

Exeter Economic Development Commission

August 14, 2012

1. Call meeting to order

Chairman Barry Sandberg convened the meeting at 8:05 am in the Nowak Room of the Exeter Town office building. Members present were Lizabeth MacDonald, Brandon Stauber, Madeleine Hamel, Christine Davis and Town Manager Russ Dean. Also in attendance: Building Inspector Doug Eastman, Town Planner Sylvia von Aulock and interns Tom Lamb and Betsy Bilharz.

2. Approval of minutes

Prior to accepting the minutes for approval, Mr. Sandberg reviewed the agenda for the meeting; at this time recognized Ms. Davis.

Ms. Davis announced she accepted the position of Economic Planner for the Town of Somersworth and in doing so must resign as a member of the Exeter Economic Development Commission. However she is still an Exeter resident and hopes if she can be of assistance members will reach out to her as she is willing to help offline. (Her new contact info is cdavis@somersworth.com).

Mr. Sandberg, on behalf of the Commission, acknowledged her efforts in helping to make some important connections to the State, working with the Business and Retention and Expansion subcommittee in getting the outreach materials together and for helping to take the Commission to the next level; she will be missed.

In reviewing the minutes for the July 10, 2012 meeting, several corrections were noted. Feeling the minutes reflected the activity of the meeting, the Chair asked for a motion. Ms. MacDonald motioned to accept the draft minutes with the corrections; seconded by Ms. Davis. Motion carried.

3. Discussion/Action Items

- ***Branding and Marketing***

Mr. Stauber turned the presentation on the EEDC web site development over to Ms. Bilharz. Referencing the prepared handouts, Ms. Bilharz asked members to view the side bar (Business Menu) of the Business home page. To date, the emphasis has been on developing content; formatting will follow when the layout of the Town page is finalized.

The additional two handouts were representations of referenced topics on the Menu from the Business Home page. Feedback from members on the printouts varied from priority of financial resources, bulleted information, more information on Town geographic location (maps, proximity and access to metropolitan areas, Amtrak stop), availability of municipal services and pictures with people/activity. Mr. Sandberg asked the interns to review the work with Planning Department to ensure ease of navigating the site and links.

The Town Manager acknowledged the work of Ms. Bilharz and Mr. Lamb saying it was a great step forward; something the Town has not had before. The (*content management*) engine being used for the site is very flexible and will permit changes/additions to the site. Mr. Dean said the web site

development is well on its way and as to when it will be “live”; possibly by the end of September but only when all are satisfied it would not be withdrawn because of oversights or omissions.

- ***Business Retention and Expansion***

Ms. Hamel reported the subcommittee met with the interns and addressed a concern expressed in past meetings; the need for assistance in maintaining the prepared data base. They have taken this on and are updating the spread sheet with the information learned from the business visitations.

Also, asked for them to look at the data base as a whole and determined what economic analysis could be derived with the addition of the material garnered from the recent business visits; anticipating the data will be helpful in future marketing efforts and in targeting economic development. Although the 16 to 20 business visited is a small representation of the total number of listed businesses it was a step in determining how to integrate and retain the information gathered. Ms. Hamel felt the analysis is coming together and good economic information is being revealed from the data base

At the same meeting, the next round of business meetings set for the fall was discussed with the focus on those businesses on the Epping Road. How to best get the information on the ER Zone out to the applicable businesses was also discussed; to follow the same procedure or a combination of different ideas. Also, the property owners on the Epping Road will be included when talking about the ER Zone. After the next work group meeting, will come back to the Commission with the draft list and recommendations how to proceed. Mr. Sandberg spoke of how to reach the Epping Road businesses/property owners as an agenda item for September meeting; be it a series of roundtable meeting, small forum or group meeting.

Also, even before the announced resignation of subcommittee member, Ms. Davis, there was an expressed need for additional volunteers. It is the intent to approach individuals met during the businesses visits that expressed an interest the group’s work and ask if they wished volunteer for this subcommittee or serve on the Commission.

Mr. Sandberg praised the progress of the work group and felt if no tangible results have emerged a tremendous amount of goodwill has been generated by the business visits.

- ***Organization and Capacity Building***

Mr. Sandberg reported he and Ms. MacDonald have conversed on the formation of an Economic Development chapter for the Town Master Plan but is not in the forefront at this time. It is still the intent to meet with the Newmarket Planning officials to talk more on their process to aid in composing a similar chapter for the Town Master Plan.

Although unable to attend the meeting, Mr. Lortie and his work group are focusing on taxes and property data base. As for working with the prepared data base, Mr. Lamb stated he and Ms. Bilharz have not had an opportunity to meet with the group. Ms. Bilharz stated she has been working for the Business and Retention work group in sorting the businesses into categories then calculating the percentage of where the major industries are based. The data base lists the businesses but does not

include number of employees. With the help of a web site giving ranges for the number of employees for a type of industry, numbers have been assigned. Although not entirely accurate, the range does work for the group's purpose; helps to balance out the number of businesses vs. how large.

Ms. Hamel added Ms. Bilharz's work breaks down the areas by zones and within those zones, by industry and size; illustrates what commercial operations are present, what may be lacking, existing clusters of certain operations and can these areas be filled in. The work is not done but Ms. Hamel hoped the report could be published; felt the Town might find interesting.

