

Town of Farmington
Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, March 7, 2023
356 Main Street-Farmington, NH 03835

Committee Members Present:

Danielle Harris, Chairman
Taylor Crawford, Vice Chairman
Penny Morin, Selectmen's Rep
Jason Lauze

Committee Members Absent:

Stephen Henry, excused
Adam Giles
KJ Cardinal
Dan Woodman, excused
Lynn Fuller

Others Present:

Kyle Pimental, Planning Director

1). Call to Order:

Mrs. Harris called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. She said due to the lack of a quorum of the members present they would have a slightly reduced agenda focused on informational purposes.

2). Pledge of Allegiance:

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

3). Public Comment: None

4). Review of Minutes: Postponed to the next meeting

5). Strafford Regional Planning Commission Overview:

Mrs. Harris welcomed SRPC Principal Regional Planner Kyle Pimental and thanked him for coming in to give the committee more background information.

Mr. Pimental said he is also in his 4th year as the Farmington's Town Planner and that he would begin with some background on the SRPC, some of the things he has tried to accomplish with the Planning Dept., what they have accomplished that the committee might be interested in and some of the things they are working on that would fit into this group's mission.

He said SRPC has 18 municipalities that they operate in so even though they are the Strafford Regional Planning Commission they have all of Strafford County and communities in Carroll County and Rockingham County as well. He said their "bread and butter" falls into 3 major categories, transportation, economic development and land use related planning.

Mr. Pimental said they have staff members that concentrate in those areas and several staff

members that service as Town Planners for other communities and they provide this same service in Farmington, Wakefield, Northwood, Strafford and Nottingham. Those towns don't have a paid Planning staff and they contract with SRPC to provide that service he said. He said a lot of the transportation issues are at the regional level so they are looking at things like bridge replacement projects and culvert replacements that fit into a regional system and then there are others that are work in economic development, housing, public outreach and public health. He said he does a lot of the environmental and climate planning, resilience measures in the energy field as well as the land use piece so that's a long winded way of saying the SRPC has expertise in a number of different planning related fields to help municipalities move whatever they want forward. It's really important to recognize that SRPC has no regulatory authority whatsoever and anything they do at the municipal level is always advisory and these are the best practices but it's up to the Town to make that decision he said. He said the circuit riders the folks that are out on the ground in these positions have a little bit more authority and they are given the task of taking projects through the Planning Board or helping write grants or recommendations and they can apply themselves a little bit more. He said in a nutshell the SRPC is a resource to help committees, citizens and businesses and it is all in how you use them. He said the dues paying municipalities, which Farmington is one of that lean on the commission more tend to get more work out of them and the more you ask the more they will say yes or they need a contract for that. He pointed to a map display and said they were some examples of maps they put together for the Town showing the Economic Revitalization Zones, the Tax Increment Finance District and if they are looking for things like this to add to their newsletter they have all this Geographic Information System information on file that they can give them at no cost to the Town. He said the GIS piece is a mapping platform and a lot of communities don't have GIS capability and they can produce maps at the regional, state or parcel level. Mr. Crawford asked if the role of the SRPC is a consulting kind of role. He said that Mr. Pimental mentioned that his role at the Town level might be some kind of extra support and asked if that included project management and what that scope looked like. Mr. Pimental said for Farmington that scope has increased over 4 years and it started as just site plan and subdivision reviews and it has expanded. He said the Town has asked him to help put together grant applications, provide assistance to the Conservation Commission with an on-going large land donation that needs some oversight and administration, writing letters of support for projects, applied for and received a \$275,000 grant to hire a Housing Navigator to work on housing related issues for 2 years working in Farmington and New Durham and help Farmington remove barriers in the zoning that would allow for more density. He said a good example of that would be in 2020 they put forth some changes to the density in the Village Center District where before it was 1 unit per 10,000 sq. ft. of parcel size which in the VC makes no sense because a lot of those lots are a lot smaller and buildings that were 2

stories were only allowed 1 unit. He said they worked on putting together a recommendation that was voted on by the voters that allows 1 unit per 850 sq. ft. of residential area which is a huge difference from 10,000 sq. ft. of lot size. That wasn't in the original project administration but we noticed there are needs within the Town's regulations that need to be addressed if they want to accomplish certain goals he said.

Mr. Pimental said the TIF District is a good example of a planning mechanism that can help the town raise money to extend the sewer lines up Rt. 11 but the way it is functioning now you'll never get there because it will take forever if you're relying solely on the TIF. He said it needs to be reworked and the numbers for what it will cost are old and outdated and those are things that were never discussed 4 years ago in that scope.

