

Town of Farmington
Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 8, 2020

Committee Members Present:

Chad York, Vice Chairman
Paula Proulx, Selectmen's Rep
Elizabeth Johnson
Blanche Tanner
Erica Rogers

Others Present:

Neil Johnson

Committee Members Absent:

Arthur Capello, Chairman, excused
Danielle Harris, Secretary, excused
Randy Orvis, excused
Ann Titus, Planning Board Rep., excused

1). Call to Order:

Vice Chairman York called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

2). Pledge of Allegiance:

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

3). Public Comment: None

4). Review of Minutes:

October 13, 2020 – No errors or omissions

Motion: (Proulx, second Rogers) to accept the Tuesday, October 13, 2020 EDC public meeting minutes as written passed 3-2 (Johnson, Tanner-abstained).

5). Goals for EDC:

Ms. Proulx asked the new members for their thoughts on future goals for the committee and what made them become members.

Ms. Tanner said she thought this was an interesting group but she didn't know what their focus was and she wanted to find out. She asked if their purpose was to help bring business to town, to have more things going on in town and how they could overcome the effects of COVID-19. She said the downtown looks the same as it did when she moved in 15 years ago and she was not sure what she could do to solve it. She said the Adopt-a-Spot Program, the Christmas lights and the storefront windows at the Friends of Farmington are great and suggested more lights on in the other buildings would brighten up the downtown and there may be something that could be done to make the buildings look more inviting.

Ms. Tanner said there is a lot of traffic going through town and has thought about what would bring people to town and get them to stop here but she didn't have answers to the questions.

Mrs. Rogers asked if they could challenge the downtown businesses to compete against each other for the best storefront window display on a monthly, holiday or themed basis. She said if

people knew there was a challenge going on with the storefront windows they might take a trip down there to see them and then vote on which store has the best display.

Ms. Tanner suggested the Town could supply window boxes for the downtown buildings but the building owner would be responsible for planting, decorating and maintaining the boxes. She asked if the committee still held ribbon cutting ceremonies for new businesses.

Mr. York said he had one when his business opened.

Mrs. Rogers said the last business to open was the bakery and she didn't recall any ribbon cutting for that. She said the EDC also used to do a newsletter that she helped compile and publish and she included the ribbon cutting ceremonies whenever they were held.

She added if any of the building owners don't want to maintain the window boxes they could become part of the Adopt-a-Spot Program.

Ms. Proulx said some people who can't manage a larger spot may want to participate in that where it would potentially be cheaper and easier to manage.

Ms. Tanner said a new little business has opened near the hair salon but she didn't know the name or what type of business it is.

Mr. York said he thought it was a craft shop with crafts made from second hand materials.

Ms. Tanner said that when there is a ribbon cutting it should be put on the Town website, Face book and the Puddledock Press newspaper to showcase some positive news about Farmington.

Mrs. Rogers said she has access to and knows how to put items on the Town website.

Ms. Tanner recalled the committee members working on a folder that was given out to new businesses and asked if that was still happening.

Mrs. Rogers said there is a stack of folders in her office and she was never told what to do with them. She said the committee had planned to update them but it never went anywhere.

Ms. Proulx said the committee should review the folders possibly at their next meeting.

Mrs. Rogers said she would give each member a folder after this meeting for review.

Ms. Tanner said there should be a way for residents that don't have the internet to access the Town website to get a list of the businesses in town.

Ms. Proulx asked Ms. Tanner how she gets her information when she wants it.

Ms. Tanner said she doesn't want it and she gets references from people if she needs to have something done. She asked if the Town website has a list of the local businesses.

Mrs. Rogers said that was also being worked on. She said the committee was doing a monthly newsletter and one reason it fizzled out was because there was only one member working on it and although she wasn't a member at the time and her job has nothing to do with businesses or the EDC she was expected to fill in the blanks and she didn't know where to go with it.

She said the list of businesses they had at the time was outdated and the committee wanted her to send the newsletter to the businesses and she would get about 42 e-mails that bounced back due to incorrect or no longer in use e-mail addresses. She said they couldn't find somebody with the time to contact each business owner and change their contact information

so it was never actually done.

Ms. Proulx asked if there is a way to use Facebook or the Town website to ask businesses to reply if they would like to be included on that list. She said they would be asking them if they want to be a part of it without having to figure out whom to go to and possibly miss somebody.

Mrs. Rogers said it just has to be put in enough places where they are all seeing it.

Ms. Tanner said she would be interested in working on this project but she doesn't have an internet connection. She said that updating the business list should be a committee goal.

She said she saw ad on TV about a town that was trying to bring shoppers downtown by holding a Small Business Saturday and asked if this was something they could work on for next year to get people downtown with all of the businesses open. She said Chambers of Commerce used to have a Business Open House and that she didn't know if the businesses have ever done some type of activity like that to draw people downtown. She then asked if the Town has received the results of the Rec. Dept. study as there may be some useful information there.

Ms. Proulx said the Selectmen have not yet received the UNH report but she believes they are close to submitting it and there was a lot of good information from the focus groups she attended. She said UNH looked at recreation as an economic driver as it gives people a destination to go to and this committee can get a copy of it once the Selectmen receive it. She said the hardest thing about having a business downtown is getting people to stop and come through your door once and once they walk over the threshold they will come back. It's getting them to know you are there and what you're there for she said.

Ms. Tanner said the UNH study may give the committee more ideas for goals once the report is out.

Mrs. Rogers asked if the committee has a list of the current Adopt-a-Spot locations.

Mr. York said former EDC Chair Angela Hardin has the notebook with the program information and Mr. Capello was trying to set up a meeting with her.

