

Mr. Orvis said 3-4 years ago there was a meeting with representatives from Concord that spoke about the Small Business Administration, RSA 79-E, etc. and he asked a business owner to attend the meeting but it couldn't help him because he is on the other side of the bridge.

Mr. Capello said RSA 79-E is limited in who it can help because once you get past the residential area it becomes the TIF District. He said the TIF District covers the Sarah Greenfield Business Park down to the Public Safety Building to the golf course and takes a right turn onto Rt. 11.

Mr. Orvis asked what the TIF does.

Mr. Capello said that is where you lock in your tax rate and the tax revenue over that base amount goes into the TIF fund which will then pay for the expansion of the sewer lines. He said there is a gap there between the 79-E District and the TIF District which was probably intentional because the gap area is 99% residential properties.

He said there are criteria that must be met in order to benefit from the 79-E program and currently there is only one downtown property owner participating in the program. He said he was not sure that the 2 businesses in the Main St. gap area would benefit from the program as it involves making improvements and commitments depending on what their plans are.

Ms. Harris said at the last meeting they also discussed that some of the information gathered by Downtown Revitalization Committee was not included. She said that the goals in section n look a lot like what came out of the Downtown Revitalization Committee's work and she would like to see the Planner's recommended goals i-iii (develop a business retention/expansion plan; support business while maintaining the downtown character and take advantage of Rt. 11 as a highly visible business corridor) be included in the chapter.

Mr. Capello asked the members to complete the Rec. Dept. survey if they haven't already done

so. He said the survey is part of a study conducted by 2 UNH Rec. Dept professors as part of a plan to maximize the Town's recreational assets, programs and activities. He said paper versions of the survey are available and links to the online survey are posted on the Town website and the Face book page and it takes about 10 minutes to complete it. About 150 surveys have been completed so far and it will be open for a few more weeks before they start to compile the data he said.

Mr. Orvis said the Conservation Commission has done quite a bit for recreation outside of the VC with the hiking trails and asked if the UNH professors plan to meet with the Con Com.

Mr. Capello said the process includes meeting with groups of stakeholders, organizations and the Town boards and committees and that the meetings have been delayed due to COVID-19.

Ms. Proulx said recreational offerings draw people to town and it used to be that everything was there so people had a reason to come into town. Now there's no reason to come in unless you have a specific reason such as to get a haircut she said.

Mr. Capello said the goal of the Master Plan for the Rec. Center is that if you can get a vibrant Rec. Dept. it gives you a reason to come downtown. If there are reasons to come downtown more businesses will come in because there is more foot traffic he said.

Ms. Harris said studies show that you need an anchor business and then shops will fill in after that and that we are missing that right now.

Mr. Capello asked if there was anything else the committee wanted him to take to the Planner in regards to the Master Plan.

Mr. York asked to have the committee see the chapter before it is published.

Mr. Orvis suggested that the library and the Historical Society museum be promoted as a resource in the plan.

Mr. Capello asked if the members knew the purpose of the Master Plan.

Mr. York said it is the direction that we want the town to go in.

Mr. Capello said that it is the vision for the town and when applying for grants to help accomplish that vision the grantor often asks if you have a Master Plan and they want to see it so if you don't have an updated Master Plan you lose points right away.

Mr. Orvis said he saw a Master Plan used in court by a developer who was denied approval to put a development in an area the plan said the town wanted developed. He advised that they ask if we really want this before putting something in the plan because if you change your mind you change the Master Plan.

7). Old Business:

a). ATV Club- Mr. Orvis said because of the condition of the trails in the Rollinsford, Somersworth, Dover area the club has been focusing on doing a lot of repairs and everything is now good to go. He said he received a call this week telling him they are going to start pushing to expand the trails northward and start connecting to the trails south of us. He said the club really wants trails in this area because they feel they will need less

maintenance than in the Rollinsford area where the soils have more silt and loams and it is easy to make ruts in the trails. He said the more miles of trails they have the more potential to get grant money from the state. When you pay for your state registration if you are a club member you get \$30 off but it costs \$30 to be a member of the club. Some of the other registration money goes into a fund for the grants that are distributed by the total miles of the trail he said. He said ATV's have become an important economic factor in the North Country and he would like to make that happen here. I need help everybody he said.

