

1. Call Meeting to Order

Chairman Barry Sandberg convened the meeting at 8:20 am in the Nowak Room at the Town Office Building. Members present were: Madeleine Hamel, Lizabeth MacDonald, Christine Davis, Brian Lortie, Len Benjamin, Planning Board rep. Kathy Corson, Town Planner Sylvia von Aulock, Building Inspector Doug Eastman, Selectman rep. Julie Gilman, Selectman Don Clement and Town Manager Russ Dean. Guest: Jason Brown, intern for the EEDC

Mr. Sandberg welcomed Mr. Brown to the meeting and asked the members to introduce themselves. Mr. Brown introduced himself as a graduate student in the MPA program at UNH and as part of the internship requirement for graduation is compiling a data base on the Business Inventory and Available Commercial Property in the Town of Exeter.

2. Approval of Minutes

In asking for approval of the December 6, 2011 draft meeting minutes, Ms. Hamel noted a statement attributed to Ms. Davis was made by *Ms. MacDonald* when referencing the proposed EEDC budget. The Chair then entertained a motion to accept the minutes as amended. Mr. Benjamin moved the minutes be accepted with correction; seconded by Ms. Corson. Vote: unanimous with Ms. Gilman abstaining.

3. Discussion Items

- **Business and Commercial Property Inventory report**

Ms. Hamel credited Mr. Brown (to) as working in depth to develop a data base for the use of the EEDC that will provide important information to support the group in their work. The report contains the data collected, how organized, sources, and areas where there is a need for additional information. Before turning the meeting over to Mr. Brown, Mr. Sandberg also acknowledged this was a high priority item as determined in the Visioning Session and an important piece of business for the Commission and the Town.

The Power Point presentation cited the sources of the compiled information: Chamber of Commerce Business Directory, Downtown Exeter brochure, Town reports and driving through the community. The master sheet noted what the report included but not limited to: name, physical address, mailing address, zoning district and industry categories i.e. food and dining. The Excel format permits each industry category to become a sub type that is more descriptive. To date there are 484 businesses documented.

On the Available Property sheet, Mr. Brown commented his main source for this information was driving throughout the Town. Included but not limited to were: property owner as listed with Town, physical address, zoning, approximate size either sq. footage as in building space or acreage if vacant land, listing realtor, for sale or lease, physical constraints, the availability of water, sewer, and utilities as determined by the Town maps on-line and assessed valuation as determined on Town assessor web page.

A summary stat sheet provided totals for number of businesses and properties, total number of business, number of commercial properties available and businesses by category. The Excel format does allow for groupings by industry, zoning/districts and the format permits expansion. The final sheet summarized the sources for the information.

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To keep the report current will present a challenge as the business activity changes. He recommended one or two persons knowledgeable on the format be allowed to enter information. The suggestion was made to possibly set up two passwords; one to read and access the report and a second that permits editing.

Mr. Dean thanked Mr. Brown for the report noting it was a wonderful start. He felt the resource could be available on the Web so people may see it, understand it and create a feedback mechanism for businesses that might want to be one it or see things differently and contact the Commission. This would and could require frequent updates of the material.

The feeling it was definitely something to be shown to the Chamber was expressed as they may prove instrumental in providing feedback on their businesses. Ms. Hamel stated they hoped to show the report at the Business Forum being planned for 2012. She also noted how the report could be used as a research tool in noting trends, zoning categories, areas requiring upgrades to infrastructure, locations and possible changes (to zoning) based on businesses located in certain areas.

Other discussion points focused on the categories and breaking them down to be more descriptive, and having the report accessible to businesses via a link for them to use as a marketing tool. Ms. Hamel did acknowledge arriving at the valuations listed in the report was tricky and was not certain it was presented in the best and most accurate way. She did meet with Mr. Lortie, Chairman of the Organization and Leadership for Growth sub committee, who is also working with similar figures in compiling a Town property tax analysis. Following the meeting, Mr. Brown did try to refine the numbers working with Mr. Lortie's figures. Mr. Lortie had questions for Mr. Brown on the methods used to determine the dollar amounts to possibly account for the discrepancies in the valuation amounts. It was noted assessed valuation for tracts of land not currently available for sale or lease and zoned commercial are not reflected in the reports total and could contribute some to valuation discrepancies.

Ms. Gilman asked if any thought was given to noting which properties were located in the Historic District as that is an overlay to the zoning and doesn't show up in the listing. Discussion followed on other possible overlay districts and their restrictions i.e. Historic District, wetlands, flood plain districts. Ms. von Aulock felt any listing of these types of restrictions may not always be accurate and present the full picture. Mr. Benjamin felt a disclaimer could be added noting the properties may be subject to use restrictions and the Planning Office should be contacted for additional details. Ms. Corson agreed and felt each property should be reviewed individually and if desired seek guidance from the Planning Office.

Ms. von Aulock requested a copy of the present report in any form for her staff to review and possibly supply some additional information. Ms. Hamel stated they did want more follow up with the Town offices and the personnel for their individual input. Mr. Sandberg asked Ms. Hamel to coordinate with the Offices and the Board of Selectmen to review the report on paper or with a presentation for feedback and bring back any recommendations. Mr. Brown stated he would forward the report if supplied with email addresses.

On behalf of the Commission, Mr. Sandberg thanked Jason for his work done during this first term. The group certainly has a better handle of what the Town looks like and the potential uses for the data. He anticipates the members can begin to think more proactively and he looked forward to continuing to work with him. Ms. Hamel was also thanked for her leadership role in this project.

