

Minutes approved October 11, 2011
Meeting of Exeter Economic Development Commission
EDC MEETING MINUTES **August 16, 2011**

1. Call Meeting to Order

Chairman Barry Sandberg convened the meeting at 8:19am in the Nowak Room of the Town Office Building. Other members present were: Vice Chair Caroline Amport, Secretary Beth MacDonald, Town Manager Russell Dean, Building Inspector Doug Eastman, Town Planner Sylvia von Aulock, Don Briselden, Madeleine Hamel, Selectwoman Julie Gilman, Brandon Stauber, Allison Field, Selectman Don Clement, and Bill Campbell.

2. Approval of minutes

One amendment was made to the minutes.

Ms. Gilman moved to approve the minutes of the July 26, 2011 meeting as amended. Ms. Davis seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

3. Announcements

Mr. Dean said that the Board of Selectmen have appointed Selectmen Aldrich and Clement to continue talks with Stratham regarding Water/Sewer issues. Mr. Dean also said that the Capital Improvement Projects were presented last week and it will be online soon for everyone's review. He said that there are 2 items of interest to the EDC: \$40,000 for the possible TIF project and \$44,000 for parking kiosks where the revenue would help to fund capital projects in the areas of the kiosks.

Ms. Gilman reported that the Heritage Commission has decided on a Winter Street power purchase rebid that is due on August 22. Selectmen Clement and Ferraro are beginning work on the website improvements by identifying who should be involved and how to proceed.

Ms. Hamel introduced, Dr. Elizabeth Robinson, a former colleague when they both were associated with the San Antonio Economic Development Commission. Presently, Dr. Robinson is with the Canadian Trade Commission in Raleigh, NC.

4. Discussion/Action Items

a. New Business

Mr. Briselden introduced today's guest speaker, David Choate, Executive Vice President of Grubb and Ellis Northern New England and welcomed him to the meeting. Mr. Choate thanked the EDC for inviting him to speak and began by saying that Exeter is a great location from a real estate standpoint. He said that Exeter has a lot of available locations now and if Exeter wants some ideas to stimulate commercial real estate they should build on what is already going on and review zoning to optimize choices for businesses. Although there are always constraints, Exeter seems to have a reputation for development problems such as wetlands issues, and that even if that is not the fact, the perception is still there.

Mr. Choate said that in real estate, timing is important, so the Town has to be ready when the market is. Epping Road needs to be zoned to allow for large development, sewer that extends all the way to route 101, and an understanding that retail drives everything and increases traffic. Ms. von Aulock said that the zoning in the Route 101 area was not the reason that Wal-Mart did not build here, it was the height of available land in relation to the highway that did not allow for enough visibility. Mr. Choate also noted that Epping Road does not look good, and that the demand for commercial space is low right now.

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Mr. Dean said that he does not believe that developers are knowledgeable about the actual traffic counts on Epping Road, and that since the high school was built the traffic has increased a lot. He thinks that Epping Road needs a pioneer to be the first one to build there, but that it will be hard because land owners in the area think that their land is worth more than it is. Mr. Dean also mentioned Gateway Zoning, which is an attempt to create a gateway vista through landscaping as well as creating good looking storefronts with parking behind to beautify the view. Mr. Choate agreed that making Epping Road more attractive could help to stimulate the area.

In reference to TIF districts, Mr. Choate said that there are not a lot of them in New Hampshire because they are not valuable if there is no land to develop. There is a perception that the closed dealership on Epping Road was a difficult property to deal with because of constraints placed on it by the owners of the property, but that he is not sure what the ownership status of the property is right now.

Mr. Briselden asked about the general perception of Exeter in the real estate business, saying that prior speakers have mentioned that Exeter has to appear to be 'open for business' and ready to help in the process. Mr. Choate said that Exeter is a great location and that it has a good reputation in the industry. The market for offices is brisk, and could be a source of development in the future for Exeter, but that there is no high demand for commercial space right now. Ms. Amport asked if we could somehow create a demand. Mr. Choate said that the town may want to develop an inventory of available spaces and properties and possibly put it on the website or market it somehow. Mr. Sandberg noted that Exeter is very accessible to Route 101 as well as Route 95, and Mr. Choate also noted that there are 4 exits off of Route 101 in Exeter, so it eliminates a lot of traffic issues of getting in and out of town. Mr. Choate said that he would spend \$40,000 on an inventory before he would spend it on a TIF district.

Ms. Field asked if the tax rate in Exeter is a concern for businesses, and Mr. Choate said he did not believe so. He said that the things that make a development difficult are items like Planning and Zoning meetings. There are a number of towns that will help to move things along and get projects approved in 1 Planning or Zoning meeting. The towns that have a lot of processes and red tape are less likely to attract development. There is really no demand for commercial real estate in places like Rye and North Hampton because they are more isolated, and Exeter is chosen over other surrounding communities oftentimes.

Mr. Choate said that he thinks it is important for the existing businesses to be recognized by the Town, to feel appreciated for their contribution to the community in the form of tax revenue and jobs offered, and to let them know that the Town is here to help them to be successful. Mr. Sandberg thanked Mr. Choate for making time to speak with the EDC today.

Ms. Amport said that she does not want to fall into the idea that the Town needs 'just one big one' in the form of a large company to develop in the Epping Road area or anywhere else in town. In reality, she thinks it is more likely that the development of the targeted areas will be a number of small businesses. Ms. Davis agreed and said that she is still working to connect with Sig Sauer to see what their future plans are.

Mr. Dean noted that many NH towns are recipients of CDBG Grants for economic development. Ms. Field noted that the availability of property is high but that financing is difficult right now because the appraise values are not reaching the sale prices. Ms. MacDonald suggested that a subcommittee should start working on a property inventory. Mr. Stauber suggested that an employee needs to pull this

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information together, and Ms. Hamel said that she was hoping to get an intern to do this type of research.

Mr. Stauber mentioned a survey that was conducted for businesses in Santa Rosa to see why businesses located there. Ms. Hamel said that after the visioning session the EDC would be trying to meet with businesses to improve relations and see what the Town could do to help them. Ms. Field said that the Chamber of Commerce can help to develop a list of the top 25 businesses.

5. Meeting Schedule Review

The next meeting will be in two weeks, Tuesday, August 30, 2011 at 8:15am. The visioning session is September 12 at the Library. Ms. Amport and Ms. MacDonald are getting information to the Arnett Group for their preparations for the visioning session. Mr. Sandberg said that he received an email from Mr. Kunz asking that the visioning session be changed to a late afternoon or early evening. Ms. Amport said that finding a time that everyone was available would be almost impossible and suggested that the meeting time remain the same. Mr. Stauber wondered if there was an option to conference call people who could not make it, but it is not known what the equipment the Library has.

6. Adjournment

Ms. Gilman motioned to adjourn at 9:35. Ms. Amport seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Kelly Geis
Recording Secretary