

Economic Development Advisory Council (Draft)

9.15.10 Meeting minutes

Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

Present:

Tracy Bardsley, Do-it
George Infanti, Milford Paint
John McCormack, TIFD
Tom Sapienza, Hampshire Hills Sports Club
Penny Seaver, Smith, Seaver & Bean
Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc

Excused:

Brad Chappell, Chappell Tractor
Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co
Heather Leach, Centrix Bank
Sean Trombly, Trombly Farms

Chris Costantino, Conservation Commission
Gary Daniels, Board of Selectmen
Rosie Deloge, Milford School District
Bill Parker, Director Community Development
Janet Langdell, Planning Board representative

Also present:

Michelle Sampson, Wadleigh Memorial Library

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

Minutes:

D. White made a motion to accept the 7/1/10 minutes as written. C. Costantino seconded, and all in favor.

Membership recommendations:

G. Infanti made a motion to re-appoint Sean Trombly for a three year term. J. Langdell seconded and all in favor. Congratulations Sean. B. Parker explained the appointment process and said Sean will go before the BOS.

There was a brief discussion on the presentation of a certificate to Rich Ball. B. Parker said that Rich will consider staying on as a consultant for this committee. J. Langdell said that a photo of the presentation and a little blurb in the paper would be a good way to thank him and get some exposure for what this committee is doing. R. Deloge added that something could go on Granite Town media to acknowledge his participation and advertize the committee.

D. White said he spoke to John Morrison of Hitchiner Mfg Co who recommended Matt Kilgore, an engineer who moved to the area from Tennessee originally where he served on municipal boards. He could provide additional knowledge to this group. B. Parker said he also talked with John Siergiewicz of Hollis Line Machine who also expressed interest in getting involved. J. McCormack said we have two good candidates; one with experience from another area and one who's recently expanded and done well. Could we appoint both and not restrict it to one name? B. Parker said that our charter limits us to fifteen members, but that could be adjusted to include another member, as getting more business involvement is key. G. Infanti suggested inviting both candidates to the next meeting.

Subcommittee Reports:

Policies and Procedures

J. McCormack gave an overview and said the sub-committee had a session with Guy yesterday to review the progress of the activities, procedures and initiatives since the recommendation report of June 14th. Guy did concur with adding objective setting with the various department heads, so our next step would be to schedule review sessions with the original departments and then develop objectives out of that communication regarding policies and procedures to further the overall objective of improving communication, thereby reducing time and cost associated with those various policies and procedures. There was also discussion on the role of economic development and that we are still looking for more investment.

Progress:

- The Munis system is quite an effective tool and Shirley has taken on a training role with DPW, which is currently underway. Hopefully they will be online to track permits and complaints within the next few weeks.
- The website initiatives are another powerful tool to help increase communication, especially information related to policies, procedures and permitting.
- The new GIS system is online with substantial improvement to available mapping that should speed the process for town departments and reduce costs for developers. Additional information has also been integrated such as sewer and stormwater data
- The town has 78-80 town ordinances. Dawn and Darlene are reviewing each with the respective department heads and revising where applicable. Two ordinances have already been eliminated. Once cleaned up, they will go online; for greater visibility and better communication.
- The Fire Department operates using both Firehouse and Munis software which should be made compatible or eliminate Firehouse.

Actions ahead:

- We're doing a lot of preparations and although we have not seen much direct involvement, we have heard encouraging words from others. When the economy improves, hopefully we will be better prepared to welcome development.
- We will ask the department heads for their thoughts on how better to streamline the process and how to utilize the website as an effective communication tool. We are really excited about the new website and the opportunities to coordinate with that.
- The Water/sewer initiative, with virtually no public input at the meetings, has been somewhat disappointing; however, the new GIS system should be of benefit to them. Communications would be improved with a joint session with the Planning Board as the availability of water will increasingly be a factor for future development. We will also look at a joint meeting between the Commissioners and the Selectmen.
- We will meet with the four key departments, Community Development, DPW, Fire and Water Utilities.

