

Economic Development Advisory Committee

1.14.09 Meeting notes

BOS Meeting room

Present:

Tracy Bardsley, Milford DO-IT
Brad Chappell, Chappell Tractor
Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co
Rick Holder, Hampshire Hills Sports Club
George Infanti, Milford Paint & Wallpaper
Heather Leach, Centrix Bank
Tom Sapienza, Hampshire Hills Sports Club
Tim O'Connell, Butternut Farm
Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc

Excused:

Rich Ball, Cirtronics Corp.
Chris Costantino, Conservation Commission
Sean Trombly, Trombly Gardens

Bill Parker, Director Community Development
Tim Finan, BOS representative
Mike Putnam, BOS representative
Janet Langdell, Planning Board representative
John McCormack, TIFD representative
Walter Murray, Jr., Water & Sewer Commissioner representative

Shirley Wilson, Recording secretary

Introductions

J. Langdell called the first meeting of the committee to order at 7:30AM and the committee members introduced themselves.

Review and Discussion of Charge / Role of Advisory Committee

B. Parker welcomed everyone and explained that there were several individuals who were interested in becoming a part of this committee but were unable to make it this morning; Sean Trombly, who was out of town to receive a national agricultural award, Rich Ball from Cirtronics and Chris Costantino of the Conservation Commission. This meeting is a follow up to the roundtable as well as to the BOS goal to really push forward on economic development for the town. The Selectmen directed the Planning Board to move forward with this economic development plan. Together with Janet, and the Planning Board, we put together the charge for this committee and hopefully we will be able to achieve this goal. B. Parker then reviewed the Committee's charge:

Milford's Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) is charged with formulating a comprehensive economic development strategy that contains a vision supported by realistic goals and implementation steps to promote balanced, sustainable economic development in the Town of Milford. This plan should be based on community values and strengths, and address community deficiencies and constraints to economic development. The EADC plan, with recommendations, will be presented to the Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen to form the basis of sound economic development policy for the Town in May 2009.

B. Parker added that he and Michelle Sampson, Library Director just finished and submitted a grant to create a small business resource center at the library which will build a stronger relationship between town administration and the library. The center would offer resources for small businesses as well as space for training, seminars and education. J. Langdell said it would offer tools right here in town for small businesses to establish and grow their businesses.

B. Parker said that everyone locally and at the state level is trying to prepare for the possible economic stimulus package coming down from the federal government and he attended a meeting last week at the State Division of Water Resources with municipal officials and engineering consultants to discuss the next steps. He has also been in contact with Senators Gregg and Shaheen, the Local Government Center and the State Economic Development Division to get our name out there. All the state agencies are trying to coordinate because it seems that the money will be funneled down through the state to the towns and various programs. The bottom line however, is that no

one really knows what is going on; when it will happen, how the money is going to be doled out, or how it will work. The other side is that when it happens, it will happen very fast and we need to be prepared.

B. Parker provided a list of possible town projects that was sent to the state:

- Phase I of the Brox property to extend Perry Rd down past the bypass to the elementary school site so that at least we could get the water, sewer and road to the school;
- Continuing the sidewalk on Nashua St from Medlyn Monument to the intersection at Walgreens;
- Kaley Park improvements including the changes to Nashua St;
- Osgood Pond.

Discussion - Development of Vision

To start the discussion on economic development, B. Parker asked the hypothetical question “*If Milford were to receive \$3.5 million from the Feds for economic development stimulus projects – how would you suggest the money be used to promote long term economic benefit for the Town?*” and stated that the membership of this group is politically diversified and there should be good discussion as to what is happening in town, why, and what to do about it to move forward.

Comments following from the discussion:

Why spend the money before we have it. We should concentrate on strengthening and supporting ourselves; not always depending on the government. If we get the stimulus money then that’s a bonus.

The Budget Advisory Committee advocates having something in place when that money comes down and although they are in agreement that we should have the money before we spend it, there needs to be some vehicle in place to accept the money when it becomes available.