b). TIF Committee – Ms. Proulx asked if the TIF committee is a fully appointed board yet. Mr. Capello said the board is fully appointed but they have not met in almost a year because there is not enough money in the account to do anything with. He said there is approx. \$30,000 in the account to expand the sewer lines and they need enough yearly revenue coming in to pay for the bond so that it doesn't fall back on the taxpayers.

c). Review Letter to VC Property Owners- Mr. Capello said he would have the flyers printed up and bring them to the next meeting for review as discussed earlier in the meeting.

8). New Business:

Ms. Harris asked if anything is being done to entice an anchor business to town.

Mr. Capello said the big topic is the old Fire Dept. lot and it is being reviewed as part of the Rec. Dept. study because there are several grants available and if the need is shown for a community center or to somehow incorporate it into the Rec. Dept. UNH would assist us with getting grants.

He said a very rough Request for Proposals (RFP) for the lot was done in non-public session with the Selectmen but it was pushed down since they decided to go this way with the Rec. Dept. study. They may come back to us and say a community center could go here, some business here and some green space here and here's where you can go for grants he said.

He said the Selectmen are looking at the Town's fee schedules to see if there is anything we can do to encourage people to come into town. The board will be receiving a recommendation on the fees from the Planning Board at their Aug. 31 meeting he said.

Mr. Capello said the Town is also working with **Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC)** on a potential **TAP (Transportation Alternatives Program)** grant for a project looking to redo the sidewalks downtown and possibly installing new sidewalks from Campbell Commons down Rt. 75 as it is a walking route for kids going to school. He said they may also look at other grants to upgrade the water and sewer infrastructure downtown and to install sidewalks to the Public Safety Building.

Ms. Harris asked if they are focusing on the downtown sidewalks.

Mr. Capello said the main focus will be connecting Campbell Commons, installing more sidewalks in the school area where there aren't any and tying everything in to the Tiger Trail.

Mr. Orvis said the downtown sidewalks are tough to maintain and keep safe in the winter.

Mr. York said that is because they are in such bad shape.

Ms. Harris asked if the Town should be budgeting for machinery to clear the sidewalks. Mr. Capello said the DPW has a sidewalk plow with a snow blower attachment that was purchased last year. He said the town has 75 miles of roadways to maintain and 6 guys to do the work. He noted that the Meaderboro Road route takes 4 hours for one swipe through. The sidewalk guy is going the whole time to keep up with it to make sure they are safe for people going to work and school he said.

9). Any Other Business Before the Committee:

Ms. Proulx asked to be updated on what direction the committee has taken and what projects they are looking at to get a feel for where they are heading.

Mr. York said the last big thing they talked about was the former Fire Station lot and that is waiting for the RFP to be done.

Mr. Capello asked what the EDC should be doing to help promote businesses coming into the downtown area and how the Selectmen and/or the Planning Board can assist with that. He said the Selectmen had the idea to waive administrative fees for businesses downtown if they filed an administrative appeal and won it and then found out they can't do that because it is similar to spot zoning. You can't do it for one area if you can't do it for the entire community he said.

Mr. Orvis said one thing the committee has done is to sponsor the Adopt-a-Spot program.

Ms. Harris said beautification of the downtown would be a huge benefit to the area and they could research how other towns did it, look for volunteers and potential funding and come up with some projects that will get some attention so that somebody wanting to start a business would see that that this area is up and coming. She said that typically you start in the most visible spot in the area, beautify that spot and work your way out. It could be painting, signs, etc. and it could work similar to how Adopt-a-Spot works with flowers and trees she said.

Mr. Capello said there are several trees downtown that need to be replaced and there are funds for that through the Trustees of the Trust Funds. He said the problem is taking the initiative and figuring out what kind of tree or shrub could go there that won't undermine the sidewalk and the water lines. I don't have time to do that research but there is someone in the municipal office that can do it if I point her in the right direction he said.

Ms. Harris suggested they consult with a horticulturist or someone from the 4-H that could tell them what to plant in certain areas.

