

Economic Development Advisory Council

1.11.12 Meeting minutes

Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

Present:

Nate Carmen, Board of Selectmen
Brad Chappell, Chappell Tractor
Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co
Chris Costantino, Conservation Commission
Rosie Deloge, Milford SAU
Tracy Hutchins, DO-IT
George Infanti, Milford Paint
Janet Langdell, Planning Board
Heather Leach, Centrix Bank
John McCormack, TIFD
Penny Seaver, Bean, Seaver & Smith
Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc.

Excused:

Sean Trombly, Trombly Gardens

Bill Parker, Director Community Development
Shirley Wilson, Recording secretary

M. Ciardelli called the meeting to order at 7:30AM.

Minutes:

G. Infanti made a motion to approve the minutes from the 11/2/11 meeting. J. Langdell seconded with discussion and clarified that the expedited review process for the proposed Commerce and Community District would be contingent on the size of the development. 65,000SF is the threshold and if more than that, the project would have to go through the traditional Planning Board process. A vote was called and all in favor. D. White called the office on 1/12/12 to make two minor administrative changes to the 11/2/11 minutes; the changes were made and the minutes posted.

Update on Downtown Ongoing Improvement Team (DO-IT) and Discussion on the role of the organization and partnership with EDAC:

T. Hutchins said DO-IT has been a Main Street Community since 1998, subscribing to the methodology of the National Main Street Center which is a subset of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Main Street program has undergone some re-organization in New Hampshire going from 23 communities to about 10 active communities. DO-IT has continued to be a member of the National program but has not been a designated Main Street Community since the State started requiring a contribution of \$3,500. When we're out there raising money to keep our own doors open it seemed a little onerous to help support their program and subsequently the State organization is no more. DO-IT is twenty years old this year; we began in 1992 and we had a Board retreat in December to look at our accomplishments, which we are very proud of, and determine where we go from here. Our mission has really grown and the Board voted to start focusing on the town in its entirety rather than being just a downtown organization. We are looking at what we do well and how to translate that to the town. New priorities may involve fixing up the gateways to the town or marketing town-wide events. We are also a volunteer board and are not looking to compete with EDAC but to serve this group and to build consistency in marketing the town. We also will be changing our name to reflect our new mission.

J. Langdell inquired if the DO-IT board had discussed how to interact with the BOS and PB? T. Hutchins said DO-IT regularly reports to the BOS and she gave this presentation to them last Monday night. This will be a transition year and we are in the early stages. Now that our funding is fairly stable we would like to get back into doing projects and some new events that will involve the entire town. We have a new website coming out that will incorporate the community website with a calendar section that any group in town can publicize events.

J. McCormack inquired about integration with the town website; if someone Googles Milford will this come up? T. Hutchins said the town's website is completely separate from DO-IT's website although there are links to us and other groups like the Chamber of Commerce and NRPC. J. Langdell noted that there should be more of an economic development piece to the town's website.

R. Deloge said that when thinking about publicity and coordination we should incorporate the GTM channel as well as the websites. It looks like we are at a point where these two groups DO-IT and EDAC could do some meaningful collaboration. How does Souhegan Valley Chamber of Commerce fit into that mix? T. Hutchins said several members are on the boards of both groups. We've always had a good working relationship and should continue to collaborate with the Chamber and there shouldn't be overlap because they are regional, covering 11 towns, and we will promote and focus on Milford activities.

D. White inquired about the Pumpkin Festival results. T. Hutchins said we were about 20% under the year before, overall. We had over forty groups participate which is the largest ever, although not all did fundraising. The event has gotten to a point where we can't grow it anymore; in fact we need to keep it steady and balance the costs. The fireworks brought at least 7,000 people to the downtown on Friday night which was also the largest ever. The irony was that with all those people downtown, the restaurants and vendors did fantastic but DO-IT didn't make a dime. D. White noted that the Budget Advisory Committee may be more receptive to DO-IT in its expanded role. T. Hutchins said they seemed receptive to the idea when we made this presentation.