Anything that could help support development of the infrastructure necessary to bring more businesses in would be the way to go as we have land sitting here waiting for development. New Hampshire is a great place to locate if we can provide some incentives because there are other areas that hold the carrot out. Towns like Hampton, who lured Foss Mfg out of Massachusetts, and others who held out carrots back in the 1970’s when times were tough made out very well. So it seems that some type of incentive or carrot building would be the way to move forward.

The stimulus package should be used for real economic development, not for the “nice-to-haves” like the park and sidewalk. We have a lot of acreage out at the Brox Property that the town bought many years ago that has just been sitting there and we need the infrastructure to make it accessible. If we really want economic development and the potential to increase our town, then Brox should be priority #1 given the list of projects. Maybe we could also look into other possibilities that would be received positively when we get to the point of allocating the funds. The key is to figure out what we should do assuming there is no stimulus package. However, if the money comes it will come fast and the structure and background is already there for Brox to act quickly.

Some of the preliminary engineering work and conceptual site layouts have already been done for the Brox property, in conjunction with the Grubb & Ellis marketing. We also know the kind of costs involved for the infrastructure and utilities out there through the TIFD and MIDC groups, but this goes beyond the scope of their charters.

We have information on the plusses and minuses of Milford and how we stack up against other communities as part of a study the TIF Board is participating in through a partnership with Northeastern University. We have not yet received the most updated information, but when it becomes available this group should boil it down and assign weighted values to the pros and cons. Once we determine who the most likely buyers would be, then we can do the marketing. One of the difficulties listed was workforce housing. Hendrix did some comparisons on worker availability and existing building inventories between Milford and Ohio and we do have issues.

We have 80-100 acres of useable raw land at Brox, but everyone who looks at it also looks at the infrastructure costs, sewer, power, and water are automatically turned off because somebody has to pay for that. If we could get

it up and running with roads, perspective buyers could drive in and see the possibilities. We have a real barrier to get over with so much other available land with infrastructure already in place out there. Also we will have to figure out how to get the prudent town folk of Milford to spend the money up front.

We need to determine what types of businesses we want at the Brox property and then find out what types of incentives we have to attract the workers. That way we also develop and retain our existing businesses. Even the technology center at the high school dovetails in.

Envision a high tech Medical Park at Brox as there are arms of both hospitals from Nashua here in town. One of the reasons that New England isn't in as much trouble, employment wise, during this recession is because of the medical and education fields. This genre would be good because the higher median income will boost the overall average economy.

Up until now there has been an industrial/manufacturing push for Brox and that is a good point that there may be a broader perspective and we may need to redirect our vision away from industry and towards green with maybe a recycling center. Zoning changes are in place and the ICI-2 district is wide open; all but auto dealerships and adult entertainment is allowed.

Historically we consider water and sewer for infrastructure, but we should also include power and telecommunications, especially if we are trying to attract medical development. Milford is weak along the telecommunication lines and this is an issue for both small and large businesses. We should also be mindful of the superfund site and the former police station as we bring services to that area. They are not far geographically from Brox and will be coming back on line in the near future. Looking beyond Brox, there are other parcels are important in that area that were considered for inclusion in the TIF expansion last year; vacant properties on Meadowbrook Dr, Jones Rd, Hollow Oak Ln, and along Elm St incorporating the golf course. The OK Tool superfund site and the old Police Station land should definitely be taken into account because there has been recent interest. Also, the recent Master Plan report did not recommend looking at the Police Station for town facility use, instead recommends the site for highest and best use, especially in conjunction with the OK Tool site.

We could invite Verizon or FairPoint to one of our meetings and see what can be done to improve telecommunications. The government needs to hear the fact that we need more bandwidth as we're trying to grow. Berlin is a good model for telecommunications and we should inquire how they approached and accomplished successful development since the paper mills closed.

According to information from the NH High Technology Council, New Hampshire will have the highest percentage of people employed in green technology and 21,000 new jobs will be created in the next five years.

There are traffic problems at the 101/101A, Market Basket and Old Wilton Rd intersections as well as access issues to the Brox property. A comment was made that if enough money was thrown at the state, anything could be done. If we could get someone big enough to come in with extra money they could add funding to update the intersections or pursue additional access via an on-ramp from 101.

