

**Exeter Economic Development Commission**

**November 22, 2011**

**1. Call Meeting to Order**

Chairman Barry Sandberg convened the meeting at 9:25 am in the Nowak Room of the Town Office Building. Members present were Lizabeth MacDonald, Christine Davis, Brandon Stauber, Madeleine Hamel, Brian Lortie, Town Manager Russ Dean, Town Planner Sylvia von Aulock, Building Inspector Doug Eastman, Planning Board rep. Kathy Corson and Selectman Don Clement.

**2. Approval of minutes**

In asking for approval of the November 8, 2011 meeting minutes, Ms. Hamel noted the correct title of her sub committee work group to be Business Retention and *Expansion*. With the change noted, Ms. Corson made the motion to approve. Mr. Dean seconded. Vote: Unanimous

**3. Discussion/Action Items**

**Reports:** EEDC work groups

- **Marketing and Branding**

Mr. Stauber led off acknowledging members of the sub committee work group: Caroline Amport, Madeleine Hamel and Kathy Corson. He then asked members to refer to the prepared handout highlighting the group's activities. The initial task was to develop preliminary marketing messages for the EEDC primarily but to be encompassing for the Town as it reaches out to businesses; in conversations with prospective businesses as well as what is viewed on Town website.

Next, the group focused on the development of a preliminary site plan for the EEDC as a revised Town website is being planned. Mr. Ferraro and Mr. Clement, working at the Select-level visited the group and outlined the planned design of the website and where the Commission's message would fit within the framework. It seemed imperative the site reflect the marketing message and tools the Commission will be using to recruit, retain and work with existing businesses.

Mr. Stauber continued saying he did not intend to bring up the next topic but felt it was something that was out there and he felt the Commission should be aware of. When members of the group talked with local business and asked of their experience in living and working in Exeter, some adverse comments were received. Mr. Stauber felt if these negative perceptions were out there they should be addressed or it would be counterproductive to the EEDC moving forward. It was not his intent to address the issues but to make the Commission aware of the perceptions.

The comments noted on the handout sparked a number of questions and comments: what was the basis for the comments, who were the responders and the number of responders, the research method, the breakdown of the questions and the appropriateness of the comments to be presented at a public meeting. Mr. Stauber admitted it was a very small and non-scientific survey conducted by himself and one other member of the work group. They spoke with a handful of businesses known personally by them and the responses were in reply to "Exeter is....." Ms. Hamel asked to have the page struck from the report as she was unaware it was being presented and would not have had her endorsement. She felt important to move on with a more positive note as the group spent a great deal of time preparing and developing a website with an economic component: that was to be the primary discussion item before the Commission today. Yes, there was discussion of the comments at the meeting but more of a side conversation. However it does illustrate the need to get out and promote the economic concept being developed by the Commission. There was consensus the comments could have been addressed in a few words to summarize business concerns out in the community.

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Ms. Corson reported the group spent time in developing a logo that best summarized the Town. There was the need for a starting point to get people to think about their community and what they wanted to say; they did not intend to be the authors. Mr. Stauber agreed. The Commission will ultimately endorse the branding statement.

The Chairman acknowledged Mr. Stauber wanting to share the opinions expressed to him and Ms. Amport, but suggested in future presentations, it might be helpful to include the positive feedback as well as the negative so as to create a better balance. Ms. Hamel wished to add after the group reviewed the input received it was resolved that everything presented to the Commission and other committees and any actions taken it has to show we are serious about a pro business attitude. Mr. Stauber agreed and thanked Ms. Hamel.

