

Exeter Economic Development Commission

December 11, 2012

1. Call Meeting to Order

Chairman Barry Sandberg convened the meeting at 8:02 am in the Nowak Room of the Exeter Town Office building. Members present were: Selectman Dan Chartrand, Kathy Corson, Len Benjamin, Brian Lortie, Madeleine Hamel, Brandon Stauber, David Hampson, Lizabeth MacDonald, Town Manager Russ Dean, Jason Proulx and Cynthia Tokos. Also in attendance: Building Inspector Doug Eastman and Town Planner Sylvia von Aulock.

Guest: Selectwoman Julie Gilman

Mr. Sandberg welcomed Jason Proulx and Cynthia Tokos as the newest members to the EEDC and noted the Commission now has a full membership. Mr. Proulx and Ms. Tokos introduced themselves and provided a brief bio and their interest in becoming a part of the Commission; members in turn introduced themselves.

Mr. Sandberg gave a short overview of the Commission, their mission and the composition of members. Mr. Dean provided background information on the history of the Economic Commission in the Town government and it recently being re-invigorated.

2. Approval of Minutes from November 13, 2012 meeting

Mr. Lortie moved to accept the draft minutes of the November meeting as presented; seconded by Ms. Corson. Motion to approve passed with Mr. Proulx and Ms. Tokos abstaining.

• **Guest Presenter**

Mr. Sandberg introduced Ms. Julie Gilman noting she currently serves on the Board of Selectmen and was the former liaison to the Commission from the BOS.

Ms. Gilman spoke initially on the formation of the 375th Anniversary Committee as the Town prepares in 2013 to celebrate 375 years of the founding of the Town. The Committee is in the early stage of discussion of how the celebration will unfold, but did want to advise this group of what they were thinking and perhaps discuss later how the EEDC could fit in or support the event. The theme will be celebrating Exeter Through the Years; not just one or two events. The Committee is working closely with the Exeter Historical Society who will be initiating an event in April on the anniversary of the signing of the Wheelwright Deed. Ms. Gilman was asking if the group wished to sponsor an event; perhaps even to have a float in the Holiday 2013 parade. As to funding, a final cost needed to stage the desired events has not been determined; may come in the form of a warrant article on March Town ballot.

The Anniversary planning committee is an official Town committee with the present members appointed by the Board of Selectmen and the present members are individuals that had expressed an interest in serving on such a committee. However, this Committee is authorized to accept members wishing to join in on the planning.

Ms. Gilman added the Heritage Commission will be hosting a public meeting possibly in March to share the results of the recently completed Town-wide mapping survey. Through a series of overlay maps and a narrative it will serve as an introduction to Exeter's history; starting with the 1700's and illustrating what patterns emerge as development occurred within the Town over the years.

Mr. Sandberg offered the Commission would discuss further how they wished to show their support and/or participation. For the present, Selectman Chartrand could serve as the liaison between the two groups.

Ms. Gilman then asked to speak to the second item listed on agenda: The Exeter Theater Co. The group is now initiating a capital fund raising campaign in an effort to raise the necessary funds to exercise an option of first refusal (on the purchase of the building) by the end of March and then proceed to sign a purchase and sales agreement with the present owner for \$600,000, the price paid by the owner at auction. One effort in the fundraising will be to submit an application to the National Endowment for the Arts for an **Our Town** Grant; a program that supports a broad sweep of artistic projects. If received, the funds will be for design and construction documents and/or the position of a program director; funds can not to be applied to the purchase of the property. A stipulation of the grant requires a partnership between a non-profit design or cultural organization and a municipal entity; additional partnerships are encouraged. Noting that, Ms. Gilman added the group is seeking the EEDC to be a co-sponsor with the Town and the Theater Company; the theater group taking the lead. Right now, she feels the role of the Commission is to be supportive. She will be writing the narrative for the grant, due the middle of January 2013 and would appreciate assistance from any EEDC individuals willing to help with the details necessary to include in the application. As to any funding being asked from either the Town or the EEDC as sponsors, that is not certain at this time.

Mr. Stauber speaking as Chairman of the Branding and Marketing subcommittee offered the group's (Ms. Corson, Mr. Benjamin and Mr. Stauber) support for both the 375th Celebration and the Exeter Theater Company: will attempt to schedule a meeting with the subcommittee in the coming week to assist Ms. Gilman with the grant application. But Mr. Stauber did note there were potentially three major projects within the Town seeking funding at this time and did not want to be financially committed to this project or the others as the Commission's budget funds are specifically for economic development. With that Mr. Stauber made a motion to form a letter of support for the Exeter Theater Co. without the implication of financial support. Motion seconded by Mr. Benjamin.

