

Town of Farmington  
Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, October 13, 2020

**Committee Members Present:**

Chad York, Vice Chairman  
Arthur Capello, Town Administrator  
Paula Proulx, Selectmen's Rep.  
Erica Rogers

**Committee Members Absent:**

Danielle Harris, Secretary  
Stephen Henry, Planning Board Rep.  
Randy Orvis

**1). Call to Order:**

Vice Chairman York called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

**2). Pledge of Allegiance:**

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**3). Public Comment:** None

**4). Elect Chairman:**

**Motion:** (York, second Proulx) to nominate Arthur Capello for Chairman;

Mr. Capello accepted the nomination.

**Vote:** The motion passed 3-0-1 (Capello abstained).

Mr. York said he will remain as Vice Chairman.

Mr. Capello said the previous meeting was held at a different time than normal because of the primary elections. He said there was not a quorum of the members present at that meeting because some members had resigned and they were not aware of it at that time (the meeting was cancelled). He said the current committee members are himself, Paula Proulx, Erica Rogers, Chad York, Danielle Harris, Randy Orvis and Stephen Henry is the Planning Board Rep. but because of a personal conflict Mr. Henry has requested that the Planning Board appoint an alternate rep. for when he is unable to attend EDC meetings.

He said there are 7 members of this committee and a quorum of the members is 4 so this meeting can continue.

Mr. Capello said he is actively trying to recruit new members and if anyone is interested in joining the EDC to fill out and submit the application form found on the Town website.

**5). Review of Minutes:**

August 11, 2020 – No errors or omissions

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

## **6).Goals for EDC:**

Mr. Capello asked the members for their ideas on the goals for the EDC and what they hoped the committee would accomplish. He said this discussion began at the Aug. 11 meeting and he would like to expand upon it and see where they go from here. He suggested they begin by listing the goals and then come up with the action steps to reach those goals.

Mr. York said the committee is administering the Adopt-a-Spot program and had been working on approving the applications as they come in and the previous Selectmen's Rep. Dave Connolly had been working on getting the signs for the spots.

Mr. Capello said he is trying to set up a meeting with the previous Chairman Angela Hardin and have her bring him up to speed on what the committee has been doing.

Mrs. Rogers asked for the total number of Adopt-a-Spots in town and how many are taken and how many are left.

Mr. York said Mrs. Hardin has a notebook with information on the spots and the program. He said there are also some suggestions for additional spots that haven't been adopted yet.

Mr. Capello said he assisted Mrs. Hardin with developing the list of existing spots and believed that most of those spots have been adopted. He said he will e-mail Mrs. Hardin for more information.

He said another item the committee discussed was how to get information out about the TIF (Tax Increment Financing) District and the RSA 79-E Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive to businesses in those zones. He said they talked about composing a letter to send out and a fact sheet on both programs was included in the member's meeting packets.

Mr. York asked if the 79-e program could be used for residential properties too.

Mr. Capello said it could only be used for commercial properties in the downtown area.

Ms. Proulx said looking at it from an ex-business owner point of view she was thinking about how she would feel if she received this information in the mail if she owned the building. There are a lot of businesses there that don't own their buildings so they may not be able to directly benefit from these programs. She said some of the landlords don't live here and asked what incentive would make them want to do it.

Mr. Capello said if they came up with a mailer and sent it to the tenants and the owners with a cover letter saying here's a way to improve downtown and potentially reduce your taxes the renters could put the pressure on the owners.

Ms. Proulx said if she had gotten these fact sheets and was interested in the programs she would be asking how to go about doing it. If I was running a business I would think my time is of the essence and maybe we should give them copies of the application instead of them having to look for it. The easier we make it the better luck we may have with it she said.

Mr. York said that Jason Lauze got approved for the 79-e program for his building downtown.

Mr. Capello said he was the Town's guinea pig for the program and we were his guinea pig and once they figured it all out it went well and his building was approved for the program.

He asked if it would be more beneficial to have a business owner receive a short “blurb” about the 79-e district listing the potential benefits and include an application or to invite them to call and they would go to visit with the business owner.

Ms. Proulx said when she had her business she wouldn’t have had time to meet with someone. Mrs. Rogers suggested they do both- send the letter with an application and invite the owners to call as some options work for some people but not for others.

Ms. Proulx said if it was something she was interested in she might prioritize taking the time to have someone explain it to her. She said they need to be sure if somebody comes in that they help them through it because most people haven’t done this before.

Mr. Capello said they learned a lot from going through the process with Mr. Lauze and they are willing to walk through it with the applicant but only the building owner can apply for the program. He used Mr. York as an example where he owns the Blue Collar Barbers business but he doesn’t own the building it is located in and he wouldn’t be eligible for the 79-e program.

Mrs. Rogers asked if they could use Mr. Lauze as an example of someone who has gone through the process and include why he did it, how he did it and what he got out of it so other business owners could see that somebody used it, was accepted and what the benefit of it is.

