

Economic Development Advisory Council

1.26.11 Meeting minutes

Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

Present:

Tracy Bardsley, Do-it
Heather Leach, Centrix Bank
John McCormack, TIFD
Tom Sapienza, Hampshire Hills Sports Club
Penny Seaver, Smith, Seaver & Bean
Sean Trombly, Trombly Farms
Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc

Excused:

Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co
George Infanti, Milford Paint
Mike Putnam, BOS representative
Janet Langdell, Planning Board Rep

Chris Costantino, Conservation Commission
Rosie Deloge, Milford School District
Bill Parker, Director Community Development
Jim DeStefano, Grubb & Ellis, Northern New England

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

Minutes:

C. Costantino made a motion to accept the 9/15/10 minutes as written. H. Leach seconded and all in favor.

D. White made a motion to accept the 11/3/10 minutes as written. C. Costantino seconded and all in favor.

Subcommittee Reports:

Land Use

1. Zoning changes

H. Leach explained several of the “clean up” zoning changes that have gone to public hearing and are going onto the March ballot. The ICI-2 district has substantive changes to allow additional uses in the Brox area for future business partners. B. Parker referenced the handout and said that the items highlighted in yellow are a direct result of the land use committee’s recommendation. This was a significant effort and is the first time all the zoning districts have been looked at to see what makes sense and what doesn’t, so this is a big effort for the zoning codes opening up areas for more uses. It all stems back from the original EDAC recommendation to look at land uses and zoning and to work with the Planning Board who has been very receptive. H. Leach said the committee picked the top twenty or so “low lying fruits” and brought those changes, that are positive for development, forward. T. Sapienza said this committee should be commended for their hard work and added that this also helps to establish the role of the EDAC. H. Leach said the changes will make a difference in some of the areas on Elm St.

2. Elm St Corridor

H. Leach gave a presentation on the Overlay district that will go from Granite Town Plaza to the Wilton town line, taking in the Meadowbrook Industrial Park and what will be the entrance area to Brox. We’ve been working with the NRPC and we’re using visual preference surveys to get input on what people feel is appropriate for these commercial guidelines; involving architectural, setbacks, parking, and entrances, not safety or zoning. There is a wide diversity of uses in that area and we felt it important to get those businesses and landowners to buy into and feel they were part of the process, so we had a breakfast meeting/presentation. The meeting was a huge success and actually oversold. D. White said he had never seen such participation from people seldom seen. The guidelines will apply to commercial or mixed use (commercial and residential) properties for new construction or significant renovations, but not residential homes. We are trying to keep Milford’s sense of place but we want to make sure it is done in a way that is not prohibitive to economic development. Many of the businesses in this corridor were surprisingly pleased about this. B. Parker said Sarah met with the owners of the Earthwards

building who were at the breakfast and they were just thrilled with the whole effort. T. Bardsley said the coordination will be welcome out there. H. Leach continued by saying that the subcommittee feels this is important to be put in place before the Brox property or the former police station is sold, that is why there is a push on timing right now. Camille and Jill of NRPC have been key to this process and will continue to help with the next step of putting the guidelines together. We are still at the beginning of the timeline and will be presenting to the BOS, the Planning Board and maybe a public session with the Do-it Board. We really do want the people to have a say in this process and we want to know what they are saying. We are hoping to compile the results of the survey this summer, be ready for public hearings next fall and for this go to town vote in March, 2012. D. White suggested presentations to the Chamber of Commerce and local realtors in the Souhegan Valley. P. Seaver offered to help.

Heather used a slide show to describe some of the examples of what is in the corridor right now; green space use, side parking, landscaping, entry ways, outdoor pedestrian areas, power lines, façade upgrades, and historical conservation. Each member then filled out and submitted the visual preference survey. H. Leach said the overall general reaction from the breakfast was that people were in favor of these guidelines as long as they are not overly oppressive, cost wise.

Website Development/Branding

Website:

B. Parker said that the unofficial launch was two weeks ago and you can link over to the new website from the current town website. Although not complete yet, it will give you a good sense of where it's headed and what the design is going to be. Mike is looking for input, so please email him with your thoughts. There was a brief discussion on departmental responsibility and accountability. We've been told by the designers that the Community Development portion of the site is very complex with all its links and information, so that part is very incomplete right now. However, one of the goals for Community Development this next year is to complete our pages within the next six to eight months.

