

Economic Development Advisory Committee

4.1.09 Meeting minutes

Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

Present:

Rich Ball, Cirtronics Corporation

Tracy Bardsley, Do-it

Brad Chappell, Chappell Tractor

Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co

Rick Holder, Hampshire Hills Sports Club

George Infanti, Milford Paint & Wallpaper

Tim O'Connell, Butternut Farms

Tom Sapienza, Hampshire Hills Sports Club

Sean Trombly, Trombly Gardens

Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc

Chris Costantino, Conservation Commission representative

Rosie Deloge, Milford School District representative

Janet Langdell, Planning Board representative

John McCormack, TIFD representative

Bill Parker, Director Community Development

Mike Putnam, Board of Selectmen representative

Shirley Wilson, Recording secretary

T. Sapienza called the meeting to order at 7:30AM.

D. White requested that the word *elementary* be changed to *clear* on page 2 and then made a motion to accept the minutes as amended. G. Infanti seconded and all in favor.

Review and discussion:

T. Sapienza said that the committee will be working from two drafts today for the first priority; one written by Bill and one in email format dated 3/31/09 submitted by Brad and Dale.

D. White clarified that his and Brad's intentions were not to step behind the group to create something different, and in no way, shape or form did they not appreciate what Bill had done. However, they tried to stick with the effect from the first roundtable meeting and tried to get to the point across incorporating all the subjects mentioned at that first meeting along with subsequent discussions of this committee. They also felt that the first priority should remain as Municipal Policy and Procedures and not steer from those first meeting minutes. This group should keep it simple and clear, as Mike Putnam had requested, and from a top down approach. B. Parker said that certainly Municipal Policy and Procedures is the number one priority, but his thoughts were that all the discussion would be covered earlier in the report before we get to the actual recommendations.

T. Sapienza said the submitted emails were appreciated and welcomed the good feedback. He took both Brad and Dale's email and Bill's draft and highlighted the similarities; they were almost word for word. Both incorporated a lot of the same things; however, points #3, involvement in a strong economic development organization and #4 supporting natural resource protection were not included in the email. B. Chappell said that they were not against #4 but didn't understand how that related to economic development. J. Langdell said that when we make recommendations with the word municipal, we have to remember that equals the whole community. There has to be a balance of needs throughout the community, not just the needs of businesses but those needs balanced with the needs of the residents for quality of life. J. McCormack said he supported that because of the experiences with the TIF warrant articles by perhaps not taking significant recognition of other factors. There is a vocal contingent very concerned with preserving natural resources and we should be mindful. D. White explained that some of these steps may already be part of the planning process where we would have to already be in accordance with some of the rules and regulations. They made the assumption that those rules are already in place. J. Langdell said that the final document will have to be a balanced presentation for this entire community. D. White added for the betterment of Milford. J. Langdell stated that we are all in agreement; we just have to blend the words together.

R. Deloge gave her observation to move forward. We need to start from the outline Bill provided and through feedback, we can address and list each of the seven priorities, then gather and review all the data. We can be more specific with the action steps.

J. McCormack stated that we all seem to be in agreement with the goals and priorities, but he has some concerns with how we foster engagement and buy in amongst all the parties; the Select Board, the department heads, and the various committees. If people feel that something is forced on them, they'll react negatively and in terms of priority #1, the word cascaded could be used instead of directed under *category 1. ...which needs to be directed from the top down to each department*. If you want to involve all the participants, you've got to involve them in the why and the how. How do we ensure that the main ideas coming down from the Select Board with firm support and understanding cascade down but also come back up the line? How do we engage the Select Board and some of the departments more fully in this process so that when the board members change, these ideas don't get left behind? The Select Board with the support of various groups has to provide the leadership and initial direction, but it can't be a directive. D. White said the wording was to get everybody onboard from the top and recounted another story he heard. An old man got up and spoke at a town meeting and made this thought comparison about a pie plate. The town government at the beginning of the fiscal year gets a pie plate filled with cash and gets all year to figure out how to spread it, while the citizens and businesses look at our empty pie plate at the beginning of our fiscal year, where we get all year to figure out how to fill it. That's where the common bond has got to be; the town needs us and we need the town and there has to be a blending of the government working from the top down and the community working from the bottom up. J. Langdell said the visual analogy was good. T. Sapienza added that was a good point and he was optimistic about where this process will go. We have an extremely capable Town Administrator and if he gets both a directive and the support of the Select Board there are processes in place in terms of establishing strategic planning and accountability. Maybe there should be some meetings directly with Guy to discuss these issues. There are also some inherent truths that do not need to go into our recommendation as it would just be adversarial, such as nothing happens without tax revenue.