T. Sapienza said we've had a lot of cooperation and inquired if there was a sense that everyone is on the same page. J. McCormack said that we have gotten excellent support from Guy. There's been progress and no question that Guy and the department heads are looking at how to improve communications. J. McCormack referenced an example of how things can go awry with a simple deck permit and said we need to ask how to find opportunities to serve the customers better. Some of the departments are farther ahead than others but people are thinking ahead. B. Parker said the idea of economic development as a prime goal for department heads may not be there yet, but its coming.

J. Langdell inquired if Guy would be at the department meetings because setting the objectives and the management thereof is his job. J. McCormack said Guy would not be at the meetings and a brief discussion ensued. B. Parker said the loop between the departments and Guy is completed through reports and minutes from this group that go back to Guy as well as informal conversations with Guy. He meets with department heads regularly and there have been small discussions and general updates at the senior level staff meetings, but nothing formal. J. Langdell asked if economic development is something that is permeated throughout community government. B. Parker said it is happening; informally. J. McCormack said this will be the opportunity to make it more formal. We could also ask that the objectives of each department be shared throughout.

G. Daniels asked where the Selectmen's involvement in this process was. J. McCormack said that the proper line of communication would be through Guy or Mike as the Selectmen's representative; however, there was good opportunity at the June 14th presentation. At that time, the questions pertained to the various sub-committees and were very general in nature without digging down too far. We are looking at Guy to help this process through to the Board of Selectmen where he in turn may ask for more input or involvement with the objectives for economic development. G Daniels said he wanted to make sure the process wasn't coming from the department heads up. He didn't want a lot of time spent on a process getting in place for the objectives only to get to the Board for approval who say no we're not interested. J. McCormack said the general directives for economic development need to start with the Board of Selectmen. G. Daniels said the Selectmen may need to be more assertive.

R. Deloge asked if there was opportunity for economic development or for EDAC progress to become a recurring agenda item at the senior level staff meetings. B. Parker said when there are things happening with EDAC, he will bring them up. J. Langdell said not necessarily just EDAC as the item for the agenda, but the outer goal of economic development for Milford. D. White said it would be good to share economic development happenings with department heads to get them onboard and excited. B. Parker said we do announcements like that; both good news and bad news is shared. T. Sapienza said it gets back to whether everyone at the meeting feels that the concept of economic development is an important piece. J. McCormack said that the spirit is certainly there. P. Seaver said the first round of meetings was really to present our committee and the positive thought process of what we are trying to do, so as we go through our second round of meetings the reception will be there. We have a relationship with these departments now; when we suggest ideas or objectives and when they get to the BOS everyone will have the ability to see where we are going. J. Langdell said that flavor, in regards to reviewing the ordinances at the BOS level and the streamlining of the development regulations, was in place prior to this committee. While this committee may have helped encourage that in other areas, it had already been set by people like Bill, Tim and Gary.

Land Use

C. Costantino said we're looking at the overall town zoning ordinance to see if what we have makes sense and is still working. B. Parker said the focus is primarily on the Commercial, Industrial, and Limited Commercial-Business zones, to see if the uses reflect current and future conditions. The group will bring recommendations to the Planning Board for potential zoning changes. Concurrently we've pulled in NRCP to start the process to develop design guidelines from the Granite Town Plaza westward. The guidelines will be similar to the Nashua/Elm St corridor guidelines and will reflect the large open areas and existing uses in that area and address landscaping and parking. They will be put in place for future development, so the sub-committee wants to get the buy-in from property owners and businesses in that area. It will also be important to do public outreach so that this will be a community supported effort. G. Infanti said we went from picking a small area last year to now looking at the entire ordinances and reviewing each district and see if the regulations make sense. J. Langdell said that the best example would be a gas station that you could have in the C district along Elm St or downtown, but by rights you can't have it in the ICI district at the intersection of Rte 13 and 101A. Fifteen years ago it may have made sense without the bypass, but does it fit today and what about fifteen years down the road.

