

**Exeter Economic Development Commission**

**November 10, 2014**

**1. Call to Order**

Chairwoman Kathy Corson called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm in the Nowak Room of the Exeter Town Office building.

- Introduction of Members and Town Staff

Members present were Dave Hampson, Beth MacDonald, Len Benjamin, Brandon Stauber, Selectmen representative Dan Chartrand, Madeleine Hamel, Town Manager Russ Dean, Also in attendance Economic Development Director Darren Winham.

Guest: Town Planner Sylvia von Aulock

**2. The Future of the EEDC**

- Discussion and follow up from last meeting

Referencing the discussion held at the October meeting on the role and function of the Commission now with the Economic Development Director on Town staff, the Chair asked if there were any further comments. . There being none, Ms. Corson reported the Executive Committee did meet and in discussion determined the focus of the Commission is to keep an open dialogue between the Town and the Commission. It also felt the main objective for the Commission was the writing of an Economic Development Chapter for the Master Plan and to continue to support projects deemed to enhance the economic advancement of the community.

**3. Flexible Zoning Presentation**

Ms. Corson, a member of the Planning Board (PB) and a member of Zoning Review Ordinance Committee (ZORC) along with Ms. von Aulock were prepared to give the PowerPoint presentation on the Flexible Zoning proposal. The Portsmouth Avenue corridor is presently under consideration by the ZORC subcommittee for the adoption of a Flexible Zoning plan for the Town.

As background, Ms. Corson stated the initiative was prompted by a demolition permit granted a number of years ago for a building located at lower end of Portsmouth Avenue. Members of the Heritage Commission and the Historic District Commission approached ZORC and asked that this portion of Portsmouth Avenue be incorporated into the Town's Historic District so as to preserve the historical history of the Town. Feeling expansion of the Historic District would restrict the commercial owners in the area and stifle any future economic projects the group started to look at more flexible alternatives. A subcommittee comprised of members of the land use boards began exploring Form Base Codes and then onto Flexible Zoning practices.

By definition, Flexible Zoning allows for the defined areas to evolve as the community needs and technology changes without the restrictions of conventional land use regulations.

Ms. Corson continued, offering explanation of the tricolor-defined areas shown on the screen of the Portsmouth Ave corridor. From High St. to Walgreen's is designated as the Mixed Use, Transition Zone, the largest area outlined is the Business Zone and lastly, the Highway Zone encompassing McDonalds and Hannaford.

Recognizing the need to have additional support to research and develop the proposal, consultant Jeff Hyland of Ironwood Design Group and an architect from TMS Architects were engaged.

Ms. von Aulock continued with more detail on what has been done to date. Wanting public input, a walking tour was undertaken in January 2014 with twenty nine participants. They were divided into three groups walking one of the three zones to evaluate and comment on their area in a prepared survey. Slide representation of the derived data was explained.

Feeling twenty nine responses were not a sufficient number, the survey was placed on Town website with eighty five respondents. Comfortable with this number of responses, Ironwood Design prepared three fictional scenarios/renderings. Using Las Olas, Classic Nails/Exeter Events and Tents and the dental office as a model, a “what if” rendering was prepared. Comparison was detailed of what would/could occur with present commercial zoning regs and what it might look like with Flexible Zoning. It was emphasized these were random, fictional case studies; not pending proposals.

The subcommittee is looking to Laconia, NH as a model with their architectural standards. Visual standards are available for examples and are given a point system. There would be examples of the different features with a point system; developer could then score themselves on their design proposal. With a set of scores, the developer would know where their plan would stand with Planning Board. Ms. von Aulock stated the group is still in beginning stages of developing standards and a point system but would like to get the zoning amendments, a point system and standards spelled out by early January.

In order to continue, the contract with Ironwood Design needs to be re-negotiated at a proposal cost of up to \$8,500. The Planning Board has pledged \$3,000 towards the extension and it was hoped the EEDC would also contribute to the project cost.

