

Economic Development Advisory Committee

2.18.09 Meeting minutes

Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

Present:

Tracy Bardsley, Do-it
Brad Chappell, Chappell Tractor
Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co
Chris Costantino, Conservation Commission
Tim O'Connell, Butternut Farms
Tom Sapienza, Hampshire Hills Sports Club
Sean Trombly, Trombly Gardens
Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc

Janet Langdell, Planning Board representative
Walter Murray Jr, Water and Sewer Commission representative
Bill Parker, Director Community Development
John McCormack, TIFD representative

Shirley Wilson, Recording secretary

T. Sapienza called the meeting to order at 7:35AM.

1. Review of agenda and meeting notes:

T. Sapienza said that the summarization on page 2 really encapsulated the website discussion.

W. Murray made a motion to accept the minutes as written. D. White seconded and all in favor.

2. Discussions:

B. Chappell

B. Chappell briefly summarized his findings and asked if there were any comments on the email dated 2/11/09 that he sent out. J. Langdell said what jumped out at her was the number of places located on major highways; I-89, I-93, I-95. She also noted that the Groton website made mention to regional and state economic development agencies and that got her thinking about the strength of our relationship with the State Economic Agency and whether NRPC might direct some resources towards economic development. George has mentioned this before, and we may need to look more regionally. What are the surrounding communities doing for economic development and would a representative from the Chamber of Commerce be beneficial? A brief discussion followed.

B. Chappell said that Groton also focused on business retention as well as attracting new businesses. T. Sapienza said that was a good point and maybe we should be asking what problems our existing businesses are facing and what are the challenges of doing business in Milford. How do we retain our businesses because that will make a more attractive environment for new businesses. J. McCormack said communication with the businesses in town is very important and we need to try to be sensitive to and more aware of existing businesses' needs. T. Sapienza said he appreciated Brad's extra effort.

Tracy Bardsley

T. Bardsley brought a reprint of a 2002 brochure from Wilton that was funded by a grant from Sovereign Bank. Do-It is planning to do a brochure like this for Milford this year and although the main focus is on the downtown, it will encompass the entire town with historical information, parks and recreational facilities, trails and sights of interest. The target group will be general tourists; however it will not be distributed at the information centers because there are minimum stocking requirements and the stocking fee is very cost prohibitive at \$2.00 per brochure. We have a quote of \$2,500 for 10,000 copies and we are going to sell advertising space on the inside to help offset that cost. She is currently working with various groups in town and in process of formulating the wording and obtaining photographs and maps. The goal is to have it ready for late summer and then maybe tie it

into our website. The Oval Area Improvement Team has even discussed the possibility of having some type of downtown kiosk where one could call this information up. T. Sapienza brought up the activities at the dome and Hampshire Hills like sporting events and the antique show on Sunday mornings. People come in from all over the region, especially on 101 or from the south and may not even realize the downtown is so convenient and has so much to offer. It is important for businesses to work together to get the word out and promote the economics of the community.

3. Summary review of issues raised to date:

B. Parker distributed copies of the draft summary and explained that the concerns fell into several categories and were grouped as such, but they could certainly be revised. From previous discussion and his own thought process he came up with recommendations that would fuel further discussion and future work and added that action steps will also need to be addressed. T. Sapienza suggested going through each item and determining what can be done right away to have the largest impact?

D. White said that while bringing new business to town is number one priority and is good, the item at hand should be to retain the business we have. Our charge is to make recommendations on how to either maintain or develop economic strengths in this town and to pay for what we already have here. How many more presentations do we need to have when we all know what is out there economically.

J. Langdell said in order to do a balanced appraisal; she would like to hear more about the conservation plan and their goals for targeting conservation and recreation land in the town. Then we can focus on developable land and where we want to see growth happen.

D. White said right now we have a wonderful opportunity as a committee to have a great impact and if we are collectively known we will have a greater effect to get some of these items accomplished. So if we go forward with recommendations to the Selectmen, we all need to be behind it together. B. Parker added that the Facilities Committee has become a powerful group that the Selectmen rely on. It is a strong group that stuck together and they are always moving forward with consensus.

M. Ciardelli said that we should prioritize the issues so that when they are presented the order of importance does not get confused. J. Langdell said easy for any group including our Selectmen to get tied into the tasks as opposed to something bigger such as a policy. T. Bardsley said what we are trying to create is a vision for the town and this is a way to get there.

T. Sapienza said we can go about this in two ways; start sending things to the Selectmen when we feel they can be done or wait until the presentation in May. T. O'Connell suggested giving the Selectmen a brief progress report. We could touch on each area and get the Selectmen to buy into this. B. Parker offered to schedule something after the new board is in place. There was further discussion on how to prioritize the summary.