He said now that they have figured out some things that can really help to work on that project administration piece of it has expanded to a lot more than what was in the original scope.

Mrs. Harris said he mentioned seeing needs in the Town regulations that need to be addressed and asked him to shed some light on what they were seeing.

Mr. Pimental said in some of the Table of Permitted Uses there are contradictions for example in the VC it says single family homes/duplexes are allowed by right but it also says residential can't be on the first floor so that will sometimes be complicated. He said it sometimes creates an issue on how they interpret that which puts the staff in a tough position trying to figure out the intent. He said that's really geared toward the existing commercial that is on the bottom floor that the town does not want to see converted to residential and they want residential on the top floors but the way that it's written causes some potential issues if someone wants to come in and build a single family home even though we allow for it by right.

He said another example is there are density bonuses in certain districts that if you have water and sewer the minimum lot size requirement is reduced by one-quarter for each utility. He said if in the Urban Residential zone the minimum lot size is 1 acre and you are connected to Town water and sewer that means your minimum lot size for a unit is half an acre but there is language in there that says single family dwelling and asked what if someone wanted to put in a duplex. He said they should apply that density bonus to whatever residential uses you allow for there and it should run with the land. Again this puts staff in the position of deciding do they apply this exactly the way it says because if we are then any duplex or apartment building can't take advantage of the density bonus. I don't think that is the intent but because it says single family it creates a challenge and if someone is opposed to that they could say they are operating outside the zoning and appeal the Planning Board's decision to the Zoning Board of Adjustment and up to the Superior Court he said.

Mr. Pimental said the commercial zone at Rt. 11 is problematic because of the way that it is constructed. He said it's essentially a quarter mile swath that goes right across Rt. 11 and there are a lot of parcels that are in residential areas. He said Paulson Road is a good example of that and if someone wanted to build a home there they would have to say it's not allowed even

though that entire area is residential and it really doesn't offer up a ton of commercial opportunities and the entire Rt. 11 corridor needs to be looked at.

He said the other problem is there are a lot of lots that go back a great distance from Rt. 11 so there is only a very small portion that is commercial and the rest could be agricultural residential or on the other side rural residential so there are these split lots. He said it would be easier if all of those lots were one or the other and asked how they should regulate them. He said they are seeking to address the split zoning this year by allowing the commercial zone to go further back into residential areas so long as they keep a vegetative buffer as it transitions to more residential properties.

Mrs. Morin asked how long and how wide that buffer would be because bushes are not going to do it if you're putting up an industrial building and having that 100 yards from a house.

Mr. Pimental said if he remembers correctly if there are existing trees and the site is wooded and in a natural state there would have to be a 50 ft. vegetative no-cut buffer at the least. He said if it's already cut and they want to develop it then it's at the discretion of the Planning Board. He said this is proposed and is not what is on the books this is what the voters get to decide in March.

He said the board felt comfortable with 50 ft. at a minimum of a no-cut/no disturb buffer as it transitions which would be almost 4 times the setback limit which is 15 ft. so it's a pretty big increase from what the setbacks are and the setbacks don't necessarily mean you can't cut in those areas.

He said the challenge is with only being part time and having a maximum of 16 hours a week to dedicate to Farmington and a lot of the issues that come up are more reactive than proactive. He said they will see something come through and say this is an issue that should probably be addressed and because of the way the Town's government is set up we only have one shot at fixing the zoning every year in March. March 16 could roll around, an application could come in and we say this doesn't make sense but we have to wait a whole year to try to fix it. We try to pick and choose the things that have risen to the top and the Planning Board has tried to make amendments that are more business friendly and to remove barriers to allow economic development and to remove housing barriers he said.

Mr. Pimental said one of the biggest successes was the density in the VC going from 10,000 sq. ft. down to 850 sq. ft. which offers more opportunities for developers to put more units in places they would not have been able to before. He said but they still have to meet the parking and all of the other site plan regulations and if the site doesn't allow for that then the site doesn't lend itself to that. It's opening doors but it's not a free for all he said.

He said he would be happy to share the proposed zoning amendments and they can be found on the Town website. He said they had 10 amendments this year and they added some commercial uses to the Table of Permitted Uses to make it clearer and they tried to reduce the number of uses that are allowed by Special Exception and to allow them by right to avoid an

applicant having to seek multiple approvals. He said the SE has to go through the Zoning Board and their process is entirely different and their criteria for reviewing applications are very different than the Planning Board.