Mr. Dean added this type of self-analysis will illustrate what we do have, what we don't have and can we get it; does it make sense. It will also be of help in putting together a marketing strategy and working within what we do have to create better districts. This level of analysis is specific to Exeter; not available anywhere else. Hopefully the report will be ready to share with the Commission in the fall.

- ***Other business***

At the July EEDC meeting a motion was approved to draft a letter of support for the Exeter Hospital: Ms. MacDonald questioned if the letter was ever sent out. Ms. von Aulock stated she did prepare a draft and sent it on electronically for review but did not receive any response. Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Sandberg replied they did not see it in their Inbox. It was agreed to resend the statement for Executive Committee review before it is released to the press.

4. Town updates/announcements

Mr. Dean reported the Town did meet with the owners of Al's Automotive Services on the Epping Road and discussed their plans for development of the property. A development plan for the property was proposed a number of years ago but was never initiated. They are aware of the plan but no action is planned at this time.

- **TIF discussion**

Returning to the idea of a TIF district, Mr. Dean re-iterated it is one way other towns achieved downtown improvements by creating a TIF district within their downtown around a parcel that has not had any development; in this instance, the vacant lot across from The Mill complex. He noted that 100% of the revenues, (from the development) go back into that TIF district for improvements.

He would like to start talking with the BOS soon, as development (at the Chestnut St. site) has not started. There is this potential for addressing some of the downtown issues i.e. sidewalks, curbing, without tapping into tax-derived revenues; feels an idea worth exploring. Because a TIF district needs to be approved by the voters on a March ballot and recognizing the need for a great deal of discussion, understanding and education, timing is of utmost importance. Drafting the language can be accomplished readily; it is the public process that is important. The Chinburg Group is aware this is an interest of the Town and he is not opposed (to the creation of a TIF district) and he also understands the parcel can be developed regardless.

Mr. Stauber questioned if by creating a TIF district and having revenue derived from development returned to the TIF district are we taking away funds from the general fund. Mr. Dean explained often they are set up for a specific time and definite projects. If after the designated time and the project(s) completed the remaining funds are returned to the general fund. The TIF is a tool to target specific projects otherwise funded by general funds/bond issues. He recounted the history of proposed downtown sidewalk improvements; both times proposals were unsuccessful.

Ms. von Aulock added nothing is being taken away; the baseline value for taxation remains but the tax revenue generated by the increased value of the developed property goes to the TIF district for a designated length of time. As for downtown improvements, how do you fund them: parking meters, general funds, TIF funds?

Discussion continued on the function of and merits of a TIF district; specifically a TIF district in/for the downtown improvements. Mr. Stauber spoke to other policy options, what are other economic paths and the economic impacts of each and what role should the Commission play.

Wrapping up the discussion, Mr. Sandberg felt this conversation represented a microcosm of the feelings/opinions out in the community. Mr. Dean agreed saying it was a great discussion and great points. He encouraged members to look at other town websites--Durham, Keene, Peterborough--and see what they are doing; acknowledged he will be bringing the topic to BOS to begin to get educated and start a discussion but wanted to have the basics in place before doing so.

- Exeter/Stratham water study

The draft report looking at the feasibility of the two communities to share a water and wastewater system is complete and may be viewed by going to the Town website and clicking on the listed link. A public discussion to solicit feedback is to be held Tuesday August 21, 2012 at 7:00 pm at the Stratham Municipal Center. Mr. Dean encouraged the members to look at it and review.

- Web site development

Adding to the earlier discussion Mr. Dean wanted the EEDC keep in mind there will be the need for maintaining and updating the Business page when the Town web site is up and running. This also applies to all of the other Commission initiatives. The Commission is fortunate to have had the services of interns to assist and provide support in the recent tasks but thought must be given to on-going support.

5. General announcements

No additional announcements at this time

6. Next Meeting: September 11, 2012

In discussing possible agenda items it was suggested to have a representative from the Rockingham Economic Development Corporation (REDC) come and speak on the 2011 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) update and how the report was generated. Ms. Laurel Bistany serves as its

Executive Director with their office here in Exeter on Industrial Drive. Mr. Sandberg will contact Ms. Bistany to arrange a possible meeting date for sometime this fall.

With the year anniversary of the off-site Visioning Session coming this September, the Chair felt this was an opportunity to re-visit the report to see the status of the Commission, what was accomplished and perhaps shift the focus of some tasks; how does the Commission move forward. This could be either a September or October agenda item.

Ms. Hamel asked on the proposed joint meeting with the various departments. Mr. Dean reported information gathering was continuing; wished to have current accurate data available to have the meeting be productive. Ms. Hamel suggested the Visioning Session statement be reviewed and revised if necessary before such a meeting.

Ms. von Aulock commented on the number of Commission members that are no longer members. The charter allows for nine (9) members and at present there are three (3) vacancies. There will be a review of the membership as it is a priority to keep the momentum of the Commission going.

7. Adjournment

With no further business Mr. Sandberg asked for a motion to adjourn. Ms. MacDonald so moved; seconded by Mr. Dean.

Meeting adjourned at 9:33 am

Respectfully submitted,

Ginny Raub
Recording secretary