J. Langdell said we've talked about an ongoing economic development council and if we envision that entity existing we should at some point come up with some strategies to answer the question of how we can assist Guy and the Select Board implement this set of guidelines or recommendations top down and bottom up but also from side to side. The how to's and the contents may be two separate issues. D. White said the last paragraph of the email pointed out those facts and asked how we as members of the community can help where the regulations are too restrictive and what can we do from the bottom up or side to side. J. Langdell then said conversely that maybe there are community members who feel that certain regulations should be made more restrictive. B. Parker said that was a huge problem and referenced density and the Land Quest development proposal. The vocal people came out in force and that is where an ongoing economic development council could play a huge role; to build consensus.

M. Putnam said from the Selectmen's standpoint when we're sitting around that table there are all kinds of considerations especially the fact that the townspeople may not want some of these recommendations and some recommendations may have to go before the voters. There will have to be monetary consideration and that has already started with the website. We don't have the money; nothing was budgeted to hire somebody to improve our website, so nothing is going to happen instantly. M. Putnam also noted that his immediate reaction to the directives for municipal policy was not good thinking that the Selectmen decide what will be municipal policy, not this committee.

J. Langdell said change doesn't happen rapidly but the Select Board can start engaging in a cultural shift to a business friendly environment and can start addressing the things that don't have monetary attachment.

R. Holder said there is really no concise way to take the temperature of the townspeople on a regular basis. When we bought the Brox property, 60% of the voters were in favor of that because the article passed, but as we go along we have no way of knowing how the taxpayers feel. We may be excited about some of these recommendations, but is the community? What needs to be marketed? M. Putnam said the Selectmen put this committee together so we don't need to be told *top down*. We need to know what the great group of intelligent people sitting on this committee thinks. What are your recommendations and what should be happening to encourage economic development? G. Infanti said this group could give strong suggestions, but doesn't have to give directives. T. Sapienza stated that we are an advisory committee. R. Holder said the language should be

communicative but not overly offensive. B. Parker said we don't want to cause defensiveness but the wording has to be strong enough to make the Selectmen aware that these are serious issues.

M. Putnam gave a suggestion for the website recommendation. Rather than just saying we need to update the website, we could add that the committee has looked at certain other websites and as a result we recognized specific deficiencies on our own website. We can point them out and show how we came to our decision. B. Parker said that was a good example because Guy gets copies of these minutes and when he read the minutes from our focus on the website, immediately there was defensiveness over several of our basic statements because he legitimately felt that there had been significant progress on our town website. Therefore in the body of the report we could list good websites that the town can take advantage of and utilize. R. Holder said in best practices there is a critical time. For websites it would be six months and you really should look around to see what else is out there and review. Depending on your cost situation, review dates could be set up. All our recommendations should list specific segments of time for review. If economic development was reviewed every six months or even annually and the effects on the town noted, we probably wouldn't have so much work to do.

T. Bardsley said it's not just about the website though. We should include a marketing plan for Milford in our recommendations and the website would be one component. We could also have business recruitment materials or a committee that goes out to make contact with large developers looking for property. J. Langdell suggested that the marketing plan not be just for businesses but also for the members of the community to buy into. T. Bardsley referenced the tattoo parlor and explained that while she was doing research on behalf of another merchant, Concord told her that if you have a waiting list of businesses that want to be on your oval, there wouldn't be spaces available for tattoo parlors and we wouldn't have to worry about buy in. People would have already spoken and we would have a clear plan of where we want to go.

M. Putnam said a citizen told him that the MIDC has been around for a long time and never accomplished anything. How do we equate to the MIDC? B. Parker replied that this group is looking at a much broader issue than MIDC who never really had the direction or energy to get out and do economic development. Their focus was industrial development and they got very tied into the Brox property and how to get that moving forward. They were set up to help with community development block grants and just never really got much guidance. Al Hicks is currently looking at whether the MIDC needs to be in existence with this group and the TIFD advisory board. If a new economic development council is formed, with new energy, new people and new ideas we just might be able to take the place of the MIDC. J. Langdell said when the MIDC was formed twenty years ago, that was the way to go and the evolution of these kinds of activities makes economic development the way to go now with a broader spectrum.