Mr. Pimental said the Planning Board is driving a lot of the zoning changes and they don't want to see the intent overruled by the ZBA if there are too many things we're putting in by SE. He said they looked at a lot of the commercial uses over the last 2 years and at why it's an SE and if it needs to go to the ZBA or whether to allow it by right and they have made some changes to allow more uses to be done by right as opposed to additional oversight which has lessened the need to go to the ZBA. Now they (the ZBA) are not meeting nearly as frequently as when I first started here so we have made some progress there as well he said.

Mrs. Harris said at their last meeting it was brought up that downtown there have been some commercial spaces that the first floor was changed to residential and the previous Downtown Revitalization Committees determined it was really important that the first floor remain commercial and asked if that is consistent with the feedback they got from the town.

Mr. Pimental said moving forward that wouldn't be allowed since that zoning change and he knew of one example where there was an agreement between the property owner and the prior Code Enforcement Officer who was also the zoning administrator at that time (that has changed) and the determination was made that they would be able to convert it back to residential.

Mrs. Morin said the former dentist's office has been converted back to residential.

Mr. Pimental said and there might be another one downtown and it is his understanding there was a letter issued by the CEO for both of those that allowed for that to happen. He said if that were to happen now without some form of permission they would be in violation of the zoning. He said one of the projects that was recently approved, the Hussey Building at the corner of Acorn Street has commercial on the bottom in the front and residential on the top and they wanted to put two Townhouse style units in the back of the building that would have 2 floors so there would be residential on the bottom and top floors and they needed relief. He said it was granted because in the spirit of what the town is looking for they were keeping the storefronts on Main Street and it was the back portion of the building that was being converted to residential. He said in that case the ZBA felt that was in the spirit of what the town was trying to achieve and the overall look of the building wasn't going to change and it was still going to keep the commercial on the front but was going to allow them to have 2 more units. That is an example of a project needing ZBA approval but one which never would have been able to happen without the zoning changes because they never would be able to get 6 units and 2 commercial spaces out of that building prior to the change we made without relief he said. He said those 2 buildings may have had something in place prior to the zoning change and something happened there that allowed them to convert back.

Mr. Lauze said he was not a fan of allowing first floor residential and he has a building

downtown so it would have made sense for him to want it just so he could keep his apartments open but he didn't think that was the best decision for downtown. He said that particular apartment was vacant for a while and then it changed hands to a new owner and they still managed to make it residential and not that he is that heavy against it but they slapped up some Home Depot residential windows on Main St. and it changed the entire front of it so now it looks like a residence.

Mr. Pimental said the regulations that were put in place were to try to avoid that and a lot of that is based on the feedback that was gathered through the Master Plan process and through other outreach events. He said the Town had a PLAN NH grant, they did some downtown revitalization efforts with the UNH Cooperative Extension and the results of that was overwhelming that the town does not want residential on the bottom floors in the VC. He said they want to bring back as many businesses as possible as well as not allow businesses to convert them at all moving forward.

Mr. Lauze asked if there was any way to put in the regulations that if that building was to change hands again it needs to be converted back to commercial.

Mr. Pimental said not without some sort of expansion and if there was a substantial expansion they might be able to hold them to that. He said if it just changes hands there isn't much they can do about it and hopefully we don't see any more of that. He said that maybe the staff needs to be more tuned into that if something like that is happening so the Town can be notified so the CEO can put a stop to it immediately.

Mrs. Harris asked about the process for that if these things happen.

Mrs. Morin said first there should have been a permit for any changes to the building.

Mr. Pimental said the CEO is one person and he has a lot on his plate already and he can't drive around town looking for violations and that is not unique to Farmington. He said a lot of how people get caught is someone calls about it or sees something and lets the Town know and in some cases a contractor applies for a permit because they're adding 5 meters to a building and the Town will find out that they're putting in apartments there or something like that and they sometimes catch them in various stages of development. He said it's not a perfect system and the hope is that people will do the right thing and go through the process and talk to the Planning Dept. and find out what permits they need and the staff will help them through that. He said when there's violations it's not the smoothest process, it slows things down, it increases costs and it's not ideal when that happens but the reality is that it does.

2023 Zoning Amendments- Mrs. Morin said voting is next week and there are zoning amendments and asked what things are paramount to pass. She said this is an opportunity to let people know what is on there before next week and what they all mean.