G. Infanti said he understood the original parameters of DO-IT but this is an excellent move to expand the group and bring more of the community members in and probably very timely. T. Hutchins said the group may have to step back from working as closely with each of the individual businesses, for example doing business plans and marketing, but will get more involved with the overall economic development of the town. G. Infanti said you may be able to pull in support from other businesses that have expertise in business planning. It will be a win-win situation. J. Langdell asked if there was a sense of how many businesses outside of the downtown area would be interested in these consultation services on an individual level. Is there a need in our area to find resources to tap into? T. Hutchins said she didn't have that information but a few years ago, DO-IT partnered with the Rotary and the Chamber to bring in a speaker to address something of that nature. The event was free and attendance was very light. The Chamber offers those types of services to area businesses and holds monthly roundtables. Business owners are busy focusing on the day to day operations.

J. Langdell invited Tracy to give this presentation to the Planning Board as there may be some focus on the gateways of the town. Much of what we put into Chapter 1 of the Master Plan is very downtown/DO-IT heavy, so you are a significant part of the consciousness of the Planning Board. T. Hutchins reiterated that the group's expansion is very new. Everything presented today is conceptual and addressing the gateways are just some of our ideas. J. Langdell said it is important for those people doing planning on a global scale to understand how best to utilize this resource and what to expect.

Updates from Community Development Director:

Recent Local Development Activity:

- Café on the Oval is doing extensive renovations to the inside and exterior of the building and will be a huge improvement for the downtown area. The anticipated opening date is May. J. Langdell added that the architectural plans are available online in the Planning Board's packets from the 12/20/11 meeting.
- Renovations to the old Boston Shoe building are ongoing; this is a work in progress with the owner. N. Carmen added that the owner is concentrating on the exterior to get it weather-tight.
- Hitchiner is wrapping up construction,
- The East Milford Storage Units,
- Air Mar is still looking to build their 50,000SF new building and will be coming before the Planning Board to request an extension.
- The restaurants seem to be doing well; Memphis BBQ, Sake House

T. Hutchins added that DO-IT's revolving loan fund of about \$20,000 is taking applications

Discussion on EDAC goals and initiatives for 2012:

Policies and Procedures

J. McCormack said we met with Guy for a review session on Monday afternoon with the notion that it is time to recharge our charter. It was noted that there was considerable improvement and a very good awareness by department heads of the concept that time is money. Per our charter, our role is to review analysis and

recommendations, to streamline and enhance town wide permitting procedures and to make Milford business friendly for existing businesses and to better attract new economic drivers. There is a very good awareness by department heads of the importance of good communication, substantial improvements and a good exchange between departments. There have been some proactive improvements particularly in Community Development and in Water Utilities to also look ahead by integrating some of the communication actions in their objectives. We asked Guy if it was worth going back to the department heads; to ask where are the hang-ups with permitting, where are the conflicts and misunderstandings and why don't those people come forward. There are new specs, new checklists and departments are trying to make sure the requirements are understood, at the outset. We decided the best way to solicit feedback would be to survey some of the permit customers from the last year or two to draw feedback. We will review the process to see where the hang-ups were, if any and to see why. Bill will get a list of ten or twenty to pull feedback directly from. Our assessments will be brought to Guy to see how to progress from there. There was also some discussion with Shirley Wilson after the meeting. S. Wilson added that we don't know how to educate the community about the regulations, whether they be State, Federal or local. J. McCormack said people, at the outset, don't have an understanding of what is required or needed. B. Parker said how to get the word out is an ongoing issue and we probably talk about it every day. A good example of one discussion was how to educate contractors regarding stormwater. One of the thoughts was to require contractors to come in and view the stormwater video. We had a split in thinking because just how far do you go to make sure people are educated versus trusting them to know what to do. It seemed onerous given people's schedules but the federal regulations are still there. I hope this survey will point to some ways to get education out there.

M. Ciardelli inquired if the problem lies with the homeowners trying to do work themselves or with the contractors doing work for homeowners. B. Parker said it's a combination of both. There are certainly contractors who know, but choose not to pull permits and get caught in it, then the word circulates. There is also the other side where there is a need for our department to communicate better. J. McCormack referenced Dig Safe and said there should be something like call before you start work.

D. White said that just by the fact of fostering the idea with us going to the different customers, they may feel that someone in town cares and they may be more comfortable talking to business people like us if they've had a problem. We can be a liaison between the person and the town and if it's done right, both the good and the negative will come out. It's a great idea that can benefit everybody.