Branding:

T. Bardsley said we held our second focus group with the Rotary Club and it went very well; they were very receptive. R. Deloge said the land use subcommittee is soliciting people's preferences and that is a part of branding, so even though this committee is not moving forward as fast, we can glean from the visual preference survey as these two issues are not separate. T. Bardsley noted that branding is the visual representation for the entire town.

D. White said he was contacted by an engineering/development firm this past week that heard of the EDAC and wanted to come do a presentation for the Town. They sent a menu of what they thought we should look at, and almost verbatim everything they suggested we are already doing or have done and we did it from grass roots. J. McCormack brought up examples from his old neighborhood Shaker Heights and said we can implement our recommendations because we're the ones responsible for individual elements of that.

Policies and Procedures

J. McCormack said we have gotten our message across; "time is money" and in these tough economic times, what can you do make it easier for your existing customers and potential investors to do work in our community. We asked how to improve communication between departments, how can the website enhance communication and what action steps can be taken to streamline policies and procedures and above all reducing cost.

We met with Community Development and they were spectacular; Bill and Shirley really did a super job. The focus was very much on improving communications. Bill gave us a one page summary sheet which should be included in these minutes. John noted that Dana and Shirley have been working to put design specs online for homeowners and we reviewed specific examples of miscommunication for deck construction. If we can eliminate a lot of the basic questions by providing these kinds of guidelines online, we can be more efficient in other areas such as keeping timelines compressed and dealing with customer complaints. A summary of the Munis system was provided showing linkages within the various departments. It is a good base of information that can be easily

cross referenced. There is good usage throughout the departments in this system; however, there are a few areas still coming up to speed or that are not quite integrated. Everyone understands that they have to move forward with this common information base.

Our meeting with the Fire department had to be rescheduled.

H. Leach recounted her experience from last week about going into the Milford town hall to get a property tax bill, which is a regular part of her job. Everyone was very helpful and said thanks for getting this cleared up even though they did charge a \$2.00 fee. She went in to the Merrimack town hall later in the week for the same purpose and spent a half hour listening to an incompetent, rude individual. The difference was such a dramatic contrast and she left Merrimack saying if I were a developer I wouldn't ever want to come back. We are going in the right direction because the process is so important. T. Sapienza said sometimes we have a tendency to focus on only the things that need to be improved and we lose sight of what is good. So it is good to occasionally step back and look at what is working well.

Hotel Recruitment initiative update:

T. Sapienza said when Bill and I were writing the EDAC summary for the town report we weren't sure if we should include anything about this initiative which basically grew out of a discussion and has a few people working, unofficially. We don't want the Selectmen to be blindsided so the next time we go before them, we should brief them and request that this become an official sub-committee of EDAC.

T. Bardsley explained that this initiative came out of a branding session, although the idea has been kicked around for years. The lack of a hotel is becoming more of an issue; we have many businesses and events in Milford that can benefit from a hotel. You can go from Nashua to Keene and if you're a business traveler there is no place to stay. Our group, Penny, Dale, Bill and Ryan Hanson of H2O Disposal/Civic Media met with Steve Duprey, a well known hotel developer. He was very generous with his time and was very open as to what we needed. We got a lot of information and it will be a daunting task, actually to attract a hotel here. He also gave us reasons why there isn't a hotel here already and the state of the hotel industry in New Hampshire. Our first step will be to get a feasibility study with a cost of around \$10,000. Steve gave us a recommendation for a trustworthy firm that he uses out of Boston, the Pinnacle Group. On the plus side, this information would be very useful, even if the study were to come back saying that a hotel would not be appropriate for Milford now. We would get a lot of marketing and demographic information that could be useful in other applications. B. Parker said he contacted Rachel Roginsky of the Pinnacle Group by email yesterday and did introduce the EDAC group's effort. He is waiting for a reply to discuss the scope of work and see if there is anything this group could do to help bring the cost down. There is a little money left from the MIDC that we could ask to utilize as seed money to go out to companies in town to see if they would want to match that to help fund the study. We also want to know what key questions to ask local and area businesses that would help her in the feasibility study. We can continue to do the background work and will let the Selectmen know where we are.