Moving on, Mr. Stauber noted the next topic for discussion was the four proposed branding statements. The goal was to have the statements reflect the positive comments that captured the diversity of the area, the historic past but a community open to business. The preliminary messages drafted by the working group for EEDC consideration were:

- ❖ **The Hub of New Hampshire's Dynamic Seacoast Economy**  
--positive comments received on the proximity to consumer and retail establishments, industrial activity, location and the diverse economy,
- ❖ **Poised for the Future, Informed By the Past**  
--capturing what is going on in technology development and light industry but are in a historic town that still retains its New England charm
- ❖ **Bridging New England's Historic and Revolutionary Past to the Future**  
--same historical theme
- ❖ **Everything you never knew you were looking for**

Mr. Stauber said they were not prioritized nor are they endorsing a particular statement although members did gravitate to the first two statements. The last message penned by Ms. Amport and a group-favorite, implies the Town is a hidden treasure although there was no direct business message. The group was not looking for any decision today but to consider how they may be revised, edited: to be viewed as a starting point.

Asking for comments, Ms. Davis suggested in statement two, **informed** be replaced with **shaped** showing influenced. Ms. von Aulock suggested viewing other town economic development websites might be helpful for ideas on their logos, tag lines. At one point in Exeter when a committee was pursuing bond money for the acquisition of open spaces the logo was Exeter: A Special Place. And did the Chamber have any logos that had been used in their campaigns. Mr. Clement echoed the suggestion of visiting other web sites saying there is a wealth of information out there. Mr. Stauber stressed this was not an effort to come up with a tag line but to have a philosophy/message that was consistent and prevailed throughout the works of the Commission: perhaps a tag line might evolve out of the message. These prepared statements were a result of looking at other web sites and Ms. Hamel added the group intends to look at the websites of the larger employers to see how they attract prospective employees to their businesses.

Mr. Sandberg noted there are four good suggestions as well as **Exeter: a Special Place** but no decision need be made today. It was suggested members review the statements and offer feedback at a later meeting.

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The discussion turned to the proposed Town website. Mr. Ferraro and Mr. Clement visited with the work group and presented their vision and philosophy of what the new website would encompass. The new site would be activity-driven with **Live**, **Visit**, **Resident**, and **Business** sections. The Commission would be in the **Business** section and pretty much own the content. The sub committee is suggesting the site be entitled “**Work**” as opposed to “**Business**” so to be more action oriented.

There may be overlap of EDC components as links would appear under the **Visit** section as well as the **Live** (Resident) section. In the **Work** section the Commission’s mission statement will appear capturing the philosophy of the group. Most likely the branding statement will also be featured here. A handout listed the contents of this section: rotating photos and business profiles (i.e. success stories) reflecting the range of businesses in Exeter and types of industry it hopes to attract. The four prospective audiences were identified with the subpages under each linking to or sharing relevant information. The audiences targeted were:

- **Existing Businesses**
- **Prospective Businesses**
- **Developers/Site Selection Agents**
- **Work force/prospective employees (strong overlap with the Live section topics)**

Ms. von Aulock said some years ago when the Town wanted to highlight various business for a project they encountered this same situation. It was a problem then and could be a problem now. Is it the Commission’s “job” to pick and choose which business is a success. It poses perhaps a legal and/or an ethical situation; would much prefer to promote the downtown in general, the Epping Road corridor, and the non-profits. She felt this proposed feature should definitely be discussed.

Ms. Davis felt it was possible to do both and do evenly; also good to have “real comments” from “real companies.” Any company could post their comments and could scroll through the section. Mr. Stauber thought perhaps in the Business and Retention survey, companies could be asked if they wished their business be profiled on website. The aim is to highlight economic activity; want people to relate to a business that is already successful and that Exeter is open for business.

Continuing with the site design, Mr. Stauber felt the remainder was self explanatory: the four targeted audiences would have subpages with appropriate pieces of content. The work of the Commission is to be interspersed throughout all the various components of the site map. Mr. Stauber felt the work was ready to be presented to the full Commission for comments and feedback. With a preliminary approval work can start on content and gather additional data to be incorporated.

The Chair asked members to spend some time to go thru the proposal and prepare comments and feedback for the sub committee so hopefully a final version might be had by the end of the year.

Because of time constraints Mr. Lortie was willing to put off his report from the Organization/Capacity-Building sub committee until the December meeting.