Mr. Pimental said some of them are housekeeping items that are not all that important and he would be happy to give them a quick rundown on the proposed amendments.

Amendment 1- He said the split zoning he mentioned was one and the way it reads now is kind

of odd and this allows for commercial development to enter into residential zones but is not allowed by right but by a **Conditional Use Permit** which is an additional little bit of oversight by the Planning Board. He said the use has to be allowed by right, it can't endanger the public health, safety or welfare and that the use will not be unreasonable or have an unreasonable impact to the abutting properties and must have a 50 ft. vegetative buffer or landscaping.

Mr. Pimental said if Farmington wants to see more developers along Rt. 11 this would be a way to encourage that because right now they are boxed into the small amount of commercial area that is right along Rt. 11 with these parcels that are much bigger and in order for them to do that if this doesn't pass they would need relief and this gives them additional flexibility.

Amendments 2 and 3- He said these 2 amendments go together and are updates to the Housing Maintenance and Occupancy Code requested by the CEO. He said these address some issues he is dealing with on the enforcement side and bringing some things up to the new code and are minor amendments.

Amendment 4- Mr. Pimental said right now in the zoning you are allowed 1 principal use on your lot and this has become problematic because people that have larger lots want to put more than 1 principal use on the lot and they would have to get a variance. He said getting a variance and showing a hardship for a second building on your lot can be difficult to prove so they are proposing that more than 1 principal use can be allowed in certain zoning districts by SE as long as it's allowed in the Table of Permitted Uses. He said it's by SE in residential areas to protect neighborhoods but in the VC, Commercial Business and Industrial Business Districts more than 1 principal use is allowed by right.

Amendment 5- He said currently you are only allowed 1 building per lot and this would allow for multiple buildings on a single lot by a CUP. He said the proposed building/use has to be compatible with the abutting uses, can't create undue traffic congestion, impair pedestrian safety or result in any objectionable noise or odor. He said the second piece is the zoning allows for 2 single family dwelling units on a single lot if the lot can be subdivided with the proper amount of street frontage. He said the way it is written was making it confusing so they clarified it to say as long as you meet the dimensional requirements you can put 2 single family dwellings on any lot where that's allowed and you can show that it can be subdivided.

Mr. Crawford said but it doesn't need to be subdivided.

Mr. Pimental said that's correct they have to show on a plan that this can meet a subdivision but they don't have to. He said that is really to protect from creating non-conforming lots in the future that people are not going to want. This tends to happen with families where the parents have a large piece of land and want to build a house for their son or daughter but later when those homes change hands does somebody want to buy a property with another house on it that they don't know so they have to show it's been confirmed that the lot can be subdivided.

Amendment 6- He said this amendment is just a clarification that allows the Planning Board to make small changes in the zoning like the page numbers, the sections get screwed up or there's

a formatting issue or something is spelled wrong those are errors that don't need to go to the voters so they put a clause in there that says anytime that something needing fixing is noticed the Planning Board will still hold a public hearing but the board would have the authority to make those changes and not wait a whole year to correct something that doesn't have any impact on anything.

Amendment 7- Mr. Pimental said they added the definitions for certified recovery home, congregate living, detox facilities, group homes, hospitals and psychiatric hospitals, incapable of self-preservation, nursing homes and court ordered housing because they don't exist right now. He said in NH there have been a growing amount of these types of facilities that are coming into municipalities and if communities don't have this spelled out they could be couched in a number of different ways that don't make sense. He said they realized without these definitions if someone wanted to come in and do that either they would try to couch it into some existing use or they would be a commercial use not specified which is allowed by SE. He said some of these may not make sense in certain areas so to start they defined all of these using the state statutes, the NH Building Code and what some other communities have done and tried to outline what these facilities meant so if someone wanted to do something they could say that's not what you're describing that's a detox facility, a group home or whatever and they are allowed in these zones. We can't have definitions for every single possible use that could ever come into the town but for things like this you want to try to make sure you know what the difference is because they are very different.

He said the next step the board took was to put those definitions into the Table of Permitted Uses and decided where they should and should not be allowed.

Mr. Lauze asked if they specifically made sure all of those things he listed are not allowed in the VC district.

Mr. Pimental said nursing homes and health service facilities (doctors, dentists) would be allowed but detox facilities, group homes and court ordered housing would not be allowed.

Mr. Lauze asked if those uses were not in the Table of Permitted Uses if that still allows them to be accepted by SE or not allowed at all.

