

Economic Development Advisory Committee

6.17.09 Meeting minutes

Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

These minutes were approved as written, on August 19, 2009

Present:

Rich Ball, Cirtronics Corporation

Tracy Bardsley, Do-it

Rick Holder, Hampshire Hills Sports Club

Heather Leach, Centrix Bank

Tom Sapienza, Hampshire Hills Sports Club

Sean Trombly, Trombly Gardens

Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc

John McCormack, TIFD representative

Bill Parker, Director Community Development

Mike Putnam, BOS representative

Shirley Wilson, Recording secretary

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

Minutes:

M. Putnam made a motion to accept the minutes from 6/03/09 as presented. S. Trombly seconded and all in favor.

Recap of presentations:

T. Sapienza thanked everyone who attended the presentation. M. Putnam said the Board of Selectmen were pleased and will follow through. T. Sapienza said this committee's next step would be to follow up with the Boards. We would then develop a charge for the continued committee to move forward and discuss a few items that the committee could work on.

D. White noted that this morning he drove by the vacant Talarico property saying that this is a property with a nice building that is ready for something. Could somebody from a committee like this spend time with the owner to find out what can we as a committee, come up with for outreach and marketing to go in there. A vacant property is the worst thing; it makes a town look dead. Maybe we could incorporate that into part of our charge. T. Bardsley explained that Do-It maintains a database for downtown buildings and she is actively looking for businesses to move into the vacant buildings and maybe a good project for this committee would be to do a listing of available properties in town. J. McCormack noted that the Community Development office created an inventory of vacant, industrial land for the TIFD Board. T. Bardsley is said a listing would also give us the ability to steer the types of businesses we want, even though we cannot prevent businesses from relocating or opening. B. Parker said that this committee as a unified group with all its connections can be ambassadors to steer people to the Community Development Office based on an evolving database and maybe things will start to flow better.

J. McCormick said there was good input from the Planning Board to look at an overview of zoning and question are we appropriately looking at some of the properties; however, we still need to encourage more up front expectations and feedback for prioritization. B. Parker agreed that it was good to hear the Planning Board suggest looking at land use. Maybe a few of the first steps for this group would be to go back to the Board of Selectmen with recommendations to look at land use based on direction from the Planning Board, to help with web site development which is a key issue and to continue with the review of the permitting process that was started internally.

M. Putnam said there is a possibility of rolling the TIFD Board and MIDC into this committee so there may be other factions to this group as the Selectmen look at the broad picture. J. McCormack said that although there is a need to maintain a substantive TIFD committee, it could be under the umbrella of a continuing Economic Development committee. B. Parker said he quickly put together a draft with the same sort of makeup as this

current group with fifteen members that could be formalized into a council, a standing permanent committee. H. Leach said heading forward we may also want to bring on some advisory members, say a commercial broker or surveyor to assist on land use and an IT person to assist with the website. The committee members may not have the expertise or desire to work on individual issues, so we would have to fill those gaps. B. Parker said the group could break into subcommittees where experts are invited to participate and work on specific tasks. Maybe this group's role will be to bring a recommendation to the Selectmen to spearhead projects such as a website development effort and ask that the town IT and media people get involved.

R. Ball said conceptually, we could provide a pool of people willing to participate when asked to review a particular project that would also proof the submittal prior to it going to the Selectmen. That would also permit smaller action groups of three to five people for subcommittees, which could do the research and leg work. J. McCormack suggested business outreach and zoning subcommittees could run close to each other. T. Sapienza said businesses and issues will present themselves for committee work and referenced a local business person who came up to him after the Planning Board meeting last night to discuss some issues. D. White brought up Dave Asselin's comment that a few members of this committee should walk through the whole process which would give way to another subcommittee. J. McCormick said it is always good to test the system out; see how streamlined the process really is and see how responsive the departments are.

M. Putnam asked if this committee's purview would be to keep the focus on the commercial level for economic development. D. White said residential is a whole separate entity but it all dovetails because the infrastructure becomes part of residential development which assists in bringing in and keeping the commercial development. B. Parker said this committee might get involved with large scale residential development because there is link with the permitting process and it does lead to construction and jobs. T. Sapienza expressed concern with this committee going in too many directions. It is better to keep focus on two or three main things to stay on track and gain credibility. H. Leach added that we might want to keep in the Board's vision and put the action items front and center with a constant reminder. B. Parker suggested scheduling regular times with the Selectman every couple of months.