J. Langdell said we still need to have a vision statement. D. White referenced a previously mentioned slogan "Milford is the hub of the Souhegan Valley at the gateway to the Monadnock region." J. McCormack brought up the "Milford Advantage" Discussion regarding slogan versus vision followed.

T. Sapienza read the Community Character vision statement.

Through responsible management and promotion of individual and community stewardship, Milford will be a sustainable community rich in physical, cultural, economic and social diversity, and will be characterized by a small-town atmosphere; a vibrant downtown; an active business community; human scale interconnected neighborhoods; local agriculture; and the preservation of natural resources, rural landscapes and historic features.

T. Sapienza said that maybe some of our charge could be combined with that vision statement referencing sustainable economic development. It is important to have an atmosphere where businesses and the town work together for a common goal; a place where the Town understands the issues that businesses are facing and where businesses in turn promote the town. J. Langdell said mutual support for retention and recruitment of businesses

within the town. J. McCormack said one of our strengths is that businesses do support other businesses here, but there are concerns with taxes, streamlining the process, and the well-meaning activities of some of the volunteer boards that create layers of pass through in terms of approvals. J. Langdell also brought up a lack of buy-in by the building owners.

D. White how asked how we tie together this vision/slogan? How do we incorporate portraying that visual of the hub of the wheel; the center of business and the center of the town with the spokes going out to the wheel. J. Langdell added that the rim keeps everyone together in an effort to roll forward. T. Sapienza said business, government and residents are in the center working together and from that come the spokes; good schools, workforce housing, conservation, and recreational lands.

B. Parker crafted a draft vision statement for the committee.

Milford shall continue to develop a diversified, growing, and sustained economy by supporting existing businesses and job opportunities, recruiting compatible businesses, and providing a business-friendly environment through promotion, supportive government, and land use that reflects the desired community character.

B. Chappell said it is good to be business focused and the statement could also incorporate community and family friendliness.

Itemized issues:

A consensus was taken on each item as to whether it should be included in the presentation.

#1 Town website

Vote 12-0 in favor to include in recommendations.

Discussion:

T. Sapienza said the website could make an impact right away.

D. White said the website should be done by a professional, not by a committee. People don't have the time to be on another committee or the expertise and he would recommend that we immediately suggest that this go forward today. In 2009, the internet is the avenue for information. T. Sapienza agreed but stated that this and other committee's roles are advisory and should only focus on recommendations. M. Ciardelli asked if the other sites we looked at were done internally or by a professional. T. O'Connell noted that Tim Finan's wife has done work for the Butternut Farm website and the Manchester Farmer's Market website which is directly tied into the Manchester Mainstreet organization and to the city. Discussion on other websites and web designers ensued. T. Sapienza said it was up to the town to determine who and how to do the website; it is not this committee's purview. This committee could draft a recommendation that Milford needs a professional, well done website that has everything linked together with a uniform look and feel, which shows how important economic development is to the community. B. Parker added that the long term maintenance of the site also has to be looked at and that is where often times we run into problems with volunteers. D. White said it is more a matter of linking everything together and also noted that everything including economic development is perception.

J. Langdell said the website should be considered a subcomponent of communication.

#2 Policy / Communication

Vote 12-0 in favor to include in recommendations.

J. McCormack said that policy really stands on its own and communication is a part of that; its how we deliver that message.

T. Sapienza said that the key is a top down approach, from the Selectmen to the departments. The frustration coming from businesses is all the hoops one has to jump through. Although Milford does have many strengths, we also want something that promotes economic development like streamlined processes. There are two forms of communication; communication between two groups of people and communication as promotion. B. Parker said

communication is certainly an overriding theme throughout this and maybe we should separate it out from policy and emphasize it in each of the points. T. Sapienza communication should be a separate point.

J. Langdell said when looking at other websites, other communities usually list general strategies for economic development.

M. Ciardelli suggested changing the section to Policies and Procedures.

#3 Downtown/The Oval

Vote 12-0 in favor to include in recommendations.

J. McCormack said the downtown defines the character of Milford and it should really be emphasized. J. Langdell said this is definitely established in chapter 1 of the Master Plan.

#4 Town Infrastructure and Services

Vote 12-0 in favor to include in recommendations.

M. Ciardelli said that infrastructure and services are a high priority and should be incorporated as part of the goal of this group. This seems like an obvious recommendation but how much emphasis do we want to place on it. Do we want to focus on this item or do we take smaller steps and let the Selectmen work on this one because it is an untouchable thing for this group to achieve. P. Parker said that is a good point to throw into the vision statement, a commitment to infrastructure maintenance and improvement. M. Ciardelli then asked what kind of commitment is there to get these recommendations accomplished. J. Langdell inquired about other areas we are looking at to develop like along Rte 13 N & Rte 13 S or the west end of Elm St? What infrastructure improvements would facilitate economic development in established areas or areas that we foresee as being developable in five to ten years? T. Bardsley said once the areas have been established, then we need to give the Selectmen specifics. B. Parker agreed that specific actions need to be a part of what this group recommends.