Mr. Capello said they also need something durable that will stand up to the salt.

Mr. Orvis said he may be able to help out some as his educational background includes forestry.

Mr. Capello added this is a quick and easy fix that gives a good first impression.

Ms. Proulx said when you first come into the downtown in the summer time it is pretty with the flowering trees and the brickwork at the Goodwin Library and the church but the other side of the Central Street intersection is not as becoming as it is when you first enter the downtown.

Mr. Capello said that side doesn't have the flowering trees that are so attractive.

Ms. Proulx said a key to this is that the area feels inviting, warm and friendly and in that section

of town you are always looking around to see what is going on. As an economic development committee we can look at some of that stuff she said.

Mr. Orvis said a lot of that can be fixed as part of rebuilding sidewalks by allowing for some planters that aren't in the way of a snow plow and are easy to negotiate.

Mr. Capello said the grant is state money so it's not going to be available for 3- 5 years if we get it and it's a highly competitive grant.

Mr. Orvis suggested promoting a beautification contest amongst homeowners.

Ms. Harris said this would be a good idea for the main corridor through town. She said it seems a lot of people have been working on it over the past few years.

Ms. Proulx said that as bad as the COVID-19 pandemic has been she has seen that people being out of work with little to do have really made a difference in cleaning and fixing up and putting in gardens and once you start it makes you want to keep going.

Mr. Capello said that is an idea that they could expand on and see how they could promote it and maybe come up with some prizes for people to make it competitive.

Mr. Orvis said the prize could be a gift certificate and they may be able to get it donated.

Ms. Proulx said the Planning Dept. is already working on streamlining a lot of the forms for new businesses coming in so it will be a lot easier for them to walk through what they need to do.

Mr. Capello said barring any major obstacles they can get them through the Planning Board process in 2 meetings where it used to take 4 or 5 meetings. At the first meeting the plan is reviewed and the applicant is told what is needed on the plan and then they return for the second meeting where it is now typically approved he said.

Mr. Orvis asked if people are coming in on their own or with professionals.

Mr. Capello said it is mostly with professionals and they have had a couple of businesses where he and the Code Enforcement Officer (CEO) walked the owner through the process and they didn't require a professional drawing because they weren't adding anything to the existing building. He said next week S & S Paving in the Sarah Greenfield Business Park is on the agenda and that was required to have professional services because it is a vacant lot.

Mr. York said his application for his business went fast and he didn't have to attend a meeting.

Mr. Capello said that is because his business was a change of use that the CEO can sign off on.

Ms. Proulx said that was one of the big changes the Planning Board made back a few years ago.

Mr. Orvis said they should try to promote this for the existing buildings downtown so they just go in and the CEO says this is an allowed use and he signs off on it.

Mr. Capello said unless it's a change of use because based on the current regulation that requires Planning Board approval. You can't go from a mercantile to storage without Planning Board approval but if they are going from a mercantile to a mercantile the CEO can sign off on that he said. He said the Planning Board is looking at these issues and they already have a list going with the Planner for the March Town Meeting.

Mr. Capello said there are several things he would like to see the Planning Board move to the

Planning Dept. level such as lot mergers.

Mr. Orvis said a lot of NH towns require lot mergers to go before the Planning Board and that he thought it is required by state law.

Mr. Capello said when he worked in other towns as the CEO he was able to sign off on the lot mergers after checking to see that the taxes were paid and the deeds were in order. Anything we can do to streamline it for the residents and the businesses will help promote it he said.

Ms. Proulx suggested the committee should think about what other things they could look at to see what they might be able to accomplish.

Mr. Capello said that their goals and objectives should be put on the agenda for their next meeting because they as a committee should set goals every year.

Ms. Proulx said asked if the committee planned to hold meetings with the downtown businesses.

Mr. York said they did discuss getting the downtown business/property owners together for a meeting and then COVID hit.

Ms. Harris said some of the downtown property owners live out of state and are leasing their buildings and suggested that they set up a Zoom meeting and invite those owners to attend.

Mr. Capello said they should get some of the residents to join in as some of the renters take as good care of the property as the landlord does.