If Brox becomes #1 priority then this committee should be aware that there is a feeling out there not to use town funds to develop Brox and to leave it as open space. It is a small but vocal minority and this is a viable piece of land to develop. There has to be a happy medium between conserving land and developing property.

There was concern expressed with this committee focusing only on the Brox property when it seems that the TIF group is already doing that; why duplicate efforts.

It is important to go back to charge and ask what we have to do or put in place to develop a sustainable economic development plan for the future. Will health, green technology and education sustain us for the future or will it just be a ten year plan.

We need to get more knowledge as to where that stimulus money will go. Will anything in the private sector see the money or will it all go to make government buildings, schools and libraries energy efficient. Where will the jobs be created?

We have to get a tight focus for the immediate future and ask what the Obama administration going to be pushing; health, green technologies and education. If we don't put that ideology in the mix, it will be harder to land grants and money coming down the road. We have to understand how to be ready.

There may be other strengths or weaknesses we could focus on such as timeliness of approvals, and public transportation to the airport, that can be seen as more immediate than developing a medical park. Part of the stimulus package could be used for existing businesses to keep them here. It's one thing to entice new business, but we can't forget about the businesses paying the freight right now. Supporting existing business is essential.

Milford is now part of the Monadnock Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) and Jack Dugan is an excellent resource. State money is generally funneled down through the regional development groups then onto the municipalities and we will be the second largest town in the MEDC which should give . Nashua is struggling with how to move forward with their economic development and that impacts us as we figure out how to tie in regionally.

There are also other areas of town we could be looking at for development or re-development.

- The Oval and South St area is a key piece for the town. The current issues are vacant buildings, parking, and traffic flow.
- Over the years there has been discussion about tying Ledgewood or Powers St to South St and extending that Residential B area zoned to allow multifamily. However, it is important with planning for any land use or zoning changes to plan accordingly for infrastructure and road connections. Accessibility to go from the commercial piece on South St to the back residential land will be instrumental. This plays into considering where we will house people for the new businesses.
- There has also been interest in the Emerson/Armory Rd area and there is development potential. Historically the Planning Board has consciously decided to not extend the commercial zoning further south, but that would certainly be up for review and possible revision.
- There is no water on the north and west sides of the Oval and the infrastructure stops on Powers St at the dead-end. Are there existing employers or businesses in town struggling because they don't have the infrastructure that is needed to operate? Are there areas in town that buyers may have walked away from a lack of infrastructure in place?

We will need to define who we are and what we want to be in the future. We have many resources maybe this committee can pull them all together and "brand" Milford.

- Milford has a town center, it's the hub of the Souhegan Valley and all roads lead to the Oval;
- We are the leading agricultural town in the southwest area boasting eight farms;
- The available Brox property
- Our schools and the technology center
- The Milford Advantage

DO-IT is preparing a brochure to market Milford throughout the region to include trails, parks and other aspects of the quality of life in Milford. The focus would be on downtown but they are open to suggestions about other areas.

We need to find out what we can improve on and who are we competing with; referencing the Seacoast, Massachusetts, and Lebanon. Milford has a lot to offer, but we need to get the word out.

The 1939 brochure referencing Milford as the heart of the Souhegan Valley and the gateway to the Monadnock region was brought up.

The School District in the early 90's was in a funk and look at our schools now. We have a technology center in the high school, a new elementary school, kindergarten starting in September and stability with the Board and superintendant. We have come a long way, quality wise, and that is marketable. Now we have the opportunity to market our quest for being higher tech and use the technology center as our unique base.

The Souhegan Valley is one of the best kept secrets in the area and a great place to live with access to a variety of recreation and resources.

We should position Milford in a better light comparing it to surrounding communities like Amherst and Hollis. Businesses draw employees from a 20-40 mile radius and will look at the whole area as each community has something different to offer, so it is important to work with the other communities but at the same time promote our strengths.