Mr. Sandberg clarified Ms. Gilman was just looking for a statement of support at this time. Ms. Gilman re-affirmed that is all she is looking for as she is not certain of the financial details of the grant application at this stage.

In continuing discussion, Ms. MacDonald asked what was being proposed for the theater. Ms. Gilman cited the various events/happenings that could be held; mostly ideas expressed at the early listening sessions. She did say once a million dollars was reached, the renovations to the building could begin. That million dollar figure includes the purchase price of the building. The initial \$150,000 raised is in escrow and will be applied to the purchase; it will be returned to the donors if the project does not go forward. Ms. Gilman did offer more specifics on the timeline for the capital fundraising and what needs/what will occur over the next year; felt it might be up to four years to have a fully functioning operation.

With no other comments to the motion, the Chair called the question. Motion passed unanimously. Mr. Stauber then added as a Commission member he would like to extend an invitation for the American Independence Museum and the Southern District YMCA project to also come before the Commission if they wish to seek a statement of support from the EEDC in preparing grant applications or for use in their fundraising.

Standing work group reports

- **Branding and Marketing**

Mr. Stauber and his subcommittee met to draft a follow-up letter to be sent to visitors to the EEDC table at the Seacoast Business Expo in October. Businesses from Exeter will receive a paper copy while the other visitors will receive a modified version via email. It acknowledges their stopping by, learning of the mission of EEDC and an invitation to become involved in the activities of the Commission. With some further refinement the letter will be sent on to the Executive Committee for their review before mailing.

Also discussed were specific items for 2013: further work on the EEDC page of Town website and business profiles for the site and future initiatives and how they were to be put forward for action.

- **Business Retention and Expansion**

Chairperson, Ms. Hamel stated the subcommittee will soon be sending out the second round of EEDC introduction letters to a small group of businesses located in the Epping Road corridor. Specifically the contacts were chosen for their possible interest in learning and participating in the State of NH Economic Revitalization Zone program (ERZ) available to qualifying businesses in the newly created ER Zone along the Epping Road. She has been in contact with DRED, the State agency responsible for administrating the program, and they are willing to come and speak with the business if there is serious interest in utilizing the benefits the program offers. Ms. Corson added additional letters are being sent to several new businesses recently locating in Town as a means of introduction and “welcome”.

Ms. von Aulock mentioned the owner of Al’s Automotive Service now on the Epping Road and in the ER Zone sought inquiry on the necessary paperwork to file an application for the program. Ms. Hamel thought an announcement should be made when a business applies and qualifies for the program; helping to make the community aware of the program. Ms. von Aulock commented, based on the building permits filed in her office to the present, there are no other businesses except possibly Cobham that would qualify; requirements are quite restrictive.

3. Town updates/announcements

Mr. Dean re-iterated the core focus of the Commission is to try and increase the non-residential tax base within the Town; presently, the Town is about 16% commercial. Continuing, while preparing for the recent Chamber of Commerce presentation in Stratham, the research determined the three largest tax payers, the hospital, the Academy and the Riverwoods Community all have a significant non-taxable component to them and then supplied figures illustrating such. Other facts gleaned is that of the six towns in the SAU 16 District the percentage of Exeter’s population over 65 years of age is 20.7%; considerably higher than the other five member towns. Also, this year, 36 million dollars was exempted from the Town’s tax base through the Town’s elderly exemption program; an amount higher than the taxable amount of two out of the three top tax payers in the Town; as more figures become available will put them out there to possibly see a trend. Mr. Dean remarked as more is learned about Exeter’s demographics this will contribute to the look and feel of the Town; certainly as basis for discussion. Also:

- Mr. Dean spoke of current economic and commercial activities in the Town that might be of interest to the Commission
- His office has been in contact with UNH and the Whittemore School of Business and Economics (WSBE) to possibly secure an intern for analysis work; also has a contact from Laurel Bistany at the EDC for a possible candidate; hopes to have an intern by early next year to work on EEDC-related tasks.

