

DRAFT MINUTES

Exeter Economic Development Commission

August 22, 2017

Present: Lizabeth MacDonald-Chair, Don Clement-Selectman Rep, Darren Winham- Economic Development Director, John Mueller, John Tremblay, Ian Smith, Madeleine Hamel. Town Manager, Russ Dean also attended.

1. Call to order: The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Lizabeth MacDonald.

2. Andre L. Garron—Business Retention & Attraction

Mr. Winham explained that Mr. Garron was kind enough to speak to the Board. He is currently working in Salem NH as the Community Development Manager and Assistant Town Manager.

Mr. Garron Community Development Manager and Assistant Town Manager for Salem NH. He created a Business Expansion and Retention program and he feels the heart of a community is existing businesses. Recruitment is great, and brings new energy but existing businesses are the heart and soul of a community. The core of the Business Expansion and Retention program is speaking with existing businesses. The program organizes groups to go out and interviewing existing businesses and whatever sectors are representing in Exeter, he highly recommends they organize their survey from each sector.

The UNH program he set up organized and trained people on how to do this for communities. People can assert their own opinions on certain things, and the committee is there to get their opinion. You must peel the onion a bit and take the negative comments and figure out exactly what they are getting at with these comments. Once you hear what the issues are you can develop a plan of action, which is the key to this whole activity. He cannot emphasize enough that they must do something with the information they gather.

Mr. Winham asked him to explain how they can organize and training the volunteers. Mr. Garron explained the process that came about in Wolfeboro, NH which worked out well. The interviewer asking the question to the business can tailor the survey to what they want it to be for a given business. Once the survey is completed and the training it becomes a conversation and that's where you can learn a lot of information. In terms of implementations the volunteers recruited to help are usually involved in moving the goals they feel strongly about forward. The process usually takes about a year and half, sometimes about a year.

Mr. Clement asked if there were certain characteristics they look for when they recruit. Mr. Garron explained that those that are willing to move forward were kept, but usually those who would sign up would be an extrovert to begin with. Mr. Garron said the UNH program, the town partners with UNH program and they have people come in to train, etc.

Mr. Dean asked of the nine BRE's he has done, can he tell about common threads among them. Mr. Garron said what came out loud and clear was communication between the town and the businesses community. Mr. Dean also asked when they come out with volunteers trained, and they have a product, would it be easy for people to come in and get going right away. And it was

confirmed that it should be, but they get to a point where they accomplished most of it but changes may have happened in town that changes parts of it. Mr. Smith said gathering the information is great, but working with volunteers can cause limited ability to push together stuff. Do they create a want vs. need list to focus on with the survey results? Especially when everything has to be done with approval in a town budget. Mr. Garron said that there are usually smaller items that can be done quickly, that are the low hanging fruit that can make a noticeable difference and cause some movement.

Mr. MacDonald asked if there is any expense that should be anticipated. Mr. Garron said that yes, there were expenses. The cost of the program at UNH is about \$2500. There will be mailings, and other incidental items. Food is also important, having something at the meetings food wise is helpful. Mr. Mueller likes the sound of the program, and wondered were there items that came up where he was surprised, and just hadn't thought of that. Mr. Garron explained that in Milford the school superintendent got very involved because it created a connection between colleges and the local businesses. This included training etc. to address needs in town.

Mr. Clement asked if the survey is developed in town or is it developed with the training program. It was explained the program has a template that can be tweaked to be more individualized for the town. Mr. Winham asked if Portsmouth did the BRE after or during the Master Plan. It was confirmed that there was some overlap. Mr. Winham also asked how long the wait time was for the UNH program and it was explained that it would be about 3-4 months. Mr. Winham asked John Tremblay, the general manager of Oslo Sylvania what a business would get out of it. Would they hear the results at the end? This would be very important to businesses. Mr. Garron explained everyone who participates gets to see the results. Mr. Tremblay also asked what the successes were from this process. Mr. Garron said it can cause groups to intertwine marketing and communication wise, and make it stronger. Also, issues businesses have and let them know about could contain improvements for utilities, etc. Discussion ensued about different scenarios in different towns that businesses mentioned utility improvements would help tremendously.

Mr. Smith asked if this was cyclical and if in the end would the businesses said this was the barrier to the growth, and that was completed would we find out if they had growth. This was confirmed, but that it wasn't just growth they were looking for, it's also business retention. Ms. MacDonald asked if businesses were hesitant to disclose information and it was confirmed that yes, they were, but that confidentiality is key.

Mr. Garron said he was blessed to be part of the Economic Development Academy, it's a great program and created to take knowledge on economic development throughout the state and help increase others knowledge on this subject. This is a great opportunity for training and it is a 3-day learning program.

3. Approval of Minutes

July 25, 2017:

MOTION: Mr. Mueller moved to approve the July 25, 2017 minutes, Mr. Clement seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Update: Business Attraction & Retention & Start-Ups

Mr. Smith liked the idea of the town going through the UNH program, and Mr. Dean agreed and wanted the town to form a formal process for it. Mr. Dean also wanted to review the 9 plans that are available to review as he felt they would benefit from the knowledge. Sustaining it would take effort, but it sounds like something they should be active on as a community.

Ms. MacDonald asked Mr. Tremblay if businesses would want to understand the result of the outcome, and he said yes, if they understand this they will want to participate. Mr. Clement felt this was good timing, because the town is working on a master plan and this would be a master plan for existing businesses. If we commit to this, we need to put a plan in place and we are approaching budget season. Discussion ensued about the budget, and getting this in on time if interested.

5. September Strategic Planning Meeting

Mr. Winham said that we could discuss BRE project, and any others they are interested in. Mr. Clement felt the BRE was a good project, size wise and amount of effort. HE did not want to try to do this and another project. Ms. MacDonald said that Mr. Dawley wanted a strategic planning session. Mr. Dean said the last time a goal setting session was completed was 2013, and some members were not part of this. The question comes back to is it a value of the commission to sit down and map out with Mr. Winham and Mr. Dean and talk about areas that they think they should continue. The Board decided to include this in their regularly scheduled September meeting as it would be easier to garner attendance.

Ms. MacDonald asked if the Board would want someone to come in and help guide them and the Board was in favor of this. The Board discussed who could help with this and with the short time period Mr. Dean would have to do some investigating. The Board discussed this at length.

6. TIF Advisory Board

Mr. Winham explained the Board did not meet as they are waiting on numbers and negotiating with Mr. Shafmaster. This is still being buttoned down.

7. Economic Development Project Updates

Sea Dog has signed their lease and there are several other projects upcoming that he will discuss at the next meeting.

Next meeting: Tuesday, September 26, 2017

ADJOURNMENT: Mr. Clement moved to adjourn at 8:30PM, Mr. Mueller seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Dionne