

Exeter Economic Development Commission

October 07, 2014

1. Call to Order

Chairwoman Kathy Corson called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm in the Nowak Room of the Exeter Town Office building. Members present were Dave Hampson, Barry Sandberg, Len Benjamin, Brian Lortie, Brandon Stauber, Beth MacDonald, Dan Chartrand, John Mueller, Madeleine Hamel and Town Manager Russ Dean. Also in attendance: Economic Development Director Darren Winham.

2. Introduction of Members and Staff

Noting the meeting would not be televised, Chairwoman Corson asked to move to agenda item Approval of Draft Minutes while awaiting the arrival of members before proceeding to the remainder of agenda items.

Mr. Stauber moved to approve the minutes of the September 09, 2014 EEDC meeting; seconded by Ms. MacDonald. Motion carried with Mr. Chartrand abstaining. (Mr. Sandberg was not present for the vote.)

3. Confirmation of November meeting date and time

With the conflicts of the state-wide voting on the first Tuesday in the month of November and the Town offices being closed in observance of Veterans Day on the second Tuesday, it was agreed the meeting shall be scheduled for **Monday, November 10, 2014 at 7 pm.**

4. Town updates/announcements

Mr. Winham reported he is presently working with multiple developers on a large project on Epping Road. It involves creating some development tools as economic incentives for the project to go forward and is working with various individuals/businesses on this aspect.

He continues to work on the train baggage building and is replying to other local business inquiries on various forms of assistance. He acknowledged his name is getting out there; feels it is going very well and that there is some progress in conveying Exeter will become a more open community for business.

When asked as to the type of assistance being sought from the smaller/medium sized businesses, he replied it ranged from seeking connections to financial institutions, to obtaining capital, issues with Town ordinances/regulations: all are being addressed as much as possible and if required, forwarded to the appropriate Town staff for clarification and possible action. Property tax relief is often asked but at this time the only venue for such is to file for an abatement and it was agreed the window is narrow to deal with issues like that

Asked if there was any interest in the TIF and RSA 79-E programs, Mr. Winham agreed TIF was an excellent program that needs to have the community on board and is effective in the right circumstances but would not be pursued at this time. The interest in 79-E is high and anticipates seeing it employed in the near future on one or more projects; working through the process.

5. Subcommittee Reports

The Chair asked Mr. Winham for an update on the four subcommittees as set at September meeting.

Prefacing his report, Mr. Winham stated the present volume of work arising from this position makes it impossible to attend four more meetings a month. Adding, with the need to keep to the New Hampshire RSA's for transparency within Town government and these subcommittees requiring posting of scheduled meetings, minutes etc., he is just not familiar or used to that type of committee work and does not have the time or bandwidth to pursue. However, if members of the Commission are so interested in pursuing any of the tasks of the subcommittees he would encourage them to do so. He will be continuing work on these tasks in his work and they will get done.

Mr. Chartrand volunteered he has been having weekly meeting with Mr. Winham and bringing his contacts to meet with him and suggested members do likewise to build his points of contact within the community. Rather than focus on subcommittee work, he asked how does the Commission enable and support his work without slowing him down within the RSA's, but conceded 91-A has to be respected.

Mr. Sandberg asked how he envisioned his work on these subcommittee tasks as outlined in his talk at the Meet and Greet event dovetail with the work of the Commission. Adding, from an organizational perspective, he does not think the Commission wants the Economic Director developing his own economic infrastructure and this Commission also working on economic issues; where is the synergy between his work and that of the EEDC? Mr. Winham re-iterated his willingness and desire to work with the Commission and is determined to find that synergy at this meeting, but cannot burden himself any further with more things he has to answer to the public.

Discussion resumed on possible scenarios with Mr. Winham working independently but with support and assistance from the Commission. As to working together, Mr. Winham suggested the Commission determine what the group wished to do and he would help.