G. Infanti said we are looking at all the areas leading to the oval and asking if they are aesthetically pleasing because nice landscaping will sell more than a huge sign. J. Langdell added that looking at the Elm St area is consistent with the Planning Board initiatives of the past few years and it makes more sense for this group to tackle the western part of Elm St since is it more of an economic area than residential. G. Infanti said that Elm St is also an area that is coming; from Agway to Wilton it is wide open and will eventually break when the economy starts to shift. J. Langdell said the other piece is that we will have more foundation material to bring forward to the Planning Board, the Selectmen and the community at large, to sway opinion.

J. McCormack asked if there were any patterns that show up with ZBA Variances. G. Infanti said they looked at that including mixed uses by area. If businesses are truly interested in an area or committed to a specific location they will go through the process. This whole committee is well rounded with a broad spectrum of representatives who are committed to make things work for economic development. J. Langdell asked if applicants are put off by the variance process. B. Parker said sometimes, but there have not been many actual businesses trying to locate at a specific location. Every case is so site specific, and the variance criteria, set by State RSA, are so pre-determined. We try to be up front with the applicants and even try to find different locations, but the reality is that sometimes the process puts them off. Just last week, a statement was made by an applicant that the ZBA is turning everything down. That is not the case; staff went through the records and found that there were 33 approvals and only 8 denials.

G. Infanti said the ZBA has become more open minded and if there is one board in town that is more realistic of the town it would be the ZBA. B. Parker added that one area they've become very supportive of businesses would be for signage. J. Langdell said they have done a good job of balancing the needs of property owners and the needs of the community at large and have used the Nashua, Elm St Guidelines as a tool and have come to a good compromise with a win/win situation at the end of the day.

Website Development/Branding

T. Bardsley said the sub-committee started with the website but are now working on the branding piece. Mike McInerney has done a great job taking over the website. B. Parker said the trial launch of the website will be in September or October. The first focus group was with the Do-it board and Rosie was an excellent facilitator. The focus centered around why Milford; if you were born here, why did you stay and if you moved here, why. We're in the process of data gathering and our next step will be to meet with the Rotary and other groups in town. We want to talk to the various groups in town first to get a feel for what type of reception there is because branding is about the logo and changing the perception. T. Bardsley said we are putting together a packet of tools more for a PR campaign. R. Deloge said this piece came out of the original sub-committee recommendations and we are suggesting a communications process not a policy. We are also progressing very slowly because we want to make sure people understand that we are asking them to describe the town not just the bandstand. What words do you use to describe Milford and what are the positive aspects of Milford. Do-it was our practice group; they were very positive and gave some good feedback.

D. White said this started at the grass roots level. The suggestion for the website was taken to Guy and then went to the Selectmen for their approval. Guy brought Mike on and it was brought to fruition. Now the sub-committee is on to another aspect. That shows the positive role of economic development. T. Sapienza said he is looking forward to seeing the final product. J. McCormack said the website will not be final as it will be an evolving process. He has heard that the drupal platform is excellent for so many things and will allow for updated and current content as well as incorporating future branding. Guy is very excited and saw this as an excellent tool. T. Bardsley noted that in the sub-committee's final report last year, the website was only one piece of the final goal which is the overall marketing of Milford. Milford is one of the best kept secrets in the area. Do-it was the first main street community in the State and Milford won the great American main street award several years ago. We have been doing this for a long time, but are just now starting to get noticed. That is what the website and branding is all about; we need to tell the outside world we're here. B. Parker said it will be very important for the website to reflect the branding. J. Langdell said we are at a vast improvement to where we were previously and our new staff member, Mike McInerney, has made a tremendous effort to get the website rolling as well as made improvements to Granite Town Media. There has been an alignment on multiple levels to move this forward. R. Deloge said Mike has a sense of process and how to work with both. The superintendent has asked her to look at who is working on the town website to see if there could be some coordination with the school's site.