Mr. Capello said they could ask Mr. Lauze if he would be willing to write a short testimonial about his experience with the process and his benefits that could be included with the letter. He said they didn’t even have an approved application when they first started the process with Mr. Lauze but they have that and a lot more information about the process now.

Mr. York asked if part of the process includes going before Strafford County Planning.

Mr. Capello said that isn’t part of the 79-e process and Mr. Lauze may have met with them regarding the historic aspect of the building. He said you can get a certain number of years of tax incentives with the 79-e program and additional years for the historic and residential parts of the revitalization plan. He said a mixed use building such as one with commercial uses on the first floor and residential units on the upper floors could be eligible for the program but someone who owned a house downtown would not be eligible.

He said the program freezes your tax rate at a certain rate depending on what work is done and then it can be anywhere from 5 years to 15 years depending on whether it is a historic structure, creates new housing units, etc. He asked Mrs. Rogers to contact Mr. Lauze to see if he would be willing to write a one page testimonial for use with the mailer to the owners.

Ms. Proulx said there are also other types of grants available for the rehab of multi-resident housing that don’t have to be repaid if there were within certain districts and may be something they should look into and make the property owners aware of.

Mr. Capello asked Ms. Proulx to share her epiphany about a different way to look at revitalizing the downtown with the committee. He said a lot of people think we have an empty downtown but we don’t.

Ms. Proulx said one night she started thinking about the downtown and that all she ever heard

was there are all these empty storefronts and they are not doing anything for the downtown. She said she started going down the line and realized there are only 2 vacant spaces.

Mr. Capello said to his knowledge the only 2 spaces not in use are the where the Pizza Shack is and next to the bakery in Mr. Lauze's building. He said the Pizza Shack is in the process of rehabbing and reopening leaving the only vacant commercial storefront next to the bakery.

Ms. Proulx said we probably have one of the last original downtowns and recalled when she was a kid the downtown was pretty active and you saw a lot of people that you knew. She suggested that instead of looking at it from an economic standpoint to look at it from a community standpoint and make it more community bound with a destination and a reason to come downtown.

She said the Town owns land on Rt. 11 that we are mining from and as we go along to reclaim the site and turn it into something with a parallel road the Town could sell to have business along that area. The way Rt. 11 is building up it would take something monumental to bring people from out of town off the highway into town and I don't think there is enough space to support something like that downtown but there would be on the Rt. 11 property she said.

Mr. York said he had a guy come into his barbershop last week who didn't know he was there and he has been there a little over 3 years.

Mr. Capello said we are a cut through to the Lake Winnepesaukee area and the idea is to try to draw some of that traffic off of Rt. 11 and there has to be a destination to make people want to come downtown. He said the Italian restaurant that used to be downtown was a draw and in the summer time you couldn't get in without a reservation. We have to try to find a niche and it all deals around the community and some of that will be achieved with the revitalization of the Rec. Dept. The Rt. 11 gravel pit area is a great idea but that is many years down the road as there is still quite a bit to mine out of it he said.

Ms. Proulx said a resident came to a Selectmen's meeting and suggested the board support putting in a dollar store downtown and they have done the demographics and we can't support that. We have trouble supporting the businesses that we have because Rochester is 5 minutes down the road she said.

Mr. Capello said you can do a lot of one-stop shopping there.

Mr. York noted there are 3 Dollar Tree stores within 10 minutes of here already.

Mr. Capello said the Cumberland Farms store didn't want to move to the former fire station lot because their business plan says they have to sell a certain amount of gallons of gas to put in a gas station and they're not going to draw people with the Irving station out on Rt. 11.

Ms. Proulx said it is a difficult situation for businesses downtown because people have to drive off the highway and route down through and back out and people from out of state are not going to do that because they are on a direct route to somewhere and they don't care.

Mr. Capello said people don't realize you can loop through Farmington and right out again because it runs almost parallel to Rt. 11.

Ms. Proulx said they need to figure out what might work for a destination and how to get people downtown and you aren't going to get them there unless it's "warm and fuzzy" there like it used to be. She said it has to be walkable and agreed the sidewalks need to be addressed as part of the plan.

Mr. Capello said they are working on getting the sidewalks included as part of state's Ten Year Plan and refurbish them using grant money. He said the DPW Director also has a plan to do "x" amount of feet per year if they can get a contractor to actually bid on the work and do it. He added that we've also had a big monkey wrench called COVID thrown in this year.

He said they may be able to use some of the information from the focus groups for the Rec. Dept. study as recreational uses could be what will draw people downtown. He said the results of the previous survey showed that over 50% of the survey participants go out of town for recreational services because their services are better and less than 50% use recreational services and are looking for community activities.

Ms. Proulx said we under utilize everything we have and we have a nice little downtown that could be quite cozy if we did it right. If we revamp the Rec. Dept. with the outreach by UNH to people to see what they would like to see there's probably a lot more we could do with the Town Hall she said.

Mr. Capello suggested they talk with the school district to see if they have a drama club and our facility is probably better than or easier to use than their gym where they have to do all the set ups and we already have it set up for that. When you do plays it tends to bring in grandparents, etc. from out of town he said.

