

Exeter Economic Development Commission

May 19, 2015

1. Call to Order

Vice Chairman Dave Hampson called the meeting to order at 8:35 AM in the Nowak Room of the Town Office building. Members and Town staff present were: Lizabeth MacDonald, Selectman representative Dan Chartrand, Planning Board representative Kelly Bergeron, Ian Smith, Len Benjamin, Brian Lortie, John Mueller, Madeleine Hamel, Jason Proulx, Economic Development Director Darren Winham and Town Manager Russ Dean
Guests: George Regan, NH Housing Authority, Rad Nichols, COAST and Scott Ruffner, TEAM

Members were asked to introduce themselves with two new members being present; Ms. Bergeron and Mr. Smith. Mr. Dean stated a candidate for the Commission was approved at the May 18, 2015 Board of Selectmen's meeting; this will complete the membership for the Commission

2. Treasurer's report

Mr. Lortie, Treasurer for the Commission, distributed financial statements noting the total liabilities and equity amount to be \$7,127.45 as of March 31, 2015. The last approved expenditure was \$3000 for consultant work for the flexible zoning initiative. Although the warrant article was ultimately not placed on 2015 ballot the group is still meeting; Mr. Dean is to check on status of the group

Mr. Dean clarified there are two sources of funding. The Town general fund which includes the director's salary and some expenses and the remainder of the funds from when the EDC was operating under a not-for profit statute that can be drawn down for specific approved purposes. Mr. Lortie's report was the remaining EDC funds not the Town funds.

Mr. Chartrand referenced his conversation with the BOS on the status of present working Commission and of the history of the former EDC. After discussion, the BOS agreed to let this group determine how they wished to organize and report back to them.

Mr. Dean outlined again the two groups: the not-for-profit group formed under the State RSA 292 and the Town adopted ordinance in May 1968; same group but two different functionalities. There has been some discussion of this in the past; just need to follow up.

It was confirmed if the not-for-profit group is dissolved the remaining funds of \$7,127.45 would go back into the Town general fund.

With the election of new officers, it was voiced perhaps the Executive Committee could assume the task of drafting a new ordinance. Although one draft was circulated last year no follow up to date; took the two economic groups and combined to one. The major question to be addressed is should the not-for-profit charter be dissolved; has not functioned properly over a number of years.

3. Election of Officers

Mr. Hampson noted four officers to be elected are for one year terms and will serve as a member of the Executive Committee.

Mr. Chartrand nominated Mr. Proulx for Chairman; seconded by Mr. Benjamin. Mr. Proulx agreed to accept the nomination.

Mr. Chartrand nominated Ms. MacDonald; seconded by Mr. Hampson. Ms. MacDonald agreed to accept the nomination.

Mr. Proulx nominated Ms. Hamel as Secretary (Clerk); seconded by Mr. Chartrand. Ms. Hamel agreed to accept the nomination.

Mr. Hampson nominated Mr. Lortie as Treasurer; seconded by Mr. Chartrand. Mr. Lortie agreed to accept the nomination.

With no other nominations Mr. Hampson presented each of the nominations for the four offices for approval. All motions passed. The new Executive Committee is comprised of Mr. Proulx as Chairman, Ms. MacDonald as Vice Chairman, Ms. Hamel as Secretary and Mr. Lortie as Treasurer. The officers will assume their positions at the June EEDC meeting.

4. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Chartrand motioned to accept the draft minutes of the April 7, 2015 EEDC meeting as presented; seconded by Mr. Mueller. Motion carried with Mr. Benjamin and Mr. Hampson abstaining.

5. Guest Speaker: George Regan, NH Housing

Mr. Regan stated in his conversations with the Town Manager about the potential housing developments of the rentals and condominiums coming to Exeter he was asked to provide some context in terms of what impacts and what the NH HA is looking at as its role in making the connection between housing and economic development.

The initial slide illustrated the changing demographics of the State. It is a study the NH HA does every few years to update the numbers the Authority uses in their work in the form of perceptions and (housing) preferences. A cross mix of focus groups are used to obtain the data.

The 70's and 80's saw a ground swell of growth as the jobs were being created increasing the demands for housing. It is a different environment now and on the basis of recent data, NH is experiencing very slow growth. A line graph illustrated NH is an aging population and the age group of 65-74 is expected to double by 2025.