P. Seaver said libraries sometimes let you return a book without the fine; maybe we could use that tactic to educate for the next time. G. Infanti said contractors are not ignorant to the rules and regulations; it is pretty clear for contractors as to what permits are required, whereas a homeowner may not know. B. Parker referenced a homeowner on Savage Rd who had done significant renovations with a contractor who was fully aware of our permits and regulations. We only found out that work had been done by their mortgage company because they were refinancing. It turned into an ugly situation that took many hours to resolve.

N. Carmen said most importantly, regardless of who is doing the work, the homeowner needs the education because the homeowner is ultimately responsible. Public outreach is needed and it would be great if they could see the information on the website or on PEG. M. Ciardelli agreed that public education would be the primary means of combatting this situation. B. Parker said "call first" is a great idea. S. Wilson said that the Building Department is implementing a new program for 2012. Whenever a building permit is issued, we will also send a post card to the owner informing them of the permit issuance because sometimes the owner is not involved in the permitting process and this will be an avenue for education and will hopefully spread awareness by word of mouth.

J. Langdell said the picture can be crazy between State, Federal and local codes. Is there any way to visually lay out what is Federal, what is State and what is local? Bill, Sarah and I just did a "Community Conversation" on PEG access for the current zoning changes and the permitting process for homeowners would make a great topic that could run on GTM. Could a campaign be done with visuals for the web and in print to educate the community in terms of what you or your contractor will need to do and this is what to expect. M. Ciardelli also like the "dig safe" idea to call first and discussion followed. J. Langdell said maybe our team could work with Community Development in developing that package and it would also give them a group to beta test with the survey participants; contractor, developer and homeowner perspectives. D. White said whatever we do needs to

encourage and facilitate economic development. We don't want to get into the codes and regulating. J. Langdell said if policies and procedures is a focus for this group, it's equally important for this group to be behind the bottom up to educate the public. B. Parker said we can start to undertake this "call first" education internally. J. McCormack said should script the survey questions accordingly.

J. McCormack said Guy gave a brief overview of the Federal Stormwater program and it was quite an awakening for him. Some of the examples of stormwater permitting seemed over the top and he is not sure where it's heading and what the impact of the new regulations will be. B. Parker said that he and Sarah had a discussion yesterday on the need to review our current regulations so see if they are over and above the Federal requirements and if we can minimize some. D. White said this was spawned by the question of what is crippling or slowing down potential growth and one of those factors is stormwater. Stormwater is important because we want everything going into the water or aquifer to be as clean as possible so we can produce good clean drinking water, but what will cover the minimum requirements without undue pressure and burden. There is a project in West Milford that may not go forward as a result of stormwater issues. Dale also referenced a very expensive, large underground water containment project at Jacques Elementary that sits on one of the best drained gravel banks in town. The project is good because it is containing and treating the stormwater, in compliance with Federal regulations, but that adds huge financial burden to the school system and us taxpayers. Drainage is very expensive and does impact economic development, so we need to meet the requirements but not put undue burden on developers. J. Langdell said it would be a good exercise to review the regulations which were put into place five years ago. How many people in town understand that Milford is an MS-4 community and that we have regulations other towns may not have? B. Parker explained that the MS-4 designation is based on population and urbanized area and it triggers specific requirements. D. White said these are all things that we can educate the developers and taxpayers about.

Land Use

H. Leach said the West Elm Street Gateway District (WESGD) has been presented to the Planning Board. We are coming to the end of our project and just for discussion, there is a lot going on with the Brox property, but it is not quite ready for the sub-committee to grab onto yet. We met in December and had some discussion for a short-term 6-12 month project to do some research and gather information for businesses on Federal, State and local resources; creating awareness for available programs that could be valuable for our existing businesses but also to attract new business. How can we educate businesses on obtaining energy credits for solar use, the availability of community development block grants or employment training credits and referenced Dover's handout book that coordinated these resources for businesses. They were not necessarily funded by Dover, but the information was put in one place. The ERZ is a perfect example and maybe only a few people will take advantage of it, but it is an important tool for those who do. Maybe we could work with DO-IT to put the information out there, with printed materials or maybe on both websites and include the Chamber of Commerce. J. Langdell said it is great to gather all this information, but through this process we will need to identify somebody to maintain and monitor it and that may be where the expanded DO-IT comes into the picture. This could also be another topic for a "Community Conversation" on channel 21. T. Hutchins added that education will be a main theme for DO-IT this year.