- Form Based Codes are going thru zoning review process; could be of interest as it allows property owners more flexibility in property development in a certain section of Portsmouth Ave. Ms. von Aulock will give a more thorough review at the January EEDC meeting.
- The baggage building project is moving ahead under Ms. von Aulock's supervision. Interviews will begin shortly for an architectural firm to do the design of the building.
- A firm is pursuing the construction of a building on Holland Way and a company has relocated to the Corporate Park on Holland Way.
- Talks are continuing on Exeter and Stratham collaborative in sharing sewer and water services. The final report is available on Town website. Discussions will continue with Town representatives and Department heads; will be public discussions but process will be lengthy.
- He encouraged members to look at the Town of Durham's website for an example of how a TIF District (Tax Increment Financing district) can be put together. As the Town talks of needed/desired improvements to the downtown, this could be an opportunity to obtain funding for the projects. However, a TIF is only good when you have a large vacant piece potential for development (the property on Chestnut St, opposite the Mill complex and possibly the former location of Al's Automotive) and it is also necessary to have a TIF district in place before any revenues can be derived (from any possible development). Further discussion could be a 2013 initiative.
- Discussion on the question of the firm Sig Sauer and the division of their operations between Exeter and Portsmouth; no definite answers available.

Ms. von Aulock asked if you are a member of other Town committees and a topic is discussed/mentioned you are welcomed to call her Office for verification before any information goes public; rumor control.

She then announced the Winter Warming raffle project is underway. This is annual event staged by herself and Sue Benoit, the Town Welfare Director, with 100% of the proceeds going to Exeter residents for fuel assistance. The prizes this year are a holiday gift basket and a fine piece of stained glass handcrafted by Ms. von Aulock. Tickets were available for purchase for a drawing on December 21.

4. Comments from the Chairman

Mr. Sandberg reviewed the purposes of the Commission, how it supports the economic development of the Town and the activities of the group this past year. Three priorities were identified as distributed in the Excel worksheet at last meeting:

- The Branding and Marketing of the community; differentiating how the Commission works and how it supports the community and the marketing materials needed to help brand Exeter in terms of economic development. The work group was chaired by Mr. Stauber.
- The Business Retention and Expansion work group, chaired by Ms. Hamel this year, focused on working from the existing employer data base as opposed to new businesses development to ensure the current base

Minutes approved at January 15, 2013 meeting

knows of the Commission and their goals/mission; to work in an advisory/problem solving capacity with the business community. The initiative was taken to invite in outside resources to aid the businesses with various projects/programs that might be of assistance to them and their operations.

- The Organization and Leadership for Continued Growth and Capacity Building work group chair by Mr. Lortie looked at tax base and what needs to be done to continue the work of the Committee and working with other groups in the Town to develop capacity and continued growth of EEDC.

Much was done throughout the year toward accomplishing these priorities as heard from reports throughout the year; working with BOS on website development, working with interns in developing a data base as examples. The Chair asked where we see the Commission going in 2013. Some initiatives will continue but there are other projects as mentioned by Town Manager the group may wish to pursue. Mr. Sandberg would like to have the members think how the Commission wishes to invest its own resources; develop priorities.

Mr. Stauber asked that the Executive Committee consider looking at and placing on agenda the “graying of NH” but more explicitly the “graying of Exeter” based on the statistics put forth by Mr. Dean; possible consequences on future economic development.

Responding to a question by Ms. Tokos on the relationship of the Chamber and the REDC to the EEDC, Mr. Dean outlined the focus of the respective organizations and the support amongst the groups. Mr. Sandberg added the EEDC took a more interactive role in getting to know the community, helping to facilitate connections; no financial resources available.

Mr. Hampson added he would like to see an increased visibility for the EEDC in 2013; perhaps to take part in more business fairs/expos to interact with more businesses in the region.

Ms. Corson attended the State of the Town presentation in Stratham and had kind words for Mr. Dean’s presentation; wished it could be repeated to put some perspective into the background in anticipation of the 375th anniversary. Mr. Dean confirmed it was a PowerPoint program and he would be willing to share to those interested.

Mr. Sandberg reiterated what he saw for the initiatives for 2013; including but not limited to developing an Economic Development chapter for the Town Master plan, TIF discussion and what resources are needed, continuing website design/maintenance and perhaps a business forum of some form. At first meeting in January will put together a program and the resources needed to accomplish the goals.

Ms. Hamel asked if there was an opportunity for the EEDC to be a presence at the Chamber’s Economic Outlook Breakfast in 2013, not as an attendee but as a participant to present the work on the data base and the developed economic analysis. Mr. Sandberg will follow up with Ms. MacDonald (who had excused herself from the meeting earlier) for more info on how the EEDC may be involved; unsure how or who sets agenda.

Mr. Sandberg thanked the members, Department heads, and staff for their time and dedication throughout the year; felt it was a productive year. The next meeting will be January 8, 2013.

Ms. Corson motioned to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Hampson. Meeting adjourned at 9:37 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Ginny Raub