W. Murray said one of the problems the Water and Sewer Commissioners have been discussion in their meetings is the way that the infrastructure has been funded in the past; it has been paid out of the users fees. To develop Brox, the water, sewer and roads would have to be put in at a cost of \$2.4M just to construct a building in Phase I. Where will the taxes from that building go and why would a water user want to pay for that water line when they don't get the benefit of the value of that building. The town is going to collect the taxes, therefore the Town or general fund ought to pay for and put the infrastructure in place. After they put the services in, then by all means should turn it over to the groups that will maintain the systems. Discussion followed. W. Murray also said that the Selectmen waived Hampshire Hills' entrance/impact fees because Hampshire Hills and Stabile themselves paid for the infrastructure that came into the system so they could have the water. This has been done before but had that money been collected and put in capital reserves we would now have the money to pay for some of this new infrastructure. T. Sapienza said that Stabile and Hampshire Hills paid \$1M dollars to bring that water up and everybody along the way benefitted. W. Murray gave an example that right now, at a cost of \$500,000, they are looking at extending the water down Emerson Rd, under Rte 13 S, down Armory Rd, to Old Brookline Rd connecting into twenty-nine houses on a well that Pennichuck supplies. Who picks up the cost for that? D. White asked why it cost half a million dollars and how much was for engineering and inspection fees. W. Murray said it was part of the deal. D. White said there are a lot of things we need to talk about and break down just how we do business. J. McCormack referenced the TIF warrant article to authorize the Selectmen to finance that infrastructure within the TIF district on a bond, so we were not asking the users to pay up front or even along the way. We would ask any significant developer to prove to ourselves and to voters that the project makes sense. J. Langdell asked that whatever sub group looks at #4, the TIF initiatives be revisited as a piece to the recommendation. B. Parker said this is also cross-referenced under #6, develop fair share costs between the town and the development community for needed infrastructure improvements.

J. McCormack said we also need to be upfront with our objective of having a tax positive impact.

#5 Business Community / School District Relationship

Vote 12-0 in favor to add "Municipal" to the title and include in recommendations.

J. Langdell said this item may carry a lower priority but does reflect the theme of trying to improve the relationship between the municipal side of town government and the school side of town government and to involve the community more. There are obviously resources at the school level that we are not taking advantage of, so we're not using our tax dollars wisely. J. McCormack said conversely that businesses could possibly be doing more; however, it hurt somewhat to listen to Rich's take on the lack of interns going into programs. That is golden and why wouldn't we encourage more of that. J. Langdell said it may be very positive to hear the school piece from Rosie at the next meeting. There are some good things happening and noted that the Planning Department and the Planning Board is using the marketing class to do some work on an award program. B. Parker said he was very careful in the wording he chose for this recommendation.

D. White said last week he heard the Milford Selectmen and the School Superintendant both wondering if they could talk together more and it is incomprehensible that one party does not know what the other is doing. How can we encourage communication between the Board of Selectmen and the School Board and can we recommend a sharing of resources. S. Trombly brought up winter maintenance at the schools; the school district had to rent a loader to push back the snow because the Town wouldn't let them use one of theirs. T. O'Connell added that there is a real disconnect by both parties. Discussion followed. J. Langdell said why can't we come together regionally within the community because the two budgets both come from the same place, the taxpayer. B. Parker said these recommendations could also be presented to the School Board. J. Langdell suggested a joint meeting. T. Sapienza said communication is a big piece of the overall picture, and referenced the variety of businesses within Hampshire Hills. How do we get the other committees and boards communicate to each other for a common goal and mutual benefit?

#6 Business / Town Promotion

Vote 12-0 in favor to change the title to "Marketing" and include in recommendations.

J. McCormack suggested that town promotion become a part of communication. The focus should be on communication and then under that come the tools; in order of importance, the website and then promotion because they tie in together. B. Chappell said that communication is so broad that it could also encompass all the items.

T. Bardsley suggested the title of Marketing because it covers everything mentioned and gets away from communication.

J. Langdell asked where regional communication fit in and noted that marketing implies selling. B. Parker said that municipal policy was listed under #2. J. Langdell said internal policy communication procedures and external policy communication are two separate items and brought up relationships with NRPC, the Conservation Commission, and the State. B. Chappell this could be broken down further at a later meeting.

M. Ciardelli replied that marketing is a huge aspect of any business.

#7 Land Use

Vote 11-0 in favor to include in recommendations.

J. McCormack said workforce housing and the housing stock could be listed. B. Parker said workforce housing was listed under #2 but could be included here as well.