H. Leach noted that some of this year's zoning changes are to allow hotels in other zones in town. We're starting the process to open up Milford. D. White suggested getting this information out to developers.

Discussion on proposed west Milford / TIF District development warrant articles – John McCormack, Bill Parker

B. Parker said we met with the Planning Board last night, the Budget Advisory Committee last week and before that the Board of Selectmen. Jim, our marketing agent for the Brox property brought a well known developer to the TIF group. John, Guy and I have been working with this group over the past twelve to fifteen months negotiating back and forth and hopefully we are close to final agreements. Through the course of this whole process we've developed the three warrant articles to help facilitate the deal and they will be on the March, 2011 ballot. The developers are very interested in the former police station and the superfund site on Elm St as future marketable, developable areas once all the issues have been determined and resolved. So they've offered to purchase the former police station and that money, in the range of \$500,000, would then be turned over to the Town to facilitate the construction of the infrastructure into the Brox property. The first warrant article establishes a trust fund specific for money to be set aside to get infrastructure into the Brox property. The second warrant article allows the Selectmen to put the money from the sale of the former police station in that fund as

opposed to going into the general fund. The third warrant article is more of a housekeeping issue. The Selectmen were authorized to sell the Brox property for industrial uses and the zoning has since changed to industrial / commercial and this would allow the Selectmen to sell the property for industrial/commercial uses. In addition to purchasing the former police station property, the developers have also proposed a phased purchase of the Brox industrial properties over the next ten years after the group works with the Planning Board for a corridor overlay master plan and an overall development master plan for the area that would show future potential access and land uses. These are all steps that would occur over the next few years, but these three warrant articles are necessary to get this process going. Whether this deal goes through or not, these three warrant articles will allow the TIF group and Jim, more flexibility if another developer comes along.

J. McCormack said the process takes a while and developers don't have that time, so these warrant articles will give the Selectmen authority to do the necessary bonding for infrastructure and get things moving if a viable project came along. The timing to wait for a warrant article wouldn't impede the development process because once again, time is money. John reiterated that we are in negotiations with two separate agreements and one of the developer's suggestions was that we stress to the voters, while they did look at all 270 acres of the property, this agreement is only for a subset of about 130 acres of the Brox property. The town has already taken benefit for various municipal uses of the remainder of that property. The other obvious point is that there is not good access to the property; it's relatively landlocked, so part of the master planning would be how to develop the additional access possibly off 101 which may involve additional properties. The development of the former police station property dovetails nicely with the Elm St Corridor Overlay project and hopefully this developer, who has a history that respects the environment, comes up with a tax positive project which responds to the needs of the taxpayers as well as to the needs for the conservation of the property to make this is livable and attractive in other ways. Overall this is an excellent opportunity to find out what can and can't be done on this property. We will be the beneficiary of all the information from this evaluation process and the Town will retain all the rights.

J. DeStefano said it is good to be in front of this group with encouraging news. This developer knows the Souhegan Valley very well, sees the vision of a large scale master planned development here and can look at the macros, the abutters and the access issues and maybe a new ramp off the highway. The developer is very innovative in trying to tie in other properties that might have more immediate development value. The real benefit in this is that you now have a developer who is willing to extend resources to do their due diligence and find out what ultimately can be built there. The conceptual plan done by Meridian Land Services, Inc. helped move us from marketing the raw land to this stage and hopefully the developer will work with the Town in an expeditious manor to gain approvals to put Milford at an advantage over other communities to market this property. In the end, it is location, location, location; and this can be a good location. This project will be long range because industrial vacancy rates are still up at 11% and office rates are at 18% in occupied spaces. Although we are starting to see some improvement in the market, we're still a long ways away from immediate development and no one really knows if this project will even happen.

D. White asked when the superfund site would be cleared for development. B. Parker said we were recently told that greater amounts of contamination were found on the OK Tool site and that remediation would take longer than expected, so development would be a long way off. There are aspects of that site that do however affect the former police station site such as monitoring wells and utility lines, so we do have to make sure easements are in place to allow that infrastructure to remain in place and facilitate the continuing clean up. J. McCormack said the developer is aware of this. D. White asked if this area this would be a feasible site for a hotel. B. Parker said we could add this to the potential site list and discussion followed.