- **Business Retention and Expansion**

Reading from the minutes of the November 17, 2011 meeting of the sub committee, Ms. Hamel noted they have been working with the intern, Jason Brown and have received sample pages of the database he is compiling. In review, they did make some requests and recommendations to be passed on to Mr. Brown re: columns on the Excel spreadsheet to be revised or expanded.

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To date there are over five hundred (500) entries including Exeter businesses as well as a small number of properties. It is the goal to have all previously prepared lists come together in one complete central data base. Once complete, sample pages will be brought to Commission for review and comments. Mr. Brown was invited to come and present the data base on a lap top but no response has been received.

A draft of an introductory letter from the EEDC has been prepared and submitted to the Executive Committee for review. Using the prepared data base, the letter initially will be sent to a small number of targeted businesses with the intent of introducing the EEDC and requesting to meet with them: follow up calls will be made to arrange a meeting. As for preparing a broad survey, they wished to start with the one-on-one meetings and possibly host a business forum. She noted there appeared to be an expressed interest at this meeting of drafting a business survey but the group feels the need to initially build a relationship with the business community: determine what kind of relationship the business has with the Town, can we help them and determine if there is an interest in their participating in the group's endeavors. They will continue to work on the data base, the introductory letter and the follow-up meetings.

The Chairman thanked the sub committee for their great work in putting together a plan.

#### **4. Town updates:**

Mr. Dean reported the Selectmen sponsored a resolution supporting the Downeaster and a copy will be emailed to the members. The letter will be going to all Federal representatives advising them of the importance of the Downeaster to the Town and to support the efforts.

#### **5. General Announcements and Next meeting**

Ms. von Aulock suggested any subcommittee group proposing to do a broad survey visit the web site SurveyMonkey.com. Professional surveys and questionnaires can be prepared on line. She found it a very easy tool to use and a good way to reach a large audience. She also suggested the Branding work group go back and develop a questionnaire that might be suitable for SurveyMonkey. Mr. Stauber replied their group does not plan on doing a survey. Ms. Hamel re-iterated the Retention and Expansion group does not plan a survey at this time as they felt it was more important to reach out to the business community in a one-on-one setting. The questions they have are in a survey form and will serve as talking points in the planned meetings. Perhaps in the future a more formal survey will be considered. Ms. von Aulock questioned was not the Branding group to return with some mechanism to gather additional input for the messaging. And also the question if a business was willing to be profiled on the new Town web site. Ms. Davis said she will work on questions taken from sample questionnaires available from her office.

Summarizing the 4-5 issues needed to be fine tuned and wrapped up by the end of year Mr. Sandberg felt it necessary to keep the next scheduled meeting of **Dec. 6, 2011**. Would also like Branding work group to develop another mechanism for getting input, continue to work on the marketing plan and messaging and how to identify what businesses wished to be profiled. The Retention and Expansion group needs to finalize the letter of introduction, the questions to be used as talking points at the meetings, the plans for the meetings and determine which companies will be included in the first mailing. It was suggested both groups be prepared to have a more broad based discussions at next meeting.

Mr. Sandberg will follow up on the Train Station/Lincoln St. project. In the absence of Mr. Briselden and Ms. Field it was uncertain where we are in that process and does the EEDC need to step into a leadership role. When questioned, Mr. Dean answered the Water/Sewer negotiations with Stratham are continuing.

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Ms. von Aulock asked if the Commission wanted an update on construction within the Town in particular business construction. There are two preconstruction meetings planned for December and the Commission might be interested to know how a conceptual plan gets from Planning Dept to the ground. The Chair said he would try to make an opening on the agenda for such a discussion.

Concluding, Mr. Dean reported on a meeting with Sigarms which he felt was very positive and they know the Town is very supportive. Accompanying him at the meeting was Mr. Eastman also a representative of the Town, Mr. Schidlovsky representing the Chamber and Mr. Sandberg; all elements of the Town were there speaking to the firm at the same time. Their parking issue was discussed and multiple plans were reviewed and discussed.

### **7. Adjournment**

With no further business on the agenda, Mr. Dean made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Lortie.

Vote: unanimous.

Meeting adjourned at 9:40 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Ginny Raub  
Recording Secretary