J. McCormack stated that this topic is something we can't tackle on our own and needs the support of regional development. We certainly don't want to take on the title of the workforce housing destination for the entire area; we can't afford or support every other community's low cost housing. There has to be cooperation within the region. B. Parker added that this is also a highly charged political issue.

T. O'Connell asked if we have established the commercial zoning for the town or if we foresee any changes coming down the pike? B. Parker said the last zoning change expanded commercial along the west side of town and over the years, there has been discussion about expansion along Rte 13 South. In the past, though, the thought was to not encourage more strip development but there are surely ways to handle development without it becoming a strip. T. O'Connell said that Rte 13 South is the road of the future, there is 1.5 miles of developable

land. J. Langdell if Rte 13S is the road of the future, what action steps or things can we put in place to mold that future the way we want as opposed to random development. B. Parker added that there are also tweaks that can be done within the zoning districts, such as specifically addressing medical parks or special uses. J. Langdell said there might be devices we can implement that would help to attract and facilitate development. J. McCormack asked if there had been any recent discussion on the area. B. Parker said right now there is no discussion on development anywhere, but commercial people are always looking for sites with a lot of traffic and the traffic volume on Rte 13S continues to grow.

D. White asked what if someone wanted to develop there now, would we have to wait for a town vote. B. Parker said given our current form of government yes, but we could rezone without somebody coming in if we are anticipating new development and want to encourage it. We could start working on it early and put it on the ballot; however, you don't want to rezone unless you can provide for it. D. White said this is where we could suggest processes. B. Parker said for example, if we are thinking about extending water and sewer down Rte 13S to accommodate a new residential development, then we could start considering the size and capacity to make sure it is large enough to handle commercial development along the way. Currently the water and sewer service stops at DPW south.

Summary:

There was discussion on how to prioritize the items and it was decided that Bill will revise the summary from today's discussion and send it out by email and so that everybody can work on prioritizing the list and bring it to the next meeting for discussion. Bill will add affordable housing to #7 on the summary list and also fine tune the vision statement. M. Ciardelli commented that it would be good to have debate and discussion as a group before anything is finalized. J. Langdell suggested that while we are looking at the priorities of each item, maybe we could start thinking about the action and implementation steps as well.

J. Langdell suggested hiring a professional marketing firm to come up with a slogan to market Milford.

B. Chappell said that these tasks are not so complicated, they are doable. B Parker said we should turn the actions into tasks or actual steps to be taken, which will be difficult. B. Chappell then read the Preliminary Identification of Economic Development Issues from the roundtable notes.

1. *There is no common set of goals, as set forth in the Master Plan, that guides what Milford wants for its future.*
2. *Although many local industries are performing well, there are problems with attracting skilled and trained labor.*
3. *Some local industries are having difficulty in attracting qualified labor and employees to the area due to the high cost of housing relative to their current location.*
4. *Although there are several Town government departments that are cooperative and helpful there are several that are not good to do business with – causing additional cost in time and expense.*
5. *The permitting process for new development needs to be more responsive to the business community. Interdepartmental communication needs improvement.*
6. *Governing boards need to share common goals that encourage business and this philosophy need to come from “top down” to the departments.*
7. *The Town must be prepared in advance for oncoming development.*
8. *Milford has a lot of offer, but does not market itself well.*
9. *Building and safety codes need to be responsive and flexible for adaptive reuse of old structures.*
10. *Municipal and regional infrastructure improvement needs hamper redevelopment.*
11. *Some downtown property owners do not reinvest in their properties and do not encourage leasing opportunities.*
12. *Volunteer boards do not have the training that they need.*
13. *Some regulations, either mandated from the State level or adopted at the local level are onerous and impractical – common concern for all types of business. Of particular note are the State mandates on agriculture, and local event and signage regulations.*

There was discussion about qualifications and education for volunteers. C. Costantino said to be careful of what you ask for. Part of the slowdown in the permitting process is because of the Conservation Commission. You ask for education and we are educated; our commission has been very good about going to all the workshops offered and the on-going training over the past few years. So now when developers bring their plans to us, we say no go and consequently we are trying to educate the Planning Board and they are starting to question plans now. D. White said there has to be some element of common sense.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15AM.

Next meeting:

Wednesday March 4th, 2009 in the American Room at Hampshire Hills

Actions items:

- B. Parker to revise vision statement
- B. Parker to revise preliminary summary of issues
- Schedule an update for the BOS
- B. Parker to get the comparative analysis from Northeastern University program
- TIF minutes of the LandQuest proposal
- Invite a representative from FairPoint to speak
- Invite Conservation to present land plans
- Website development
- BOS directive to town departments
- Staff to provide package with aerials and maps of identified properties
- Schedule site visits
- Provide updated information from Northeastern University partnership
- Invite Don Zizzi, Northeastern University to a future meeting