From a regional perspective, where do we stand? Do we need to re-define the region? Milford is unique and strong enough without Nashua. Development is coming this way, 101A is built out and we should work with Amherst as this all ties together. We need to be ready.

The Selectmen need to give the charge to all the various departments to all work together to make the process more accommodating in conjunction with proper planning and to encourage education for volunteers on land use boards.

Is there a caution regarding economic development where it becomes more of a burden than expanding the tax base? The recommendations of this committee must be weighed for impacts versus the benefits. There have been studies done regarding the costs and benefits. This group will be debating the pros and cons of development and will have discussion at various stages. There should be a balance between conservation, business, residential and the tax base.

An Affordable Housing Group will be formed through the Planning Board and Staff that may intersect with this group at some point in time.

We could look at what other towns have done so that we don't have to reinvent the wheel and can learn from their successes. Discussion followed.

- Members of this committee could contact other communities and look at their comps and plans.
- The TIF studies and findings can be made available
- Google "Economic Development NH"; there is so much information out there, but Dover, Peterborough, and Portsmouth have good sites.

Identify key issues

- ✓ Determine what types of businesses we want in Milford
- ✓ Incentives or carrots to retain existing businesses and attract new development
- ✓ Workforce housing as part a larger regional effort
- ✓ Develop a marketing theme for Milford
- ✓ Wonderfully developed conserservation features
- ✓ The Milford advantage; how to get the word out
- ✓ Assistance with permitting and town processes
- ✓ The Selectmen give a charge to all the various departments to work together to make the development process more accommodating in conjunction with proper planning and to encourage education for land use board volunteers.
- ✓ Infrastructure work:
 - Brox property
 - Telecommunications and power
 - Areas in town and existing businesses identified as lacking or having additional need
- ✓ Identify projects for possible stimulus package money
- ✓ What other towns have had successes and what have they done?
- ✓ What can we improve?
- ✓ Who are we competing with for business and housing?

Summary of questions:

Do we have a focus for the long term continuum growth that makes sense for our community?
Does this area support the kinds of living requirements for potential employees?
Who was the Grubb & Ellis marketing being focused on?
What type of business do we want?
What zoning changes may be needed?
How would somebody approach assisting Milford with creating a sustainable economy?
What would Milford's future look like?
Are there existing employers or businesses in town struggling because they don't have the infrastructure that is needed to operate?
Are there areas in town that buyers may have walked away from a lack of infrastructure in place?
What can we do to support existing businesses?
What is the goal of conservation for obtaining open space and have we gotten there yet?
Where do we stand from a regional perspective and how do we tie in?
Is there a caution regarding economic development where it becomes more of a burden than expanding the tax base?

Agenda and goal(s) for next meeting

Discussion and presentations for current economic development in town through the following roles:
Master Plan-Planning Board & Board of Selectmen
MIDC
West Milford Tax Increment Financing Advisory Board
DO-IT
Chamber of Commerce
Community Development Dept / Wadleigh Memorial Library "Business Resource Center"

Determine chairman

To be discussed at next meeting.

Set meeting date(s) and time

Wednesday mornings, 7:30AM at Hampshire Hills Sports & Racquet Club

*It was determined that the group will initially meet weekly and then go to bi-weekly

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday January 21st 7:30 AM at Hampshire Hills.

Actions items:

- Invite to future meetings:
 - Jack Dugan of Monadnock Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)
 - Don Zizzi, Northeastern University
 - Jim DeStefano of Grubb & Ellis (Marketing firm for Brox property)
- Website development TIF website: www.milford.nh.gov/communitydevelopment/TIFD
- Provide updated information from Northeastern University partnership
- BOS directive to town departments

Future meeting topics:

- How to move forward
- Look at town infrastructure; water, sewer, roads, transportation, utilities, community facilities,
- Zoning, development and land use issues for vacant lands
- Land use boards education and training
- Regulatory framework
- Marketing and promotion
- Property tax, revenue and budget issues
- Environmental issues relating to economic development
- Regional and state economic development issues
- Community character
- Brox property
- Identify weaknesses and strengths and determine how to address them
- Recommendations for Planning Board and Selectmen

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00AM.