

**Minutes approved with minor corrections
at February 21, 2012 EEDC meeting**

Exeter Economic Development Commission

January 31, 2012

1. Call Meeting to Order

Chairman Barry Sandberg convened the meeting at 8:20 am in the Nowak Room of the Town Office Building. Members present were: Len Benjamin, Brian Lortie, Caroline Amport, Madeleine Hamel, Selectman rep. Julie Gilman, Planning Board rep. Kathy Corson, Town Planner Sylvia von Aulock, Building Inspector Doug Eastman, Selectman Don Clement and Town Manager Russ Dean.

Jason Brown, intern for the EEDC was also in attendance.

2. Approval of Minutes

- Following a brief period for members to review the minutes, Mr. Sandberg asked for any corrections or amendments. There being none, he asked for approval of the draft minutes for the January 10, 2012 meeting. Ms. Amport motioned to accept the minutes as presented; seconded by Mr. Benjamin. Vote carried with Ms. Corson and Mr. Lortie abstaining. (Ms. Hamel was not present for the motion.)

3. Discussion/Action Items

- **Chamber of Commerce Breakfast Forum: Economic Forecast 2012**

Several members of the Commission were in attendance for the presentation by Dr. Ross Gittell: **New Hampshire Economic Outlook**. Dr. Gittell expressed cautious optimism on the area and State's economic recovery. The forecast for the US and regional economy is for slow growth in 2012 and for the economy not to pick up momentum and growth until after 2012. Concerns expressed by businesses represented at the Forum were the high costs of energy, health care and obtaining skilled labor. As Dr. Gittell assumes the role of Chancellor of the Community College System of NH on February 1, 2012, he focused some on the idea of training a workforce whose skills are a strong match with the needs of industry and cited the re-location of Albany International to Rochester, NH and the job training provided to supply trained workers for the needed new positions with the company.

Mr. Sandberg suggested perhaps Dr. Gittell might come and address the EEDC at a later date.

- **The Exeter Theater Company (IOKA) Visioning Sessions**

Ms. Gilman thanked the EEDC for sponsoring and for the members participating at the Saturday, January 21, 2012 session. In spite of the snowstorm, it was well attended and a great deal of input was received on what the community would like to see for the theater.

Business planning is the next step and Ms. Gilman commented that in other towns where similar revitalization projects were done, the towns became members. Discussion followed on membership and the different fiscal membership levels. Ms. Amport emphasized all membership monies received will be held in escrow and not used for salaries, operating expenses etc. If the goal of 1000 members is not reached by March 31, 2012, the monies will be returned. It was recommended this information be re-enforced as it may be a deciding factor for individuals' or businesses' willingness to contribute to the project.

Ms. Hamel asked as a potential economic generator, would it not be appropriate for this Commission to show its support by becoming a member. And is it an appropriate use of funds?

Mr. Benjamin felt it was an appropriate use of funds; a not-for-profit organization project in the heart of downtown.

Ms. Amport stressed presently the emphasis is securing 1000 members before a March 31, 2012 deadline as an indicator of community support for such a project. The dollar amount of the membership is not critical at this time.

**Minutes approved with minor corrections
at February 21, 2012 EEDC meeting**

Ms. Corson questioned where do we stop? She supports the project but has concerns it may set a precedent for other non-profits to approach the EEDC for financial support; was just putting it out there for discussion.

Ms. von Aulock had concerns with the number of members not in attendance. Would like it be noted a discussion was had on supporting the project and will be discussed at a future meeting to allow time members to determine if the EEDC should become a member; felt it was certainly something to consider but would like to see if it is supported.

As for the use of municipal funds for contributing to non-profits, Mr. Dean noted that over the years the Town has allocated funds to many non profit and social service agencies through the municipal budget i.e. American Independence Museum, the Historical Society, funding for Christmas lights through the Chamber of Commerce. At this time, he felt it was up to the Treasurer to tell the group: does it fit the mission within the ordinance of the EEDC, are the funds available and then it is up to EEDC to decide if they wish to support the project and how much do they wish to contribute.

Treasurer Lortie responded that it appeared to be a good fit, the funds are there and it is a membership not a donation.

After hearing the possible options from the Chair, a motion was proposed by Ms. Hamel for the EEDC to become a member of the Exeter Theater Company. Considering the economic potential of the project for the community she would prefer it be at the \$1000 level. Mr. Benjamin suggested the motion be in the form of two votes: a vote to become a member and the dollar amount voted as a separate motion. Ms. Hamel modified her motion to state: **for the EEDC to become a member of the non profit organization, the Exeter Theater Company.** Motion was seconded by Mr. Benjamin. Vote carried with Ms. Gilman abstaining.

