

MEETING NOTES

Exeter Economic Development Strategic Plan-Lincoln Street Area Input April 7, 2016

Present: Darren Winham- Economic Development Director, Robert Hall and Don Clement

Handouts: Meeting agenda and markup map of input area of Town

1. Call to order: The session was called to order at 6:05 pm by Darren Winham, Economic Development Director.

2. Session purpose/process (Darren Winham)

Darren Winham: I'm the Town's Economic Development Director. I'm going to listen more than talk in this session. We have an Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) which my Department is writing in conjunction with the Town's Master Plan. We have a new Planner onboard. We are hoping the EDSP will coincide with that Master Plan timewise and also marries with it, putting an economic spin on it. There are six economic corridors designated in Town and this session is for the area of Lincoln St/Train Station, portion of Front St and Winter St areas.

There are 27 parcels here, currently assessed at \$9.3 million, which is about \$650,000 per acre. It's all C1 Zoning. Average daily traffic is 7,700 on Lincoln, 3,800 on Lincoln at Front St, 7,900 from Front to Garfield St. There are 157 striped parking stalls, one municipal surface parking area with 76 stalls, with 2 hr parking for 44 stalls. I'm not going to run through all the characteristics, we'll do some of that later during improvements discussion and it's also posted on the website.

The purpose of this session is to talk about the train and how it's a great asset to the community with potential we may not be taking advantage of, such as Dover, Brunswick, Portland, etc., do. Want to talk about the area the train is in. Bob Hall is here, he's an expert on train, but first I'll talk about Town's commitment and what we spend on the train.

Town owns the parking lot at the train, bought with grant from the federal government in 2000/2001. We lease the platform for \$3,000/year and we pay the liability insurance on the station to AMTRAK for \$20,000/year. We pay \$11,400/year for maintenance, basic station upkeep, plowing, electricity and so forth. Now I'll ask Bob to speak.

Bob Hall: One of first thing to remind ourselves is that the community hosts the station, we started with 3 roundtrips/day and it's at 5/day now. It's been 15 years and we hit our one millionth rider last summer. Many communities don't have what Exeter has. Exeter has about 80 commuters who work in Boston daily and about 150 daily total riders. It's not strictly a commuter train. We had 80,000 riders last year coming in and out of Exeter.

This is a real gem, not only to getting to Boston but for Boston and Portland people to come here. But that only works if we can invite them to come here. Right now, when you step off the train, you don't know where you are if not from Exeter and there's not even a bathroom for people. We love our history, but need to make services available to riders in 2016. There's a lot of opportunity in the Lincoln St area. My whole life has been spent in Exeter.

People love their cars, they want to drive up, walk onto the train, come back, walk off the train and drive away. This is a real gem that we have. There will be six roundtrips within a year, that's 12 daily trains running through Exeter. Talk is 2-3 years there will be a direct train from Portland to NY City, won't even go to Boston.

[Discussion about routing to major cities].

I'm an advocate of the train and will take any questions. I serve on NH Rail Transit Authority. It costs money for improvements but they are needed badly. We need to pay for it.

Resident query: How many total riders on the line per year?

Mr. Hall: About a million riders. It's gone up steadily.

Mr. Windham: What is the "take" on Exeter, what do the various authorities involved with the train think we should do?

Mr. Hall: Exeter is an education community. Many younger people are moving back to cities and don't even buy a car anymore. We are an area close enough to a major city so that it will attract young people. We are ripe for that. If we had a lot of high tech industries here, it would attract those younger people to live here or commute to Exeter Not factory work, high tech work. It's up to the community and business owners to make it happen.

Mr. Winham: I'd like to hear from the business owners who are here.

Barbershop owner: My business is really daytime, only one evening per week. I don't see train really helping out my business. The riders get off, jump in their cars and go. They often run across the street to get to their cars. My shop business is from locals.

Mr. Winham: Would development there change that at all?

Barber: Might. Maybe if had a popular restaurant with an outdoor patio there, then maybe people would tarry to get something to eat. If a burger place goes in there, probably some people would stop to

have a burger-hard to pass it up. We have anchor stores there, like the hardware store, etc., which do draw customers.

Gabrielle: I live on Winter St. The area is a gift for us. We have a special needs child who loves trains and loves watching them. This town is quintessential New England. As a resident and property owner, "let's do it!"

Mr. Winham: How should we "do it?"

Gabrielle: One thing would be to put in a welcome center.