4. Town Updates

- **Ioka Theater**

Ms. Gilman re-iterated the sale of the Ioka Theater at auction earlier in the month. The new owner is working with the Exeter Theater Company, a non-profit group formed about two and a half years ago with a mission to revitalize the theater as a performing arts center. In an effort to gain input on what the community would like to see for the theater, two informational, town-hall style meetings are scheduled for January: an evening on Wednesday January 18 and a morning meeting on Saturday January 21. The theater group is asking the EEDC if they would be willing to host a meeting at the Town Hall. The meeting format will be an introduction, then to break off into small discussion groups coming together at the end for a summary. Invitations would be extended to nearby communities with similar groups to share their experiences. The Heritage Commission has agreed to host one of the meetings.

After discussion on the proposed informational hearing, Mr. Sandberg's recommendation to have the EEDC host the Saturday morning meeting was made into a formal motion by Ms. MacDonald. The motion re-stated asked the EEDC to host a community input focus meeting on the morning of January 21 with a contact person from the Commission to work with Ms. Gilman on details to be determined. A small budget will be dedicated for refreshments. Motion seconded by Ms. Corson. Vote: unanimous. Following the vote, Ms. MacDonald agreed to be the contact person for the EEDC.

- **Discussion of Town Proposed ER Zone**

Ms. Davis contacted Mr. Dean regarding a message received (at DRED) from an expanding Exeter employer interested in an ER zone being established on the Epping Road. Further investigation and discussions determined it would be important and a measure of good faith on behalf of the Town and the EEDC to bring this forward to try to make something happen. Within a limited amount of time and with the assistance of DRED, Ms. von Aulock prepared a draft of a Proposed ER zone for Exeter. The handout distributed defined an ER zone as a short-term, tax credit against the business profits and enterprise taxes; a program administered by NH Economic Revitalization Zone Tax Credits Program.

The handout locating the proposed ER Corridor on the Epping Road contained maps of the area and area descriptions. In all, approximately 624 acres comprise the corridor and the area was divided into two sections-with the second section being divided into two sub groups with explanations for each division. The eligibility requirements were listed along with a statement of justification for an ER Zone.

Mr. Dean felt personally this was an area that funds from the EEDC account could be used to have an outside firm review the draft for input and feedback.. Ms. von Aulock mentioned she had worked with Mr. Robert Berry at DRED and found his guidance to be helpful and perhaps he could review the draft to see what additional information is needed.

Mr. Dean remarked it is a draft and after a review he hoped to receive the support of the EEDC and the Planning Board and then bring forward to Selectmen for the posted hearing process and adoption. Discussion then focused on utilizing the services of Mr. Barry at DRED in lieu of paying a consultant. The question was posed what would be the negative of adopting an ER zone. Ms. Davis responded none financially to the Town; only if the zones are overdone as you are looking for businesses to come in and revitalize a business/property. Too many of these zones send the message the town is a mess.

Because time seems to be of the essence, Ms. Corson made the motion for the EEDC to provide up to one-thousand dollars (\$1,000.00), if needed, towards the development of the ER Zone Tax Credit application package. The decision would be made by the Executive Committee following the review

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comments from Mr. Barry. Mr. Benjamin seconded. Further comments stated it would be good to have the incentives in place when meeting with businesses and Ms. Corson noted the proposed letter of introduction could cite the ER Zone. In calling for a vote; motion carried.

Mr. Sandberg thanked Mr. Dean and Ms. von Aulock for their efforts and Ms. von Aulock for the timely manner in preparing the application package and the presentation.

5. General Announcements

In a memo to Mr. Dean and BOS, Police Chief Kane proposed adopting an ordinance for second-hand dealers and pawn shops that would require annual permitting and other stipulations. Ms. von Aulock had some concerns on such an ordinance and asked for follow up from the EEDC on the proposal. Mr. Dean noted this was in the early stages and invited review and feedback. Mr. Sandberg said the Executive Committee would work with the Town Manager's office to determine where the ordinance was in the review process and when the appropriate time might be to place on agenda for discussion and review.

After posing a question of interest, Mr. Sandberg asked Mr. Benjamin if he was willing to work with Mr. Dean and Ms. von Aulock to track the proposed ordinance, see where it was in the process and when it needs to come back to the Commission for discussion: Mr. Benjamin agreed to do so.

Mr. Dean stated the contract has been signed for the Train Station Baggage Building and will be returned to DOT for countersignatures. This allows the Town to move forward with a scoping meeting for this project and an appraisal leading to the actual acquisition of the property.

Mr. Dean attended a joint training session with Maine Town Managers on Form Based Codes (FBC). He became better acquainted with this tool that can help shape a community in the use of zoning and developing. Currently there is an ongoing discussion on FBC with a subcommittee of the Zoning Review Ordinance Committee (ZORC) and felt the Commission should keep abreast of the topic.

Also Mr. Dean felt the EEDC should think more about the downtown parking issue. Perhaps there should be a group to revisit this project and used the Town of Dover as an example of how that Town addressed their parking issues. Also, there is the need to get back to work on the downtown improvement project and Ms. von Aulock could give a presentation to the group of its history. There is also the conceptual issue of a downtown parking garage and where the process was at one time: need to bring back and discuss. There is the need to create a revenue stream to re-invest back into the downtown.

Mr. Sandberg took the opportunity to thank the Commission for their hard work and to Mr. Dean, Ms. von Aulock, their staff and the Board of Selectmen for their work and support. It has been a productive year and great inroads have been made and felt the group was in great shape for the challenges in 2012.

6. Meeting Schedule for January

Meetings will be held on January 10 and January 24, 2012 at 8:15am.

7. Adjournment

Ms. MacDonald moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:45. Ms. Corson seconded. Vote: unanimous

Respectfully submitted,
Ginny Raub, Recording Secretary