Mr. Pimental said if this is approved by the voters they wouldn't be allowed.

Mr. Lauze asked if it happened to be a detox center in a cornerstone building of the downtown if they can go around the Table of Permitted Uses by applying for a variance.

Mr. Pimental said an applicant is always allowed by state statute to apply for a variance even though it's not allowed. He said they would have to prove they meet the variance criteria and he thought it would be a tough argument to make to the ZBA. He said the Planning Board decided the VC is not the appropriate place for these facilities and they would be allowed by SE in the commercial district and in other districts and that was the last amendment.

He said they made some other small changes to the Table of Permitted Uses like allowing aquaculture in the Commercial Business district which wasn't allowed before but was allowed

in the Industrial Business district. He said overall they spent the majority of the time concentrating on the substance abuse facilities to make them clearly defined and allowed in certain areas. The board was really careful to not just put these in and zone them out completely recognizing that these facilities offer a service to those in need and they were very careful in thinking about where these might be allowed and where it doesn't make sense for our town he said.

Mr. Pimental said they have been pretty consistent in putting 5-10 proposed amendments before the voters every year but the Housing Navigator is going to be looking at the zoning focused strictly on housing. He said she will be looking at things like changing the language to fix the density bonus and at maybe encouraging a density bonus in the suburban area not just the urban area and proposing some potential zoning amendments. He said those discussions with the board will probably start in the late summer and their agendas are posted online and invited the committee to attend the meetings and provide feedback to the board. The more that we can promote the discussion of what the town really wants the more it will help the staff to guide the board he said.

Mrs. Morin said she knew he has been working with Kelly Heon on some of their projects and discussions and asked if he had any advice for this board moving forward.

Mr. Pimental said Mrs. Heon sent him the draft of their spring newsletter and it looks great and that is a great way to reach out to the business community. He then passed around a copy of the Request for Proposals for the former fire station lot and said the Selectmen recently voted to ask the staff to put together a RFP for the sale of this property. He said this is going to the Planning Board tomorrow for comments and it will eventually make its way to the Select Board. He asked the EDC to review this document and in looking for their support on this if there are ways they think they can make this more attractive to a developer they are open to that. He said the idea for this was to put it out and get some feedback on what could go there from developers. He said the town has asked for a mixed use development and in the back there are some design concepts that were put together by a consultant in 2020. He said if the developers say there is no market for this in Farmington then we know a mixed use development may not happen there but we don't know that right now. He then offered to share the RFP electronically with the committee so they could take more time to read through it.

He asked the committee what they could include in this to attract somebody to think about purchasing this property and redeveloping it. He said it has multiple access points from Garfield St. and Main St., it's connected to water and sewer, it has a decent amount of density that is allowed, it has parking, a Coast Bus stop that goes to Rochester and you can loop in to go to the shipyard, it's next to a crosswalk, there are sidewalks leading downtown and you can walk to the library, the post office and Town Office Building from there. Those are all selling points to someone that could make this an attractive development as a gateway to the downtown. I'm not an economic development planner so if you have other ideas of what we could include in

that I'd be happy to incorporate those he said.

He said their goal is to release this in April or May. He said it could get to the Selectmen and they could want to make wholesale changes and they haven't seen any of this yet.

Mr. Pimental said there are other efforts the Planning Dept. may take that would need the EDC's feedback. He said re-doing the TIF District development and finance plan needs to happen but also needs help. He said the staff is going to try to get to it this year but if the EDC could be involved in that and help set up what the finance plan should look like and what other sort of funding might be available to offset just relying on the TIF itself to generate the money needed to extend the sewer. He asked what their recommendations would be that they could consider on how to make the TIF more successful.

He said in the Town's Site Plan Regulations there's a whole section about architectural design guideline for this and he didn't know if that makes sense or not. He asked if the area lends itself to be architecturally drastically different from the rest of the town and if that would be a barrier to a developer that says he has to go through site plan review and then meet the design guidelines too. He asked if that was not accomplishing the goal of enticing developers to this area because of the architectural design guidelines being too strict. This group could look at if it makes sense to have design guidelines in the TIF district or downtown or if it makes sense to have them at all. Having your support for things like the RFP and helping with the TIF we could say the EDC is behind these efforts would help us in some ways he said.

He said he and Mrs. Heon talked about updating the Business Directory on the Town website because it is really out of date. He said the "BIGS" list (Businesses In Good Standing) was given to SRPC from the Secretary of State from the CARES Act grant they got and it can only be used for outreach and engagement purposes. He said they were using it to send it out to support businesses making sure they were aware of funding resources that were coming out of the Recovery Act like low interest loans and other things to help businesses come out of the pandemic.