Dan: I own the book store on Water St: My business has changed into a tourist clientele over the years. But we need to get riders into the Downtown area. Want to show folks more of the total of all that Exeter has to offer. Yes, let's develop Lincoln St for sure, but also make riders aware of the rest of town.

Mr. Winham: How do we get riders into downtown? A walking path, public transportation? What do you think?

Beth: Lincoln St area is a gem. We have the trolley there but it's for residents only. The trolley is expensive but highly utilized. Merchants pay for it all. The first year we had 50 people per hour. People have to wait. Often it's standing room only with 50-60 people onboard at any given time, which is the maximum.

Don B: I'm also on the development board. If anyone here goes onto Google and Google "Transit Oriented Development Corridor (TODC)," you will see how important that concept is. If people live here, sure they'll get off the train and go home but later they'll come back, go to the barbershop, go to other businesses they are aware of. Another important concept is business owners who need local employees. It all links around a TODC. We had Plan NH come in with a 3 day Charrette and it's still valid. People who lived

within Lincoln St area were so into their neighborhood that we started calling the neighborhood “WestEx” just as a way to ID it and set it apart for its flavor.

Resident: Some communities have a train station that is more difficult of a problem than ours is. If someone wants to see the Exeter library, which is a world-renowned architectural site, they need to know how to get there from the train. We need clear signage. Also, the tracks run along the backs of the buildings, so not very enticing a view. Need to look at low cost/low tech solutions to enhance the area. About 10 years ago we did a walking audit of Exeter and the guy that ran it was in awe of Lincoln St area, said “don’t mess this up.”

Resident: Portsmouth spends a lot of money on signage and it’s great. There’s a MILLION people coming through Exeter a year? I own the fabric store. Not that big an attraction for riders, but I do have people who come from out of town to get goods at my shop.

Dottie: I’ve been running real estate office here for 50 years next month. Recently had a woman who came from Boston and she walked to some businesses to check out the fit/convenience and ended up buying a place at Front St Towers and now she commutes to Boston daily now. People like idea of a small town.

Resident: need multiple modes of transportation here. Portsmouth is grappling with this and its efforts are attracting younger folks. Need an ‘open arms’ approach here. Getting riders to branch out into other areas of Town is important.

Dottie: Also, students might live here and commute into Boston to college.

Lexie: When we open up our business here, we hope folks will take the train and come to our place. Could use bikes for people to

get around the area and town. Maybe bike rentals. Definitely need improvements to direct people around the town.

Resident: I had an “Uber” moment this weekend visiting in RI. Two folks peeled off to go home and the car was right there and they were gone. Trolleys are good. Bicycles are great idea, locked at train station and also being able to park them around town and have a place for storage of them at the station.

Jeff: I moved back to Exeter recently and very excited to be back. Bikes are a great idea and rail trails are a great idea. When I first moved back I worked in Boston, but I quit my job there because I couldn't get the ride schedule for train commuting that I needed. An increase of trips may well help solve that issue.

Mr. Winham: Please talk about rail trails.

Jeff: Former track area where tracks are removed.

DW: Ok, so we can't do that here, but would a specific pathway work?

Other resident: Yes, and sidewalks need to be improved too.

Another resident: Lincoln St area is different from downtown and has its own flavor. Like it very much as an area that is somewhat bohemian, funky and not all historical district flavor. I think area should be developed toward these goals. Mixed uses are wonderful. Separation of living from businesses is not reality, ;lovely to have the mix and convenience.

[Discussion about bike routing/issues]

Resident: one thing not so great. Lincoln St area needs crosswalk improvements.

Don Clement: Phase I is underway here and Phase II is in process and those things are part of that.

Resident: As for getting to our downtown, the Freedom Trail in Boston is red-striped area to lead folks around.

Mr. Winham: That's a great idea.

Resident: Bike idea is a good idea but maybe need bike parking areas downtown and they can just walk around from there.

Outdoor eating areas would add to the enjoyment. As for the view of the backs of buildings, I like the Drycleaning sign on the back of that building, showing they are there. Could do more of that.

Resident: Commercial area extends to other side of the tracks and maybe that should be considered for improvements too.

Resident: If going to go with bikes idea, might need to look into downtown traffic flow and changing it.

Mr. Hall: Regarding the backsides of buildings. In other locations, at the bases of bridges, businesses have signs. Could work in Exeter. By the way, it's probably now about 750,000 total riders per year, but it's growing, at about 2% annually.

[Discussion about ridership and growth]

Mr. Winham: Want to talk about improvements now. Don Clement is here to address that.