Members continued to express their feelings of how such a partnership could play out and what the role of the Commission is to be. Mr. Winham shared in other communities where he served, the economic development committees were work groups handpicked by him; their size and composition. When they met to review and brainstorm the various properties, their uses and

availability etc., it was all without the constraints of regulations and still maintained the confidentiality needed in economic development.

Mr. Stauber stated he was 100% uncomfortable with having any hand-picked work groups because it violates the tradition of the State and the open form of government this State stands for. There is also the issue of variability on the outcome of any group just by the fact that no one group will produce the same result. He does feel there is a way to achieve the frank discussions needed by voting to go into non-public session and then just record the ending outcome; no names need be disclosed but within the framework of posting meetings in the legal way. He added the entire Commission was very supportive in having an Economic Director position and is very excited to have him on board. He feels the Commission members are supportive of what he wants to do but it needs to be done in a framework that is legal and transparent and open to the community.

The Chair asked members to weigh in with their opinions and questions. The role of providing support and guidance was consistently heard.

Mr. Dean stated he was doing more listening than talking. He too wants to create a system that works and work to that end. He re-iterated his confidence in the Economic Director and his ability to do what he does and is supportive of that.

Mr. Hampson expressed what he was hearing was disbanding and perhaps reform as a smaller group maybe as a work group acting in an advisory position because the present public meetings did not afford him the confidentiality he needs to perform his work.

Mr. Winham added his job requires the credibility and confidentiality of anybody he talks to and if the individual thinks his name and project are being shared he loses all credibility. Also there is the concern of working with the Commission if his approach/opinion is different than that of this group. He suggested perhaps picking a project and work on together.

Ms. Corson, stressing the idea of receiving support from the Commission, felt it would enhance what Mr. Winham is doing and provide some historical perspective; asked to look at it as a vetting policy, looking at the other side of the story. She restated her support for Mr. Winham and wants to help him and possibly protect him from perhaps going down the wrong road.

Ms. Hamel shared that the Business Retention and Expansion subcommittee had similar issues when visiting Town businesses but did post meetings and minutes and when they reported back to the Commission did not use names.

Mr. Sandberg went back four years ago when citizens were asked to look at the present economic development as opposed to what was. He re-iterated the Commission has evolved and is evolving now with a professional being on staff. As to the role of the Commission, he is unsure what the role will be but it will evolve from the way it was and we have to be open about

that. Perhaps it is more of an advisory group than a sitting Commission and there is a distinct difference.

Mr. Chartrand added the Commission is at this juncture because it succeeded (with the hiring of an ED and passage of 79-E; now there is the need to evolve.

More discussion played out on the distinctions and legality of such an arrangement. Perhaps wait it out and see how it plays out was expressed. Mr. Lortie spoke of the business statistics developed as a viable resource and Mr. Winham acknowledged it was.

Mr. Benjamin asked if he saw the Business Retention and Expansion work group continuing with the business visits and Mr. Winham said he was more than happy for the members to continue with that function. Ms. MacDonald acknowledged that Expansion/new business development was more appropriate to his position and this is might be an opportunity to highlight the two. Mr. Winham explained he saw his position as a function and the Commission shaping the overall picture; it just comes down to what is appropriate.

Mr. Stauber felt evolution is a good thing and the Commission is going to evolve; proposed looking at the four subcommittees as set up at September meeting as a framework for moving forward. He suggested taking the Project Review subcommittee off the table respecting Mr. Winham's need for confidentiality and flexibility.

As for the Market Tools subcommittee, he felt there was the experience and background on marketing tools in the room and ongoing discussions could be held in an open forum to help guide development within the town.

He felt the EEDC could have a Strategic Plan subcommittee to give input and work with the other committees but still giving the ED his authority and the EEDC providing the input. Later, Mr. Chartrand suggested for those working on the Strategic Plan to revisit the talk Mr. Winham gave at the Meet and Greet event as it contained the essence of what a Strategic Plan should and could contain.