He said it cannot be used for any regulatory or enforcement action so tying this to the business use certificate creates a problem for staff because the business use certificate can be used as an enforcement mechanism. He said they are advising that that list not be used as the business use certificate but as a general outreach to businesses maybe seeking support for the RFP for the old fire station lot or to do a survey and that list is perfect for that.

Mr. Pimental said they recently received an e-mail from a resident that complained about one of the listings they had listed on the Town website where that person's personal social media was being used in way that went against the Town's mission statement about being inclusive and the person was posting things that were not in that same vein. He said this opens up a large discussion about free speech that we can't iron all of that out.

He said legal counsel suggested one option is to add a disclaimer that says "This list is being provided as a courtesy only and by including a business on this list the Economic Development

Committee and the Town do not adopt any viewpoints or opinions that may be expressed by a business nor does the EDC or the Town warrant the quality of any of these businesses or sponsor their services in any way". He said but their advice is that the list should come down because there is potential for the Town to get sued and staff has not made a decision on this because they just received it within the last 48 hours.

He said the staff does not want to take down something the EDC just put a lot of effort into and that the staff thought was a good idea but now we're hearing something different from our legal counsel and asked how they should resolve this. He said they could put up the disclaimer and if something happens where a business on the Town website is part of a lawsuit because of some negligence and that person decides to also sue the Town because they found their contact information on the Town website they would have to see how that would shake out.

Mrs. Morin asked if they're getting this list from the state wouldn't they be covered under the state. She said the state is providing us these businesses in good standing and we're taking their list and putting it...

Mr. Pimental said the list was provided to the SRPC and then the SRPC shared it with the EDC so whether or not they'd be covered by that would depend on if they made the case that promoting it on the Town's website still fits in the same vein as that promoting and education piece and that satisfies that then maybe. He said the attorneys are looking at it as while this may be a minimal risk it's a risk none the less and if there are ways to reduce it to zero that is what their approach is going to be.

He said the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce has a business directory that is organized by business type and asked if they had looked into this.

Mrs. Harris said her initial recommendation was to just send everyone there as that's in place and is well known and has a much farther reach than a directory on our website could do. She said this was a courtesy to the Town office and whoever had requested that but they could push it that way. Anything on the website right now should be taken down and there's a lot of old stuff up there and they were doing organizing of what new could on and right now it's pretty low what they've received so far she said.

Mrs. Morin said then the easiest thing would be to take it down.

Mr. Lauze said as a business owner he didn't know many people are looking for his business on the Town website vs. Google so he didn't think they were doing enough of a service to those businesses by putting it on the Town website to justify any risk.

Mrs. Harris said some businesses are only showing up through Google but the first one is the Farmington page but some of those businesses are no longer businesses.

Mr. Pimental said that's good that it's popping up first on Google. He said one way around this could be if it comes off the Town's website for now and a new list is generated that is shared with the Rochester Chamber of Commerce you could keep that page open and provide a link to the Rochester page and that way it reduces all the risk and then agree to review it once a year

and resubmit it to the Chamber. Those are 3 options- take it down and do nothing, leave it and add the disclaimer that legal counsel has suggested or revise the list and send it to the Rochester Chamber and provide a link to the Chamber if they are willing to add the businesses to it he said.

Mrs. Morin asked if they wanted to add this to the agenda for their next meeting.

Mrs. Harris said she will look into it and she did do a quick look into their process and it's kind of in-depth so the owner would have to fill it out and they may have to become a member and they might not be able to do it for them.

Mr. Pimental said only 1 or 2 business owners have used the RSA 79-E program that they wrote about it in their first newsletter. He said they have shopped it around a little bit and it's a useful tool for downtown business owners to take advantage of freezing their taxes on a revaluation for allowing a developer to put in some investment money and to slowly recoup that over time and not be assessed that new value right away. He asked Mr. Lauze if it was successful for him and if he would recommend the program.

Mr. Lauze said in his case it was mostly useful and his building was a mess and the value of what it was assessed at vs. what it is assessed at now was significant so it was a significant savings and it allowed more flexibility with the funds to put more money into the building.