Mr. Stauber wished the Chair to re-iterate the clarification of “Form” of Form Based Codes; was not associated with written documents. Ms. von Aulock assured him it was structural forms and in fact FBC is lack of zoning/documents.

Mr. Hampson inquired to the scope of the extended contract. Ms. von Aulock explained it was for creating a regulatory plan for standards, the point system and compensation for attending meetings when the plan was being presented; want to be sure funds are there to allow public to understand proposal. She emphasized this is an option for the developer and not a mandated ordinance. Earlier in meeting, Ms. Corson emphasized any action would need to be voted upon by the community on the Town ballot only after a series of public hearings.

Mr. Winham added it is definitely an economic issue; anything having the potential to expedite a project is looked upon favorably. But it was determined it won't always allow the developer to bypass the ZBA if a variance is required.

Mr. Chartrand asked if this was just for that stretch of Portsmouth Ave. or could other parts of Town be included. Ms. von Aulock replied Portsmouth Ave is the test spot and but if successful could be applied

to other areas of town. Mr. Chartrand felt this would be helpful in addressing the disparity of the development/redevelopment of the two sides of Water St. Ms. Corson and Ms. von Aulock agreed but would require additional funding as the design standards would be developed specifically for the Portsmouth Ave. area of study. To do Water St. or any other area at this time would be stretching the ZORC group too thin.

Replying to Mr. Stauber's question on proposal agreement, it was determined the contract cost was for *up to* \$8,500 and yes, it was hoped the EEDC would provide the remaining \$5,500. His second question referenced the potential for Portsmouth Avenue to benefit from Form Based Codes.

Ms. Corson replied it is long term plan but might provide incentive for property owners to work with their neighbor(s) to better utilize their properties in any future development. Ms. von Aulock, working from the zone definition slide traced what developments have occurred in the past 10 years and called out potential properties for action. Ms. von Aulock added quite a bit of redevelopment has occurred over the years and why not have it continue.

Mr. Dean asked if this extension of contract with Ironwood Design would get the work of the ZORC subcommittee to the 2015 ballot for approval. Ms. von Aulock replied it was the intent but acknowledged there was a good amount of work to be done. If after the presentation to the PB they feel the proposal was not ready for a town vote the subcommittee would continue the work for a 2016 vote.

Mr. Dean thanked the committee for all their work and felt by having more opportunities available to the developers/property owners is a good thing. By having real options it does give the Town a better presence; felt it is a good initiative and hopefully can be pulled together.

Mr. Chartrand spoke of his willingness to contribute funds to continue with this initiative if he was assured Mr. Winham would be integrally involved with this work group and bring this initiative to the 2015 ballot. Mr. Winham, although very much in favor of moving forward stated it was not his decision but that of the Planning Board.

With a question on the dollar amount pledged by the PB, it was explained this was an amount remaining in the Planning Department budget available for this type of project; not an indication of their support. Mr. Chartrand continued noting there were four EEDC members not present at this meeting and because the Commission is being asked to contribute more than half of their remaining cash assets, he wanted some assurance it would go to Town meeting this year; did feel timing was right for such a proposal..

Mr. Stauber stated he would like to see financial commitments from the other involved Town Boards and Commissions; they also being stake holders. Ms. von Aulock stated her (Planning Department) budget has a line item for Studies that none of those other committees have. Discussion continued for the EEDC to match the PB contribution and would that amount get the process started.

Mr. Dean added the BOS budget had some funds set aside for Consultants and would speak with Chairman Gilman to determine if there is any flexibility in applying those funds to this initiative.

Confirming there was a quorum present at this meeting, Mr. Chartrand moved to allocate three-thousand dollars to the Flexible Zoning Initiative subcommittee project. Mr. Stauber asked to add to motion *with the goal to be on 2015 ballot*. Mr. Chartrand agreed and the motion seconded by Mr. Stauber. Before the vote, Mr. Chartrand expressed his opinion and frustration that for this Town, with a 20 million dollar operating budget, to delay all forms of action to a one time in the year was not realistic and not practical. The Chairman then called for the vote; motion carried.