Taking a look at Exeter's household profile, a pie chart illustrated a majority of residents are a married household with children (49+/-%), 15% single parent household and 37% non-family households. This profile has not changed significantly in the last thirteen years or so with perhaps the single parent household increasing some.

Taking on the issue of schools being impacted by multifamily units, their studies indicated in multifamily developments (5 or more units) it resulted in a .17 child impact. The biggest generator of school age children is the 4 bedroom homes. The Authority does not feel it is likely to see a surge in school enrollment; but again it may vary in different NH towns.

Results coming from the focus groups showed young married couples may have a difficult time entering the housing market because of outstanding school debts, tighter lending guidelines and different employment opportunities. And that millennials (the 20-34 age groups) have a preference for renting. Also seen in the rental units are older adults downsizing from their larger homes. Agreed you can have a good mix in multifamily communities; young and old.

The vacancy rate for the State is 3% which Mr. Regan feels is an indication of a supply/ demand issue. In Exeter, the vacancy rate is 2.4%.

Rental rates throughout the State have increased about 16% in the last ten years or so. In Exeter a 2 bedroom rental averages \$1575 gross rent plus utilities. That now becomes an affordability issue as supply drives affordability.

Referencing the NH Employment and Security web site Mr. Regan displayed a slide for long term industry projections specifically for the area served by the Rockingham Planning Commission for the years 2012 – 2022. Health care and social assistance to support the health care services were positions prominent for this area. Looking at the aging population, he felt it was necessary to have a diverse work force to take those jobs caring for the aging population. He further added the need of diversity of housing for the diversity of wages that helps grow this economy but also support that aging population that will have its own increased health care needs.

The results from an earlier NH HA study indicated if there is not enough housing it can constrain jobs created and that leads to impaction of personal income and the gross domestic consumption/production. A survey of business and industry leaders verified housing costs is important in recruiting and keeping workers. The younger work force is a mobile work force; have choices but the challenge is affordability.

The Legislature saw the impact of housing on job creation but now the focus seems to be on economic stability. How can we keep the young graduates from leaving the State. Here a diversity of housing is a critical element.

Displaying a slide on NH's Changing Environment and those consequences, various factors were mentioned but noting fewer household with fewer children and elders remaining in their homes; again there are variants from one region of the state to others. But do need to have that information to put into planning for a number of years down the road. In-migration is not what it was and changes what things will look like in 20 years.

Mr. Chartrand questioned what he was hearing that municipal boards and others need to get away from the mindset of the 70's and 80's and be more flexible in their thinking about housing. Mr. Regan agreed; perhaps looking at zoning issues and allowing larger single family homes be converted to multifamily and or possible allowing accessory units on a property that might allow an elder to stay in the Town. As to age restrictive housing, he feels that stipulation should go away and allow young and old to live together. Also is finding that designation can be restrictive as the market is changing.

Responding to a question from Mr. Chartrand on positioning the Town with the number of multifamily units projected to come on line, Mr. Regan felt it could put Exeter in a favorable position as the demand is there as there has not been a lot of multifamily units constructed in past years; have concentrated on the single family residences. Discussion continued on young families/adults renting and then deciding they wish to stay in Exeter, Mr. Benjamin asked what the inventory for such a move was. Mr. Regan did not have those stats but offered to research such.

Mr. Winham noted he had a series of questions but specifically did he have any stats on mixed use on one type of zoned parcel and could/would that residential to the rear (of property) help drive the commercial in the front. Mr. Regan replied he did not but referred to work derived from a grant offered a number of years ago that Towns used for different zoning issues i.e. for Master Plans, flexible zoning; felt he might find some helpful information in that work.

Mr. Hampson thanked Mr. Regan for his presentation. Mr. Regan offered to leave business cards and for members to contact him with any further questions and email his presentation if requested. Mr. Dean added after gathering data from the local school district on school enrollment it showed there has not been

any significant change in student population in the past 10 years. The Authority was contacted based on their study done in 2012 on school enrollments as illustrated in this presentation. He urged members to visit the Authority website as there was some interesting and useful data; felt there would be further contact between the two groups as the Town goes forward updating their Master Plan, particularly Chapter 2, the Housing Chapter.

Mr. Dean will share the local school data if requested as well as the link to the school enrollment trending study done in 2012 by Applied Economic Research that was used in this presentation. Mr. Regan also was willing to supply the link to a report done by the NH Center for Public Policies on housing needs and perceptions; felt might find useful.