Ms. Proulx said if they planned a Zoom meeting with a speaker on something of interest to business owners and kept it short and to the point where they could participate without physically being here or spending a lot of time on it we may get some interest there as well.

Mr. Capello suggested having a meeting with the downtown business owners and to find what they want and what would be of help to them.

Ms. Proulx recalled that the first year she had her business downtown it looked like it does now and then one by one the spaces filled up until the downtown was full and there was trouble trying to find parking because it is definitely limited. I've seen it happen and it just takes a spark but I don't know what the spark would be right now to do that but the downtown business owners may know she said.

Ms. Harris said Ms. Proulx and Mr. Orvis have seen how the town has changed over time and how Rt. 11 has grown. She said now that the Ridge is in it's just going to keep going and hopefully will expand into Farmington. Whatever types of businesses go in downtown should be unique so that won't have to compete with Rt. 11 she said.

Ms. Proulx asked if the committee has done much outreach to businesses that may be looking for a new site.

Mr. Capello said if they get the names of businesses looking to move, expand or go into a store front he can get the outreach to them done.

Mr. Orvis asked what the Friends of Farmington are doing these days.

Mr. Capello said he didn't know if they are even open for business yet (due to COVID-19).

Mr. York said at one point they planned to hold a business get together one night a month. He said they held one get together but he hasn't heard anything from them since.

Ms. Proulx said years ago when she was on the EDC they were working with a Planner from SRPC and they were looking at the possibility of a space for big uses like a flea market on Town owned land adjacent to the Sarah Greenfield Business Park.

Mr. Orvis said he mentioned doing that on the old fire station lot. He said he knew someone who has a 4 acre field with a flea market every weekend in Vermont and it brings in a ton of money and people.

Ms. Proulx said the Town is taking sand and gravel out it as we go along but the idea at the time was to reclaim it as we went. There would land available parallel to Rt. 11 with one curb cut coming in and a parallel road so you don't disrupt all of the traffic with curb cuts all along the road frontage she said.

Mr. Orvis asked if there is a potential to connect that land to the business park.

Mr. Capello said there will be as the Town has an easement to do a road out to where the gravel pit is. He said it was smart to set it up that way as Rt. 11 is a limited access road so they may not get another curb cut on that road.

Mr. Orvis said there is a lot of potential for expansion of the business park.

Mr. Capello said there is about 5-10 years worth of materials left in the Town gravel pit. He said they could potentially looking at letting people set up a community flea market at the old fire house lot while they are trying to figure it all out.

Ms. Proulx said there is potential for all kinds of things there like car shows, powwow's etc. and there may be events they are missing out on because they are not tapping into the right source.

Mr. Orvis there is so much potential for the old Textron property and asked about the possibility of talking to the "mysterious" Trustee from New Jersey about the property.

Mr. Capello said the problem is that except for the 10 acres where the Metal Farm is located the property is part of a Super Fund site and nothing can be done with it.

Mr. Orvis said he thought it would be a perfect place for ATV riders to load and unload and access the trails.

Mr. Capello said it is the best commercial space in town but can't be used due to the contamination. He said there is a plume of contamination underground and that is the reason for the monitoring wells at the Sarah Greenfield Business Park and further down on Rt. 11 caused by Textron and others dumping their chemicals outside.

He said the money from the Super Fund is very limited in what it can be used for and they are limited in what they can and can't do. He said he has had some preliminary conversations with the federal government about the site but there's 6 other projects in town that need to get going before broaching that subject again. The contamination is not just in the gravel and the rocks it is in the water table there too he said.

10). Next Meeting: September 8, 2020 at 6 p.m.

Mr. Capello requested that the next meeting date be changed because Sept. 8 is the Primary Election and he and Ms. Proulx will be at the polls.

Consensus of the members was to schedule the next meeting for Sept. 22, 2020 at 6 p.m.

11). Adjournment:

Motion: (Capello, second Harris) to adjourn the meeting passed 5-0 at 7:14 p.m.

Respectively submitted

Kathleen Magoon

Recording Secretary

Chad York, Vice Chairman