#### **4. Project of the Month**

- Introduction and discussion of 4-6 Center St., Exeter

The Chair explained this agenda item was included to spur discussion on current vacant lots or properties on the market and what did the members see as possible uses/occupants for the property with suggestions from Mr. Winham. The property chosen this month was 4-6 Center St. Members were provided a site map, listing sheet and photographs for the property.

Ms. Corson introduced realtor Ms. Dottie Milbury and property owner Stan Wentzell to speak to the listing of the former Demeritt Insurance Agency (later the Cross Insurance Agency) building on Center Street. Mr. Wentzell provided some history of the uses of the building and the existing features of the 3,000 sq. ft. building.

Although its past uses were professional, Mr. Chartrand felt this was an opportunity to bring retail and food service to this end of Water St and this particular location. Mr. Winham having toured the building agreed it was an excellent location and had the building had the potential to add a second level. It was agreed the number of parking spaces/availability of should not drive a decision on who should be the ultimate occupant, although there is a Town parking area across the street that appears to be underutilized.

Mr. Winham stated at the Executive Meeting it was agreed to start bringing different items to the meetings for discussion and members' opinions; not necessarily vacant or available properties but related economic issues in the town. These will be brainstorming sessions and this parcel was the first.

#### **5. Formation of the Economic Development Master Plan Chapter Committee**

Although interest by members to serve on this committee was expressed at previous meetings, the Chair felt they were starting anew and asked for volunteers. Mr. Winham will spearhead the committee and outlined a possible meeting schedule and duties/functions of the group. Those members not present will be contacted for their interest in participating. Mr. Dean stated he would be able to assist on this committee. Although the Planning Board has the final approval he felt a draft could be vetted at the EEDC level. It was stressed this may take some time to get something framed out; possibly up to a year.

Mr. Stauber asked if there was to be an Economic Tools and Policy group and if so he was willing to be on the committee. Mr. Winham said there was no real committee planned at this time but if Mr. Stauber wanted to work on these issues he would be glad to assist him. Mr. Stauber said only if it is a public committee with the proper posting, in the public eye. Ms. Corson felt with Mr. Winham's full schedule, the Economic Chapter would be the only public committee at this time.

#### **6. General Announcements**

Mr. Dean wanted members to be aware of the ongoing discussion with COAST and the possibility of Route 7 being discontinued. Newmarket and Exeter fund a major portion of the local operating expenses for this service while neighboring communities are not participating or at a reduced level. With low ridership and reduced operating funds its future is in jeopardy. From an economic standpoint, if it is discontinued it is one less service to be offered for those using this means of public transportation.

Mr. Winham reported on his recent activities; not all details were able to be released at this time. The development "The Porches of Exeter" on Franklin St. received conditional approval at recent PB meeting. Ms. Corson reported the 68 unit residential development at 1 Hampton Road was also given conditional approval at the PB meeting.

**7. Confirmation of December meeting date**

The next meeting is set for December 2, 2014 with the start time of 7pm. Agenda will include the project- of- the month discussion and an update on the Flexible Zoning Initiative.

Mr. Dean commented on the appearance of Mr. Peter Francese at a recent BOS meeting speaking on the demographics and ongoing trends in the population of Exeter. He suggested inviting Mr. Francese to speak at a future meeting. With Mr. Francese's interest and knowledge of the demographics of the Town, there may be an opportunity to form some long term strategies for going forward in the Town.

**8. Approval of minutes October 07, 2014 meeting**

Mr. Dean suggested an alternative verb be used in a statement attributed to him at the October meeting. Mr. Chartrand motioned to accept minutes as amended of October 07 EEDC meeting; seconded by Mr. Benjamin. Motion carried.

**9. Adjournment**

Mr. Chartrand motioned to adjourn; second by Mr. Dean.

Meeting adjourned at 8:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ginny Raub

Recording Secretary