Discussion included some of the adopted locations around town and their adopters. Mrs. Rogers said she would like to know what spots are currently available for adoption.

Mr. York said the spots that were adopted have an official application that was submitted by the group or business adopting the spot.

Ms. Proulx said almost every storefront is full as some are now residential units so their objective changes from bringing businesses in to helping the existing businesses to stay there and getting people to stop. You've got to make it more of a place where people feel comfortable to come into she said.

Ms. Tanner said an interesting question to ask people is "What would make you stop in town?"

Mrs. Johnson said the Downtown Revitalization Steering Committee did surveys on that question.

Ms. Proulx said she would try to find the Steering Committee information.

Mrs. Rogers said the businesses could do more to involve themselves with the community like

the Friends of Farmington's Christmas tree event and Aroma Joe's paper ornaments to color and when kids turn them in they get a free doughnut and the ornaments are displayed on their windows. Stuff like that makes me want to go out of my way to go into a business she said.

6). Summer Kickoff Idea:

Mrs. Rogers said that she and Ms. Proulx have been talking about bringing people into the businesses with something like a bingo card or a deck of cards to do a poker hand and every time you go into a store they stamp your card or give you a card for your poker hand and you could win a prize from the business. This would bring people through the door that would come back and tell somebody else about it. It could be something simple pulling in each of the businesses and really selling it in the newspaper and online to bring people downtown she said. Ms. Proulx said Foster's columnist Stephanie Piro is good about getting local events in her column which appears in the "Radar" section of the newspaper every 2 weeks and they could talk to her about if they have an event how to get the information out.

She said one thing mentioned in the focus groups was people are a little bored with the Hay Day performance and maybe they could incorporate this into Hay Day with a little different set up and could consider changing the event's name. She said there are a lot of crafty, handy people in town and instead of charging them \$100 per spot they could register for \$5 and set up their tables and sell their wares and hand out their business cards. Make it more community friendly with a blend of "old timey stuff" instead of just having vendors she said.

Ms. Tanner said food and music will bring people in.

Ms. Proulx suggested there could be a Battle of the Bands in the bank parking lot as there a lot of musically talented people in the area. She said the event could also be a separate event not associated with Hay Day similar to the Craft Fair in Alton and could be held in the municipal parking lot so the street wouldn't have to be shut down for the day.

She said whatever they do, they need to keep it as simple and economically feasible as possible because working in a store you don't have a lot of time to play and times are kind of hard right now for businesses.

Mrs. Rogers said the EDC has a small budget but it shouldn't cost much for a couple of decks of cards and they could provide the cards to the businesses.

Mr. York asked if they could get custom made cards instead of using the blue Bicycle cards because almost everyone has a deck of those cards at home.

Mrs. Rogers said she may have a "special stamp" to use on the official cards they provide.

Ms. Proulx said they can also work on making the downtown more "warm and fuzzy" and that the **Transportation Alternatives Program** grant is being worked on again by the Strafford Regional Planning Commission which was for beautification and functional improvements to the downtown and that she would ask Mr. Capello about the status of the grant application.

Mrs. Rogers said she wondered if the school district could get some of students to decorate the storefront windows with a different grade level doing the display each month.

Mrs. Johnson suggested they could make it a contest between the grades.

Mrs. Rogers said she thought it would be better for classes in the same grade to compete against each other rather than having the 8th grade compete against the 4th grade for example. She said this makes it personal and if her kid was decorating a window she would go there and look, Grammy and Grandpa are going down there to look, etc.

Ms. Proulx said small business can't compete with the big box stores on prices and the only thing they have left is the personal side and their relationship with their customers. We have to get people to like going there so if by chance something is 50 cents more that relationship is worth more to them than that 50 cents she said.

Mrs. Rogers said that post COVID they could have some sort of event for the business owners to get together and asked if they even know each other.

Mr. York said the Friends of Farmington had planned to have monthly meetings for business owners and only held one meeting a few years ago.

Mrs. Rogers suggested they reach out to the Friends of Farmington to find out why that didn't continue.

Ms. Proulx said once the list of businesses is updated it could be used to determine interest in having those meetings. She added that finding a common time for most people to participate is probably another hurdle they will have to overcome.

7). Master Plan Update:

Ms. Proulx said she could not provide an update at this time.

Mrs. Rogers asked what they are looking for from the Master Plan in guiding this board.

Ms. Proulx said they would review the Economic Development chapter to see what potential direction they were considering.

Mrs. Rogers asked where that comes from.

Ms. Proulx said the direction comes from the Planning Board and the Planner and if the plan is adopted there is an economic section the EDC would be involved with and it would be good to have the committee review it. That might be a little while down the road she said.

8).Any Other Business before the Committee:

Plan of Attack for the Next Meeting – Mrs. Rogers said she would write a blurb seeking contact information from the businesses to be put on the Town website and the Facebook page and she will send it to the members for review before posting it.

Mr. York said he would print out the existing business list on the website and start reviewing it.

Mrs. Rogers said she provide the members with the folders given to the businesses following this meeting.

She said she would also make a paper copy of the existing business list for Ms. Tanner.

Ms. Proulx said she would find out the status of the TAP grant and contact Mrs. Hardin and ask her for the Adopt-a-Spot information.

Mr. York said if Mr. Orvis is present at the next meeting he would ask him to provide an update on the status of the ATV club and the expansion plans for the ATV trails.

9). Next Meeting: Tuesday, January 12, 2021

10). Adjournment:

Motion: (Proulx, second Rogers) to adjourn the meeting passed 5-0 at 7:12 p.m.

Respectively submitted

Kathleen Magoon

Recording Secretary

Chad York, Vice Chairman