Ms. Proulx said Christmas or holiday concerts or a Battle of the Bands could be another draw to the downtown. There are so many things we are not tapping into to pull people into town she said.

Mrs. Rogers said people come through Rochester before they get here and have already stopped there to eat and go shopping so by the time they get to Farmington they're not going to get off Rt. 11 to come to town when they have already taken care of those things.

Ms. Proulx said maybe they should be trying to capture the people that are here in town for the downtown area and then capture everything else at the Town property on Rt. 11. She said before she started her business in the former Masonic building the windows were being broken frequently as the police can only do so much and she moved in there not once did they have a problem in all those years. Then the whole place filled in and that brings in the foot traffic and moves the bad element out and people feel comfortable to come in and walk around she said.

Mr. Capello said at the Steering Committee focus group meeting he went to some people from outside of town said they didn't come downtown out of fear for their safety because of some of that bad element.

Ms. Proulx said they were never afraid growing up here no matter what time it was. She said a few years ago, late at night they had to stop at Cumberland Farms and parked nearby. She said

she was sitting there when a group of people came walking down the street and the hair on the back of her neck went up and reached over and locked the doors. That was the first time she had ever done that in this town and it wasn't right to feel that way. Since then we have upgraded a lot of the lighting there so it is not as dark there and the Police Dept. is monitoring the streetlights she said.

Mr. Capello said the issue is to find the right balance of making it bright enough for safety and not so bright it interferes with the residents there. He asked the members to take these ideas and thoughts and come back with a couple of goals at their next meeting.

He said all of the downtown businesses are within 5 miles of Rt. 11 and he would like to contact the state about the blue informational signs (i.e. Restaurant ->) that are supposed to be provided to the Town if there is a business/attraction within 5 miles of a state road.

Mr. York said he thought the businesses had to pay for those signs.

Mr. Capello said if so, depending on the cost it may be worth it for the business it could bring in.

Mrs. Rogers asked if this committee has any spending money.

Mr. Capello said the committee has a minimal budget.

Ms. Proulx said at one time it was higher but it wasn't being spent and if they could show an attainable goal and a need the Selectmen would at least entertain their funding request.

Mr. Capello said for example if the Dept. of Transportation agrees to post the signs but the cost is \$300 they would try to find that money somewhere in the overall budget. There are some small things this committee can look into and do such as the additional publicity from the signs and contacting the local media about events such as the Christmas tree lighting he said.

Ms. Proulx said the town doesn't get enough good press and that may be something they have to initiate.

Mr. Capello said that he has contacts at WMUR TV and that he felt the tree lighting event would be a great "feel good" story for them given everything going on in this world right now.

Mr. York recounted when the town made the national news for turning on the Christmas lights downtown when everything was shutting down because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Capello said that is some of the stuff that this committee can do and it all helps people to know that there is a Farmington, NH that does these types of things.

Mr. Capello then gave the late Tom DeJulio a lot of credit for all his work in keeping the 100 year Christmas lights tradition going after Eversource told the town it couldn't use their poles.

Mr. York said the Farmington Preservation and Improvements Organization (FPIO) is keeping it going now.

Mr. Capello said the FPIO is all volunteers and they are doing a great job. They are handling the tree lighting for us this year because the Rec. Dept. is closed due to COVID he said.

He said asked the members to come back with a couple ideas for their next meeting on Tues., Nov. 10. We all have different resources and the more diversity we have on the committee the more contacts we will have and the more we are likely to get done for Farmington he said.

**7). Master Plan Update:**

Mr. Capello asked to postpone this discussion as there are issues still being addressed that don't involve the EDC.

**8). Any Other Business before the Committee:**

**Old Fire Station-** Mr. York asked for the status of the Request for Proposals for the former fire station property.

Mr. Capello said that property is part of the study being done by UNH to develop a revitalization plan for the Rec. Dept. He said he gave the Selectmen an initial RFP some months ago and then this issue became a lower priority because of other things that came up. We got involved in the UNH study and when they did an assets inventory they said that is a prime piece of land because of the utilities there and there is potential to include it as part of the plan. He said he has another RFP he could bring before the board but he didn't know where it would go given the situation with the pandemic. It's an extremely valuable piece of land for the Town because of the location and the utilities and we want to make sure what is put there will benefit the town which takes time to do it right he said.

Ms. Proulx said they don't have the full report from UNH yet and professors conducting the study will present their recommendations to Selectmen when it is completed and the board will determine if it is a viable plan for the dept.

Mr. Capello said the focus group categories have been set up with dates and times and anyone wanting to participate but is unable to attend at that time is asked to contact the Town office and they will see what they can set up.

Ms. Proulx asked Mr. Capello to announce the date and time for the focus groups at the next Selectmen's meeting.

**9). Next Meeting:** Tuesday, November 10, 2020

**10). Adjournment:**

**Motion:** (York, second Capello) to adjourn the meeting passed 4-0 at 7:10 p.m.

Respectively submitted  
Kathleen Magoon  
Recording Secretary

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Arthur Capello, Chairman