Mr. Pimental said a story like that could be highlighted in some way and sent out to folks that are thinking about re-investing or identifying some buildings that might make sense for that type of investment. He said it doesn't make sense for every building and if it is something that was built in 2020 he didn't think they wanted to cut them a break on taxes and this is really for older buildings to bring them back to life. There are opportunities downtown but we only had one business owner use it and it's been on the books for a number of years and that could be a lack of education and not knowing it's available or how it works and that program could be promoted by this group to see some more interest in that he said.

Mrs. Morin asked if the 79-E is shared with the local realtors too so they know those opportunities are out there.

Mr. Pimental said he doubted it but he doesn't know enough about how real estate works. He said any way they could promote the program to be used more would make sense.

Mr. Lauze asked about the Kodiak Realty building.

Mr. Pimental said they were asked multiple times and they asked them to reach out to him and sent them information about it but there was no follow-up. He said there was a lost opportunity for a 79-E project with that building and the applicant could have made it more in his favor if he had moved forward with that.

Mr. Lauze said another good candidate for the program is the building directly across from Cumberland Farms.

Mr. Pimental said he is not involved in the early part of the process when people are thinking about purchasing properties unless someone calls the Planning Dept. with a question. He said if

any of the committee members know of buildings that have changed hands and someone is thinking about redeveloping to tell them to consider the 79-E program and to talk to the Planning Dept. There are some good resources on the state's website and the Town has already adopted it and is ready to go it's just a matter of having the Selectmen approve it he said.

Mr. Lauze said the most of the buildings along the stretch where it's Main St. and Central St. would be eligible as they are historically and culturally significant.

Mr. Pimental said if the EDC uses the BIGS list one of the questions could be if they are aware of the 79-E program or if they are thinking of redeveloping a property here is a resource. He said if they wanted workshop ideas they could bring in someone from the state's Bureau of Economic Affairs or someone from the Rochester Chamber of Commerce.

He said he was on a call with the Seacoast Economic Development Group that meets bi-weekly to talk about regional economic development efforts and someone may want to get in on that Zoom call just to get looped in. He said he was there to talk about the old fire station RFP and they have a huge mailing list of all kinds of developers and real estate agents that might be interested in this and they are going to help distribute the RFP. He said UNH is also going to help to get it out through their business and economic groups and maybe they should have some of those groups come and talk to the committee about what they are doing to be looped into some of the regional economic efforts.

Mr. Lauze asked if there are still Community Development Block Grants available. He said if you are toying with the idea of bringing you business to town and you're not from town you're going to drive by Rt. 11 corridor or drive through downtown and see the sidewalks, utilities, the location of the poles and the streetlights and there's a lot of room for improvement.

Mr. Pimental said Charlie King has brought up multiple times that the Town needs to consider applying for some funding and the CDBG was one of the funding sources to potentially do a downtown feasibility study that would include looking at what is the water/sewer capacity, what utility upgrades are needed, what pedestrian improvements need to be made and landscaping. He said that could be something that a CDBG could at least partially fund and the EDC could be thinking about helping to support some grant writing. He said the staff would take a lot of that on but if there was general support of this is a good funding source we're happy to give a letter of support and help outline what should be in this proposal would be valuable.

Mrs. Harris asked if the SRPC would write the grants.

Mr. Pimental said they would help write them.

Mrs. Harris said there have been a lot of grant opportunities out there but the Town doesn't have a full time grant writer to get more of those opportunities.

Mr. Pimental said grant writing is one thing but the Town has to be ready on the financial side. He said these grants may cover some of the design and some of the planning but they are not going to cover the cost of the construction of the infrastructure improvements that are needed so the Town has to have funds set aside to match these grants. It's very rare that you're going

to find a grant that is 100% state or federally funded. They're out there but they're extremely competitive and it's rare he said.

Mr. Pimental said most of the federal and state grants are a 50/50 or a 75/25 split so if you have a \$200,000 project the Town has to come up with 25% of that and if you're not ready at the time of application and be able to commit "x" amount of dollars to this you're not going to be as successful.

Mrs. Morin said that is like the bridge when they had to be "shovel ready" with our 20% as soon as the State Bridge Aid became available. She said the 20% keeps changing and it keeps getting more expensive.

Mr. Pimental said being ready and advocating to the Select Board that if they want to apply for funding they've got to be ready and have "x" amount of dollars to commit to these things and to say if we get a grant we're going to authorize an amount not to exceed whatever but it has to be used for these 3 things.