Mr. Winham had no problem with the suggested framework but suggested the Down Town Revitalization subcommittee be removed (from work list) as that is a larger issue and will be holding public hearings on any plans. Mr. Stauber agreed and hoped the Board of Selectmen get behind the issue as they are presently working on a sidewalk plan.

Mr. Dean stated his approval of the two subcommittees and relayed his opinion on what would follow. Discussion then focused on who would initiate the draft of the ESP and Mr. Winham felt he and the group could work together. There was agreement this plan would be different than a chapter on Economic Development for the Town Master Plan which is a function of the Planning Board; ESP was more nuts and bolts.

Discussion continued on how these two subcommittees could move forward. But Mr. Winham did want to verify the Commission supported breaking the group down into the two subcommittees; developing the ESP and working on the various Marketing Tools.

Mr. Stauber went on to give further definition to what other items could fall under the Marketing Tools work group; continuing with data base, work on web site. A motion was proposed by Mr. Stauber outlining the role and makeup of the work groups with the inclusion for outside members of the community to join the groups, need only be approved by the Commission Executive Committee. Mr. Winham stated he liked what he was hearing.

Mr. Dean suggested any further action on motions and adoption be put off till perhaps next meeting to let members work through what was proposed; felt the common thread was there but with the new direction being put forth warranted a wait time.

Citing this group as one of the larger Town committees, Mr. Benjamin asked if there a need for twelve members on the Commission. Mr. Dean shared it was a BOS ordinance and created by BOS (created as Exeter Development Commission) and the charter was to be reviewed by Executive Committee but was delayed waiting the hiring of an Economic Director.

Ms. Hamel asked if working as a 501c3 would provide Mr. Winham more flexibility. He agreed it would and advantages and additional provision were listed but all agreed any consideration of such was quite a way down the road. Mr. Lortie confirmed the original commission of the 80's was never a 501c3.

The Chair suggested the Executive Committee meet with Mr. Winham to vet these recommendations voiced at the meeting and report back at the November meeting; consensus that made sense.

As a point of clarification, Mr. Sandberg wished for more information on where the ESP begins and ends and the chapter on Economic Development for Master Plan comes into being. Mr. Dean offered explanation on the Master Plan document needs to be accepted by the Planning Board and Mr. Winham offered how an ESP could be presented. He felt the ESP comes before the MP chapter. The Strategic Plan is a series of action steps and goes "deeper" where the Master Plan chapter is more of recommendations.

6. General Announcements

- Meet and Greet Event

The Chair thanked Ms. Hamel for coordinating the event and Ms. Hamel in turned thanked the various participating merchants and individuals for contributing to what was a very successful event. She estimated close to 50 attendees and felt a lot of good connections were made which was the goal of the function. Mr. Winham in turned thanked the Commission for hosting such an event.

- Economic News.

Mr. Stauber spoke of the Leadership Seacoast group accepting applications for its 2015 class. The group works to developing informed and active community members. As a recent participant and graduate of the class he would be available to help any interested candidate with the application.

Ms. Corson relayed the PB has a full agenda for the upcoming meeting including the town houses proposed for Exeter Road, the social club proposed for the Porches of Exeter project at 1 Franklin Street and a drive through pick up at Hannaford Market.

Mr. Dean spoke of the detour in place for about the next four weeks as paving and sidewalk construction continues on High St.

The Form Based subcommittee is set to meet on October 8 on their continuing work which has economic impacts along Portsmouth Ave. Ms. Corson reported the findings of this work group will be presented to the PB to see if they wished this subcommittee to proceed or terminate their work.

Mr. Clement, who was present at this meeting, is the BOS representative to Planning Board and they are beginning to have discussion on existing regulations and possible revisions.

With no further business, Mr. Stauber moved to adjourn; seconded by Ms. MacDonald. Meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Ginny Raub

Recording Secretary