In discussion of the funding level, Ms. Corson motioned: **to join (the Exeter Theater Company) at the \$100 level and as the project progresses the EEDC will re-examine their financial commitment.** Seconded by Ms. Amport.

In discussion on the motion, Ms. Hamel asked Mr. Dean if the downtown building was eligible for any grant funding. Ms. Gilman replied NH Division of Historical Resources (DHR) does have a tax relief program for renovation to commercial property. There are some grants out there but State funds for preservation are limited. Mr. Dean added that what the final use is for the building will determine whether it fits into the guide lines of certain redevelopment programs.

With no further discussion, the Chairman called for the vote. Motion carried with Ms. Gilman abstaining. **The EEDC is now a member of the Exeter Theater Company at the \$100 level; the level of funding to be reviewed at a future time.**

- **ER Zone application**

The Chair asked for any update on the application for an ER Zone supported by a vote at the January 10, 2012 meeting. Mr. Dean stated a few minor changes were made to the application (lot and map numbers for all undeveloped or partially developed properties were added) and the application is on the Town web site for viewing as an attempt to get the word out.

It has not been seen by the Planning Board but will most likely be on their February agenda. Following their review and comments it will be sent on to the Board of Selectmen for their approval. With that, Ms. Davis will be asked to deliver the application to the appropriate parties at DRED.

Minutes approved with minor corrections at February 21, 2012 EEDC meeting

Mr. Dean commented that following approval a brochure on the program will be developed as a marketing tool, be put on line and given to prospective businesses considering locating to the area. Realtors will be contacted as well and signage developed for the Epping Road corridor.

When queried, Mr. Dean stated once DRED has approved the application an interested party would contact DRED, advise them of what they wished to do and then the final decision would be made by that agency to determine if they qualify for the State tax credit program.

- **EEDC Financial report**

Treasurer, Brian Lortie working from distributed copies of the last quarter/year end financial report walked the members through the report noting the headings and pertinent entries. The year end balance shown on the report was \$23, 539.40. It was explained every five (5) years the Treasurer/Commission must register with the NH Secretary of State and that was done in 2011 so the Commission is current with their required filings.

The Chair felt no formal motion was needed to approve the financial report but to note the submission by the Treasurer of a financial statement for the EEDC for year-end 2011 and to be attached in the Commission's documents for the year.

Work group updates

- In the absence of Mr. Stauber, Chairman of the **Branding and Marketing** sub committee there was no update. Mr. Sandberg did inquire of Mr. Clement on the status of the web development project. Mr. Clement replied he and Selectman Ferraro are finalizing the RFP to be sent out shortly. As for a time line: with the necessary steps going as scheduled a vendor could be selected by March or April. There is \$10,000 appropriated in the Town 2012 municipal budget for the project.

Ms. Corson questioned if the Commission wished to elaborate/modify the EEDC site, could Commission funds be used to supplement the web site development. Mr. Dean replied the proposal still needed to be worked through the Budget process but felt if the EEDC wished to do so it would be an appropriate use of the funds.

Mr. Sandberg will ask Mr. Stauber and Ms. Amport to consider this as the EEDC web page development is a component of the Branding and Marketing subcommittee work plan.

Mr. Clement and Mr. Sandberg stressed the need for the EEDC "landing page" to have the look and feel of the Exeter home page; messages to be consistent. How to populate the EEDC page is up to the Commission but it would be helpful to assemble the material prior to the RFP being finalizes to give the prospective vendor an idea of what tasks are to be considered.

Mr. Sandberg re-iterated that at an earlier meeting the coordinators of the three working groups were asked to think through their plans and put down the financial resources needed to accomplish their goals that could be discussed by the Commission as a whole.

Ms. Hamel stressed the web page is expected to be a primary marketing tool for the EEDC and wants to do a thorough job in its development so it serves its purpose to promote Exeter for business and business retention.

- **Business Retention and Expansion**

Ms. Hamel provided an update from the working group's meeting on January 19, 2012. The Commission's letter of introduction to the business community received a final review. Time was devoted to choosing businesses from the newly prepared business data base to receive the introductory letter. Drawing on Mr. Eastman's knowledge of the area and its businesses he assisted in forming the

Minutes approved with minor corrections at February 21, 2012 EEDC meeting

list. It was desired to have the businesses represent a cross section of the geographical area, the size and types of the businesses. The list also includes individual property development representatives from the commercial realtors and individual property developers. Presently, contact names for the listed businesses are being sought. It is the intent to mail the letter out by the middle of February.