M. Ciardelli asked why we have to dig so deep to find where the money is. In the heating industry, information is readily available and marketed so it is the contractor's responsibility to bring the information to the customers. H. Leach said resources for businesses come from so many different directions; there is not a central location to house that information and discussion followed. T. Hutchins said that we have a size and capacity issue here; Bill is Community Development, Planning, Zoning and Economic Development while Dover has somebody paid to do just Economic Development. Also some of these programs are Federal and grants can be extremely time-consuming. B. Parker said the more we can gather to put into a central location the better it will be, we've been trying to do this for several years. H. Leach added that none of the programs are centered in Milford and we can be tagged to different locations depending on the program, maybe Keene, Concord or Nashua and that makes it more difficult to get funding. J. Langdell said that was a good point and we ought to be an entity of our own and classified as Souhegan Valley. She also referenced the "fund book" where information could be included.

H. Leach said we all have different backgrounds and exposures so as we come across things, send an email with suggestions and information so we could research. The strength of the list will depend on the input.

J. McCormack said it depends on the industry but many associations have an eye out for funds, information and programs. M. Ciardelli said with the broad spectrum of members here, that would be a good start.

B. Chappell said this could be an opportunity for our schools; an internship to do grant research. R. Deloge said we should be cautious with high school students, but with a structured environment we certainly do place students in internship opportunities. She also has a resource in the business department at SNHU. B. Parker said the Community Development office has had help from the senior year geography students from Keene State College to do projects. Geography is all encompassing and maybe we can combine geography with economic development. T. Hutchins suggested the possibility of a work study program with a local college that would benefit both the student and our efforts.

N. Carmen said with DO-IT expanding and the client base doubling, at what point do you profit from taking on grant writer or researcher? When you bring figures to the Board about how much money your event brings to town, and that's what all of this is about, bringing businesses and money to the town, there is a point in which you have to spend money to bring in money. Dover and other towns have done the research to show the return on their investments. G. Infanti brought up the TIF District and said you have to show the profits, rewards and the expenses; prove it on paper. T. Hutchins said she was impressed that Dover did put money into economic development, and there was a real commitment by the city to go down that road. M. Ciardelli asked if the group was in favor of exploring the opportunity for an intern. G. Infanti said it was a great idea.

H. Leach asked if the council was ok with the change in direction and focus for the sub-committee. J. Langdell said we set a number of goals and action steps and it is fine if our whole focus is changing, but we may need to get that codified somewhere. M. Ciardelli said land use done a lot of work and is at somewhat of a crossroad. H. Leach said there are several key points from the recommendations that this fits into. J. Langdell said looking at this from the whole group, there are many actions that have not been completed, such as branding and we shouldn't lose sight of the original recommendations. M. Ciardelli asked if we should get input from the Board of Selectmen. J. Langdell said part of goal setting is to review our objectives periodically.

D. White suggested putting together a synopsis from the subcommittees, similar to a report card of what they set out to do, what they've done and what remains. D. White also noted that it has been two years since the original roundtable. Would it make sense to invite those same entities and give a presentation on what has been done and ask if has made a difference. J. Langdell agreed that it would be a good idea to get input from the greater community at this time. B. Parker said he would be happy to do a report card for the next meeting and we can go forward from there.

Website Development/Branding

T. Hutchins said branding has been low priority. The group focused more on the website last year and by in large that has been accomplished. We did report to the Selectmen about branding but there was not much push back. We have to determine how to move forward, how to get it out there and what are the costs involved? D. White said that could be a roundtable question; do businesses feel Milford should have a brand? Discussion followed. J. Langdell said it is important for everybody to be on the same page; DO-IT, EDAC, the town's activities all need to dovetail or none of it will work. It is time for greater Milford to say we're open for business.

Other Business:

Next meeting: The next regular EDAC meeting is scheduled for February 8, 2012. A discussion topic will be 2012 goals.

The meeting was adjourned promptly at 9:00AM.

The minutes of the January 11, 2012 meeting were approved on April 4, 2012.