G. Daniels said he met with someone last week who is looking at starting a business to turn used tires into fuel and was wondering if Milford would be receptive to that type of business. The committee suggested he talk to Bill who is usually the primary contact.

Recruitment of hotel/lodging development

G. Daniels said that hotels usually exist to draw people to an area and for some time now he was wondering how to fit the Heritage and Historical districts into that and more importantly what could fit into a AAA book. J. Langdell inquired if anyone had more information on the new Heritage district called Freedom's Way. There was no response. D. White referenced Dover and how they created a reason for the destination. T. Sapienza said a hotel would mean a lot for dome activities. Maybe EDAC could recruit other businesses that would benefit from a hotel. G. Infanti added that Dave Roedel of Roedel Companies is on the TIFD advisory board and has been very open and honest about the hotel business and provided a lot of valuable information. D. White said big engineering firms are also in touch with the big players and we solicit their help in finding someone; however we will have to be prepared with eateries and the like. J. Langdell said to look at bringing a hotel into town; we may want to broaden our horizons to look at Milford as the heart of the Souhegan Valley and pull in what the area has to offer as part of the draw. The Souhegan Valley has enough to draw a hotel today, but does Milford alone? T. Sapienza suggested putting a package together with benefits from the area such as a guest pass to Hampshire Hills to get a hotel in and at least look at a location. M. Sampson asked if there was a way to get data from businesses like Hitchiner who have a need for corporate lodging. We could include that information along with festivals and events in the Souhegan Valley area because statistics go a long way. T. Sapienza said we could give examples of lost trade show business because of the lack of lodging. Dome customers are always looking for hotels close by. T. Bardsley said if we want to have a hotel here and if regionally we have the people support it, we would need to take a pro-active approach and do a proposal with statistics, even listing potential sites. B. Parker said he was hoping that as a result of this discussion, he would get a couple people from this group who would be willing to

work with him to put something together and start contacting people about the sites that are available. We'll also pull in the Chamber of Commerce. Dale, Penny, Tracy, and Tom volunteered. D. White added that local businesses would certainly jump on board and the chamber would be supportive.

OTHER BUSINESS:

“Climate Change: Thinking Globally, Acting Locally” program

B. Parker said the big event will take place on October 5th at 6:30 pm and will host speakers from the State to discuss the New Hampshire Climate Action Plan. The event is supported by the Planning Board with a generous contribution from the Rotary to fund the food that will be catered by the Milford culinary arts program. There is so much from climate change that affects business and economic development. The presentation will be about what is happening in New Hampshire and in the area, how it will impact us and what we should be doing to address it through energy efficiency and transportation. J. Langdell said this initially came up at a Planning Board meeting while we were discussing adding elements to support what can be done as part of the Master Plan and to provide public awareness. T. Sapienza said it would good exposure for EDAC to be there.

New development

- Hitchiner is coming forward with a 44,000 SF expansion. They've also had some good job growth this past year.
- Chapangas Griddle and Grill, a restaurant at the former McDonalds site, will be opening soon.
- The buildings on the west side of the oval that were once in danger of being condemned have had the foundations re-engineered and rebuilt and the businesses are back open for business. That all worked out very well; thanks to a cooperative property owner that sort of helped push things along.
- 1 Nashua St, the former Boston Shoe Store, just signed a lease for a new coffee and bagel shop to open in December.
- An experienced property owner/investor from Boston will be purchasing the JC Devine property and will make some much needed repairs to the building.
- Sixty-eight homes were sold in Milford during 2010, that's a big number.
- New home construction is up.

P. Seaver said Dale is a real cheerleader for development in Milford. D. White said economic development as a whole has to promote something that looks good, so what can we do as a town to promote this. J. Langdell said people from southern Vermont and the western part of the state constantly come up to her and say we love Milford and the downtown. We need to keep the momentum going. J. Langdell added that the Heritage and tourism piece was a good idea.

Next meeting

November 3, 2010 7:30AM at Hampshire Hills

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15AM.

The minutes of the September 15, 2010 meeting were approved on January 26, 2011