The focus of the letter is to introduce the Commission to the business community. The one page letter also states a member of the working group would like to meet with the company representative and convey the goals and objectives of the Commission and the plans to them. There will be the opportunity to have input from them and hear back their needs, concerns and recommendations. And also to encourage their participation in our (EEDC) projects and the work it is doing. After the letter goes out the group will meet to divide up the businesses for visitation and start to make appointments with those individuals. Anyone from the Commission is more than welcomed to help with the meetings. The next meeting will continue the preparation work in refining the topics and questions presented at these meetings.

Ms. von Aulock expressed her concern on going out into the community and the questions being asked. Is it in a survey form? Would there be a formal report? Ms. Corson explained the visits are basically to say we're here and how can we help you. Ms. Davis has from her office a suggested list of talking points that may be referenced in the conversation. Ms. Corson stressed the visits are not being scheduled with every business in Town nor with the largest businesses or major organizations nor any business actively meeting with the Town.

Ms. Amport expressed her feeling of the importance the individuals representing an entity are actually representing the group and not just their individual perspective.

Ms. Hamel continued presenting the next steps the working group would be doing. A question was posed would she be returning to the Commission with the draft script and talking points for the full group to review and possibly offer some insight or comments.

Mr. Dean also felt the full Commission needs to know the list of the businesses and the outreach that is taking place. It is critical the whole group see this and have the assurance that what is being said reflects the types of things the Commission is working for.

Mr. Sandberg summarized by noting the Commission spoke earlier this year of ways to try to standardize some processes in that before there was any surveying or talking points in the community there would be the opportunity to review that as a full group, so as to have quality assurance built into that, some opportunity for feedback; looking and working for consistency.

Ms. Amport spoke of her wanting to actually see what was discussed and decided at the working group's meetings and not just here about it. Would want to see the various questions prepared for the various businesses and if there is a handout being left with the host business would want to see that as well.

Ms. von Aulock expressed her concern that there be a distinction between the EEDC and any of the Town departments; that the representative making the contact is representing the Commission. Can suggest or provide an appropriate contact to address any concerns or questions they may have regarding Town policies and not making promises or concessions.

**Minutes approved with minor corrections
at February 21, 2012 EEDC meeting**

Ms. Corson suggested reviewing the prepared list and removing any businesses in the proposed ER Zone until after the application became approved. They then could schedule meetings to introduce the ER Zone to those businesses within the zone.

The sub committee will meet and fine-tune their materials for presentation at the next meeting.

- **Organization/Capacity –Building**

Mr. Lortie reported he and committee member Ms. MacDonald had met to review his prepared report on the Town of Exeter Property Tax Analysis. Copies of the report were distributed to the members; had also been sent electronically at an earlier date. He recapped what he thought the tax base of the Town was, but the dollar amounts were not confirmed. What he determined as the general make up for the Town was 74% of the tax base is residential, 20% commercial and 5% industrial. He is unsure where to go from here and what value it might have to the Commission. Was also not certain what criteria were used for the different designations/categories. Because of a pending commitment Mr. Lortie was unable to discuss the report in more detail. The Chair thanked Mr. Lortie for the report and added it will be reviewed further and how to use this information.

4. Town Announcements

Mr. Dean reported on:

- Job Fair to be held Thursday, February 9 at the Town Hall from 9:30 am-3:00pm.
- Will be meeting with the listing agent for the former Friendly's restaurant. If members had any comments or input they wished to convey to contact his office
- Exeter/Stratham water/sewer study is moving forward. The firm of *Kleinfelder S E A* consulting engineers were selected by the RPC working with the two towns on the study. It is presently in the data gathering phase.
- Baggage building presently going forward with the appraisal process
- Saturday, February 4, 2012 is the Deliberative Session at the Exeter High School. The warrant articles are on line for viewing. Several articles are water and sewer related and do have economic development benefits
- Signage to be developed with Mr. Eastman for the intersection of Holland Way and the Hampton Rd. in an effort to attract potential occupants for a building that has been vacant for some time.
- Other business openings/re-locations within the Town

5. General Announcements

Ms. Amport announced because of increasing work commitments she was submitting her resignation from the EEDC effective February 1, 2012. She enjoyed her time spent with the EEDC and the work done but does not feel she can participate at the level she feels is needed and desired.

Mr. Sandberg wished to acknowledge Caroline's (Amport) importance to the Commission throughout the year. She has been as trusted confidant and advisor and a driving force for the Visioning Session. Her wisdom and guidance will be missed; hopes to bring her back in a volunteer position.

Mr. Sandberg also commented because recent meetings have extended beyond the stated meeting times, the meeting format will be reviewed and discussed at next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for February 14, 2012 8:15 am

6. Adjournment at 9:50 am

Respectfully submitted,
Ginny Raub, Recording Secretary