T. Bardsley said that while these warrant articles look like a no brainer to us, a taxpayer could look at #2 and say the Town is having a tough budget year and this money should really go into the general fund. Education will be really important.

P. Seaver said this all dovetails into the Elm St Corridor work, the policies and procedures work, and future planning for the DOT and Water/Sewer. Top down, this is the perfect example of taking all of these parts and pieces and through communicating and working together to get to the end result.

D. White added that the infrastructure fund might also include part of the water and sewer costs which could take some of the burden off the users.

J. McCormack said one of the Planning Board members asked if the initial funding could be used to attract matching funds.

R. Deloge referenced the school district's experience and said we need to establish the fund for if and when you sell this piece of property and it will keep it out of the tax burden.

R. Deloge made a motion that the Economic Development Advisory Council strongly supports the three warrant articles as described. D. White seconded and all in favor; the consensus was unanimous.

B. Parker said this will be used in the voter's guide, and in the guest editorial he would write for the Cabinet. D. White suggested sending the draft out to the rest of the council members to get their unofficial blessings because all the names should be included. B. Parker said he also has another slot scheduled in the Cabinet to bring the community up to date on economic development efforts to tie in either the week before or after.

OTHER BUSINESS:

B. Parker noted that the Planning Board gave out the second Distinguished Site Award last night to the Milford Veterinary Hospital.

Next meeting

B. Parker confirmed that this group is scheduled to go before the BOS on 2/14/11.

The next regular EDAC meeting is scheduled for February 16, 2011 with invited guests:
George Bald, Commissioner, NH Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED)
Gary Chabot, Regional Resource Specialist (DRED)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00AM.

Attachments:

Update from Community Development Office Efforts – Objectives

ATTACHMENT:

EDAC – Policies and Procedures Subcommittee

December 16, 2010

Update on Community Development Office Efforts - Objectives

1. Streamlining development review process to resolve site plan/subdivision issues prior to staff recommendation going to Planning Board

Coordinating interdepartmental review comments and communication quickly (within first week -10 days of submittal) so that applicant and staff are on same page prior to Planning Board meeting. Objective is to streamline projects that have more technical issues (i.e. stormwater design and requirements) and obtain resolution so that the Planning Board can give approval/conditional approval in one meeting and avoid tabling if there are unresolved issues.

This has always been our Office goal, but with added requirements and regulations and recognizing ‘time is money’ S. Marchant is coordinating a quicker interdepartmental effort.

F. Elkind reviews stormwater plans to insure Town and applicant is in compliance with federal regulations. Is working with Sarah on guidelines/checklists for applicants/engineers so that the developers know what to expect up front. Objective is to have these complete within the next few weeks.

2. Dana MacAllister and Shirley Wilson have been coordinating an effort to put ‘basic’ guidelines/specs for homeowners on-line, based on excellent documents provided by the Colorado chapter of building officials. We’ll be utilizing the MHS pre-engineering department to provide CADD drawings and specs this next semester (meeting with Instructor Frank Xydias on January 5, 2011).

Objective is to have an on-line resource on what is needed for the existing homeowner for decks, plot plans, additions, roofs, windows, remodeling. Will be looking for implementation on-line by June 30, 2011.

3. Municipal ‘Green Book’ code updates that are the responsibility of the Office have been completed and forwarded to BOS office for required public hearings and inclusion in the Green Book update. Areas that this Office was responsible for included: Food Service Establishments, Surface and Groundwater Protection, Stormwater Management and Erosion Control, Fines and Penalties, various miscellaneous updates.

4. Website: currently working with Mike McInerney on new website information /functionality.
2011 objectives:

- Complete Community Development, Planning/GIS, Building Safety, Health, ZBA pages and linkages (see also concurrent effort in #2 above).
- Complete the ‘BUSINESS’ page and linkages

5. *Guide to Development and Permitting*: 2011 objective (by 11/2011): Office objective is to compile a single (and simple?) reference guide (on-line and hard copy) that steps developers and the public on development and permitting process, steps, fees, contacts, requirements, and flow.

6. Munis interdepartmental usage: 2011 objective is create a communication linkage between Munis and Fire House(Fire Department system).