J. McCormack referenced point #2 from the email and asked if Bill had tried to look from the outside in, in terms of what it means to businesses. Are they familiar with who to talk to and who to contact. He then referenced the standard procedures from his former employer Alcan and brought up checklists that could direct one to appropriate sources of information. Could somebody coming from the outside be directed to the appropriate source or checklist? Do they know how to get into the system without being bogged down? B. Parker said we were very aware of that in our department; however, not all the other departments are at the level that we are, for whatever reasons. The communication channels can be cumbersome and confusing because we are not consistent town wide. That would be a good recommendation to go forward to the Select Board to tell Guy to tell the department heads to work on something like this so that it becomes easier to navigate the process. J. McCormack inquired if there was one integrated checklist? B. Parker said no, not yet. J. McCormack said that could be one recommendation. B. Parker explained that this committee would be surprised at the number of required permits. Site plans can go fairly quickly through the Planning Board process if everybody has their ducks in a row, but subdivisions are a little more difficult because there are more outside influences involved and the building permit process and checklist have been refined. One of the missing links is just a matter of getting the word out to people that they need to come in. Our department has many, many checklists available. J. Langdell asked if all the checklists were on the website. S. Wilson replied not yet. It would be beneficial if all were on the website, that way we could have the development process, and the building process available to more people. T. O'Connell said this has been the crux of the whole discussion, we need top down because of the lack of communication between departments and we need an easy process for businesses and individuals without the obstacles that can be seen as a hindrance.

T. Sapienza asked if we work on one priority at a time or with the whole list. Discussion regarding the process followed.

R. Ball likened this process to Moses coming off the mountain with the ten directives that state thou shall or thou shall not. We should come up with some basic recommendations then we can address everything else. Interestingly, it was Moses who developed all the laws, lawyers and court systems we have, to basically address ten issues. So we have to be really careful not to slip down too much on the strategy but stay with how the particular recommendation should be implemented. He doesn't really know how to approach this either, but maybe there should be Selectmen involvement in the process. We should identify the issues and send over a no bones statement to solicit reaction. M. Putnam said that was exactly what he was looking for; short, sweet and simple. Here is what we looked at and indicate what we came up with. Based on the talent of this committee, the Select Board can then implement specific suggestions without any further recommendations to get the dialog going back and forth. Additional discussion on the submittal process followed.

D. White suggested listing ten bullets for each item. T. Bardsley suggested using a whiteboard to list the items and do a general outline. B. Parker offered to put together a more simplified format to work from. R. Ball said the explanations should go later in the document. The vision statement and a basic list of issues should go first on only one or two pages and then can be backed up as reference on the subsequent pages. People are going to read the executive summary first. R. Holder asked if there should be more contact with the Select Board beforehand.

R. Deloge said the heart and soul of the work we need to do right now are the six or seven priorities, then get the information under each one of those. She agrees the executive summary needs to go first, but we shouldn't write it first. We have to do the other work first and then summarize it for the executive summary.

J. Langdell said she thought that at the last meeting, everyone was instructed to email any comments they wanted included on the report to Bill. We can work on priority #1 today but please do so for the remaining six items. G. Infanti said all the others are concise with pretty decent bullet points. We just need to update and add any other comments. B. Chappell agreed and said there wasn't much more to do on the others. He also noted that we were asked what we see as the problem. Whether the Select Board agrees or not, we can't do anything about that. J. Langdell clarified that our charge was what do we see as the solution. T. Sapienza re-read the charge.

B. Parker said he would come back to the next meeting with the entire body and a list of bullet points under each item. R. Ball said our first draft should be very blunt saying do this and don't do that. M. Putnam said there will be five different people looking at this and five different opinions from the Selectmen.

C. Costantino said that we keep working with the same list, just putting it in a different order. If she were a Selectmen she would want to know the how to's; how do we develop strong municipal involvement and how do we support the natural resource protection which is her particular interest and that the email does not include. That tells her something is missing in the process, so she would like to know where we are screwing up. Maybe we could focus more on how to achieve the individual items because the list already is good. D. White said resource protection wasn't included because he felt it was already going along and they only put down what they thought needed to be changed. Not everything is broken or needs fixing. It's as simple as going into the town hall and being treated friendly, you'll want to come back to the business again. If not you'll go to somewhere else and the town will lose that tax revenue. That is maintaining economic development. T. Sapienza said that is good customer service. C. Costantino said that having the process checklist would then be a good action item whereby each department would have a checklist. T. Bardsley bought up tax incentives. M. Putnam said those are the things he is looking for; do we need tax incentives, zoning changes, accommodate more workforce housing. J. Langdell said the action item might not be implement tax incentives; it might be investigate tax incentives such as the ones offered in Groton, MA to foster economic development. We should provide the details.

T. Sapienza reminded everybody to email their comments to Bill Parker. J. Langdell said action items should be submitted as well. B. Parker said they would be logged.

The next meeting date was set for Wednesday April 15th in the Americana Room at 7:30AM.

G. Infanti made a motion, J. Langdell seconded and all voted in favor to adjourn the meeting at 8:45.