He said it takes a lot to find the right funding source, to put the application together and be ready to administer it and every fund is going to want to ensure that if they give you money it's going to be successful. They're not just going to give you money to have you spin your wheels and you've got to show that you're ready to do this and sometimes you have to do planning work before that and people lose momentum because they think it's taking too long.

Sometimes that's how it goes because you have to have this study done to show you've got timeframes, got the money and you know how much something is going to cost because you've done your homework so all that is left is the implementation funding he said.

Mrs. Harris said since the UNH study was done a lot of that was focused on the Village Center infrastructure, the sidewalks and all that and asked if in the past 3 years if there has been anything that has held it up.

Mrs. Morin said a lot of the focus when UNH was here was also on the old fire station lot.

Mr. Pimental said that was done in 2018 or 2020 and this is it (the RFP).

Mrs. Harris said all of that looks familiar from the downtown revitalization plan and they had a town meeting and reviewed all of that.

Mr. Pimental said you hope it wouldn't take 3 years to develop this because we still don't know if we're going to get responses but the planning world is slow. He said if the RFP is released all that planning work that went into this will make for a better project as opposed to selling it off to the highest bidder and you get a gas station or something you don't really want. To go through all of this work it takes time and effort, it can be frustrating but in the end I'm really hopeful that we'll get some responses that will be something the town can be proud of he said. He said some of the other downtown improvements the need and the identity of what those are have already been identified and the next step is to come up with a plan that is very specific with costs and timeframes because you don't want to put in new sidewalks and then in 3 years dig them up because you have to replace a water main. He said if you know you have to do that

phase it and the only way to do that is to do a feasibility analysis of the downtown and get an idea of what the utilities look like and have the downtown planned out and phase it and then start to implement it. Then you know this is going to cost (for example) \$1 million to do this and we can put this money aside but we need to find some grants to do this he said.

Mr. Pimental suggested they start by finding some money to do that study downtown and it could be a high priority for the EDC. He said the Planning Board would also like to have a study done to see what infrastructure improvements are needed.

Mrs. Harris asked if there was any other specific feedback he was looking for regarding the old fire station and people were asked what they would like to see there and they were saying things like breweries, youth centers and things like that.

Mr. Pimental said they have all of that information and they used a lot of it in the RFP but what they were told by SRPC's economic development staff was don't be too specific because that could chase a developer away. He said they provided what is allowed downtown and gave commercial uses examples like retail, restaurants, professional offices and all the things allowed by right and here are the different housing options that are allowed there.

He said they are not prescribing they follow 1 option or another but to stay within the realm of we'd like to see commercial along Main St. with some improvements to the esthetics of the sidewalks and some residential in the back but from there what they want to put there and how they want to set it up is up to them. He said they wanted to balance what the residents said they wanted with you're a developer you figure this out and what the market says.

He said viewing this through the lens of the business community and if they have thoughts on ways they could ensure that the lot is coming across as an attractive place for someone to come in and develop it and there could be things they have heard from business owners or the community in general saying this site is unique because of this that's not in here yet. So other ways you would think that someone would look at it and say I want to build something there because I see opportunities that lens would be really useful for me he said.

Mrs. Harris said there have been requests for a bike system and where the Rails to Trails are there are some groups that have mapped out a couple of networks that could be added.

Mr. Pimental said something else not mentioned in this is if kids can walk to school from there.

Mrs. Morin said it is within walking distance to the schools.

Mr. Pimental said if they read through it and there are opportunities there he would be more than happy to take their feedback.

Mrs. Harris said she has his e-mail and she will share it with the group.

Mrs. Morin said the members will be able to play back the video because it will be on the website.

Mr. Pimental said he would send the report to Mrs. Harris and asked her to share it with the committee. He said he would be happy to keep this group apprised of the larger developments and things they may want or need their support on that may be coming to a certain board and

it could be something different or somewhat controversial but they think is valuable. That feedback to decision makers when decisions are being made is helpful and a group like this to advocate for residents and say we're listening to business owners and we know this is something that they want because they told us and that is why we support this application. Mr. Pimental then told the committee he will be on paternity leave probably starting around March 20 and his office e-mail will go to his Director but if there is any additional short term follow-up to feel free to e-mail him. He said he is hoping to get the RFP to the Select Board by early April so the EDC will have a chance to look at it and the goal is to have it released sooner than later.

The members thanked Mr. Pimental for attending their meeting.

6). Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 11, 2023

7). Adjournment:

Mrs. Harris closed the meeting at 7:38 p.m.

Kathleen Magoon
Recording Secretary



Danielle Harris, Chairman