6. COAST Proposal: Exeter-Newmarket Route/Wildcat Link

With COAST no longer receiving funding from the towns of Stratham and Greenland, there was a need to arrive at alternative to save the Route 7. Mr. Dean, referencing a prepared handout, summarized the efforts of COAST to continue the ridership to the towns of Exeter and Newmarket, albeit in a different format. It will be a three days a week service (as opposed to the original five days a week service) taking Exeter residents to Newmarket where they may make a connection with the Wildcat Transit Route 5 service on through Durham, Dover and ultimately to the Fox Run Mall. With this revised route, Mr. Dean noted the same level of funding was maintained, basic service was provided and those riders with disabilities would still be serviced.

Mr. Benjamin, question with no funding coming from Stratham, why the stop. Mr. Chartrand felt with a presence in the town it may develop a ridership and ultimately Stratham would return to the organization. After other members commented, Mr. Benjamin felt there were arguments on both sides. (Mr. Rad Nicholas from COAST commented later the stop in Stratham was at Market Basket for grocery shopping for Exeter and Newmarket residents.)

Mr. Dean added there are still tasks to be done: marketing of the service, location of stops, visibility of stops and getting the new information out to the riders. Mr. Chartrand spoke of scheduling at a future EEDC meeting a brainstorming session for marketing ideas for the service as it is an economic initiative and thanked all those involved in working to see the service continued.

Mr. Nichols spoke, thanking the Town's efforts and support to come to this alternative route. He noted there are only 30-35 communities in the State providing public mass transportation and felt Exeter should be proud to be among those communities. The changing demographics of the State to an aging population points to the need for diverse transportation be available as well as diverse housing. This alternative will not meet everyone's need but it is something to build on; build back up (the service) for commuting and schooling.

7. TEAM Exeter: Scott Ruffner

Mr. Ruffner spoke of a new group TEAM (Town Exeter Arts Music), a nonprofit initiative focusing on the downtown of Exeter. His organization, and as a resident, feels Exeter is lacking in the arts, music and culture; often the Town's image is linked to the rise and fall of the efforts to revive the IOKA.

His group is looking to utilize some of the resources already here in town such as bandstand, Swasey Parkway, Town Hall, restaurants, art galleries and get events together to change the perception of what is in Exeter. Also, it gives musicians and artists an opportunity to showcase their efforts and talents and bring people downtown.

Mr. Chartrand felt that the first event held in May was most productive speaking as a business owner seeing an increase in people walking into his store and around the Town. Other members of the Commission attending also gave positive feedback on the event.

He was at the EEDC meeting to raise awareness of the group event, the First Friday initiative where on the first Friday of the month after regular business hours there is the invitation to all to stay in Town and visit various participating establishments staying open for the event and offering refreshments, music, and entertainment; wants people to have the option to stay here rather than going to other neighboring towns. But he cited a need to work with other professional groups on the organizational aspects of the events; his group are predominately the artists and do not have that expertise.

8. Economic Director Report

Mr. Winham agreed to forego his report because of time constraints.

9 Other Projects: EDC Ordinance

Mr. Hampson noted the earlier discussion of the drafting of a new ordinance would be undertaken by the newly elected Executive Committee.

Mr. Chartrand noted the BOS at last meeting stipulated EEDC meetings be televised; still AM meeting time.

Mr. Mueller stated he had requested representatives from the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) come to a meeting and Mr. Sinnott of the RPC suggested contacting Laurel Bistany of the Regional Economic Development Center to visit as well. Both agreed to appear together. Mr. Mueller felt they might provide an overview of their organizations, what they do and how they may be a resource for this group; members concurred. Mr. Mueller will confirm with both Ms. Bistany and Mr. Sinnott an invite to the June meeting.

Mr. Proulx spoke of creating a Facebook page on development initiatives to create public awareness of what is going on in Town. Positive feedback was received from members, but he stated he could not do alone and sought support as co-administrators. Further discussion focused on protocol, legality of showing photos of ongoing projects; agreed it needed further discussion. It will be an agenda item for discussion at next meeting.

With no further business, Mr. Chartrand moved to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Benjamin. Meeting adjourned at 9:47 AM.

Respectfully submitted.

Ginny Raub
Recording Secretary