Don Clement: Activity in that area. Replacing water lines in Phase I and a little bit of sewer work. Phase II will be all sewer lines and road resurfacing and sidewalk improvements from Lincoln St to

Main St and drainage work, streetscaping for attractiveness. More coming but final result will be infrastructure will be in great shape. Ph II not even before budget committee yet. No new sidewalks in Ph II, only improvements.

Dan: There is no plan on books to add sidewalks-would have to look into that via citizen activism. Talk to DPW and convince them of the need, then go to Planning Board, then Budget Committee, then Selectmen, and then to the Voters.

[Discussion on town long range sidewalk plan with DPW]

Arthur: Area of Lincoln St, sidewalks narrow and often not plowed for 2-3 days.

Mr. Clement: Ph II will include sidewalk improvements for this area.

Resident: What is the timeframe for these phases?

Mr. Clement: Ph I this year, Ph II needs to go through Capital Improvements Planning process. Probably 2017 ballot. Earliest would be start it late in 2017. Usually a year after voted approval to break ground.

[Discussion on budgeting process timeline]

Mr. Winham: many large projects underway. Lots of folks want to invest in Exeter for long term gains. Several key lots involved here. Only one is for sale. Al Rood (sp?) Shoe parcel is for sale. One developer wanted to buy it, raze it and put apartments there. Bob, why is it impossible to build above or around tracks?

Mr. Hall: Pan Am Railways owns the tracks. Liability is huge. They are 100% against any additional crossings. They claim air

rights over tracks. Another crossing, even pedestrian crossing is no go. Durham tried for years and didn't prevail. Any type of crossing they are not interested.

Resident: Walking this area is viable means to get around.

Resident business owner: we have a fence at tracks that we own. What if we just tore it down?

Mr. Hall: I think PanAm owns the fence, not you.

[Discussion on walking through the area]

Mr. Winham: Several developers are interested in the numbered parcels. One of them is interested in several of the parcels.

Resident: Can we substitute a more desirable crossing for one that is less desirable?

Mr. Hall: No, they won't consider doing that. Also, there has to be a bridge in town for emergency access if all the crossings are blocked for any reason.

[Garfield St area discussion]

Bill Campbell: Glad neighbors came out to this session. Great neighborhoods and Master Plan Sessions are coming up, really hope folks will participate.

Resident: Regarding the safety issue, could we get speed bumps at parking lots, crossings, etc.?

Resident: lots of the buildings have historical character-hate to lose all that. Keep correct historical flavor if can. Make it better, but retain feel.

Mr. Winham: developers seem disposed to keeping a historical look but making improvements that are modern.

Resident: are developers looking at using buildings as is?

Mr. Winham: no.

Resident: that's what I thought.

Resident: historical is nice, but can't get developers interested if have to reuse buildings. Angle parking is worth considering. Won't find folks to make the investment if have to retain the structures .

Mr. Winham: Let's talk about parking. Need places for merchant workers to park, and leave spaces out front for customers. Don't really have that in this train station area. Angle parking makes a lot of sense to me.

Resident: Use angle parking, gain two spots per original space and huge safety buffer. Widen street and you define commercial zone with little investment.

Mr. Clement: pros and cons to angle parking. Cars have to back out and puts people at risk that are crossing the road. Works in some areas, not others. Road narrows at the school, don't have enough room for it there.

Mr. Hall: parking on Lincoln St issues go way back. Only room for 67 spaces. Tried to buy Bridges Brothers parcel for more parking. Garfield was never meant to be a left hand turn. In Plan NH Charrette, buying that property was the number one priority for Exeter. Employees and owners should use new parking until May. It's not just a train parking lot.

[Loose discussion on parking safety issues, snowplowing, etc., contractor equipment parking presently, owner/employer/employee/customer parking problems, school traffic bottleneck certain times of day]

Mr. Winham: My agenda list has been addressed. Anyone else here have anything to add?

Mr. Hall: Centerpiece of this area since 1860 is the “Richardson Style” Railroad Station. It is the basis of this whole area of the community and we need to recognize that and use it.

[Discussion on AMTRAK and its rights]

Mr. Hall: If it takes \$5M/year to run the train and it only brings in \$3M/year, then the other \$2M/year is made up in subsidies. The State of Maine has been carrying this thing. We need to do our fair share on this. The State should do more. Nashua has horrendous traffic and has turned down railroad presence there for that reason.

[Discussion on value of train service and its uniqueness to Exeter community]

3. Adjournment: Input session ended at 8 pm (No formal adjournment needed).

Respectfully submitted by David Pancoast