R. Holder said he has been impressed with the evolution of this committee. That very first meeting, to organize this committee, seemed to be a bit adversarial and now, the committee seems more supportive of the Selectmen, the town volunteers and Community Development. We are asking how this committee can help them do a better job and to liaison to those people involved with developing business. There is a more ecumenical feeling. H. Leach added that this committee has tied many factors together and coordinated different factions making connections that were not there previously. The Conservation Commission is now working with Do-It, and the School District is working with Cirtronics. There was a positive jolt when the School District joined this committee. T. Bardsley said an Economic Development Council would definitely be a catalyst for projects even if it's not a project of that committee. She and the Conservation Commission are working on grants for the bike path and the Rail Trail which was a very positive result that came directly out of these meetings. B. Parker said the communication coming out of this group is huge. R. Ball discussed the school interaction resulting from this committee. Rich Paiva brought a dozen or so students, teachers and guidance counselors to tour the facility and we agreed to put an intern relationship in place. Our relationship is a lot more active because of this group. D. White said he heard that some of the different departments are aware of this committee and there may be a watchdog overview that they have to be a little more responsible and accountable for their actions.

Develop and recommendation of charge:

J. McCormick suggested adding a few actionable items to those topics discussed today. B. Parker said we could present the charge to the Board of Selectmen and then recommend a couple of action items to begin working on immediately. J. McCormick explained that the TIFD committee was made formal with terms and membership. R. Holder added that the committee could be available to act on other advisory requests by the Board of Selectmen.

T. Sapienza asked how we address other interested parties who would like to serve on this committee. R. Ball suggested writing the structure of the ongoing committee into the charter. Let the committee form and then do a six month or annual review of the progress and structural aspects. T. Sapienza added that the subcommittees could pull others in. D. White said we should recruit people who are in favor of good smart growth, not anti-

growth because this is about development. J. McCormick noted that this committee has a good balance now. B. Parker said his sense is that we are working in the right direction, looking towards the big picture and sometimes you want people who are anti-growth on a subcommittee so you could pull them into your way of thinking. The Facilities Committee started with about twenty people and then filtered down to about fifteen volunteers. D. White said it is amazing that a group of that size, with all their agreements and disagreements come to a formal consensus. B. Parker said the key is that they were working towards solving a single issue or problem.

T. Sapienza brought up the website and asked what if it's proposed but there is no money in the budget. D. White said then we could go outside the box for funding, maybe to businesses with the promotion of economic development. H. Leach said there are grants out there and possibly advertising.

T. Bardsley asked if this committee would be budgeted through the town. B. Parker replied no, only staff support. Committees don't really get any funding through the budget and explained the funding process for big ticket items. S. Trombly inquired about MIDC's money. B. Parker explained that they were established as a non-profit corporation and originally the town voted in a budget for them and they also received outside contributions.

T. Sapienza summarized the three suggestions for proposed items; web site, land use and outreach efforts. H. Leach and said the permitting process and zoning would probably long term subcommittees evolving as the economy changes, where the website would be a finite time. J. McCormack said we still should set goals or for an initial overview and to set a timeline. B. Parker said as Guy has directed us to start working on this in house, once we have something congealed he can bring back to the committee to review and understand where changes were made. Once we get the ideas and direction we would have the group discuss and then formulate the subcommittee and set up the objectives and timeframe. H. Leach said outreach will be hindered until the website is done. J. McCormack commented that there has already been outreach with visits to local businesses and property owners and this group could provide additional legitimacy.

T. Bardsley said outreach has several different components; communication, public relations for the community and letting them know what our mission is, and the marketing component to market the town, where the web site and database would fall under. That small subcommittee could start right away to gather the information for the database and once it's put together it becomes a maintenance issue to update properties and buildings that Community Development could oversee. Everything can be started on at least some level. D. White said again the Board of Selectmen has to buy into this and give the ultimate charge. There has to be a strong charge to go forward and then support us. Discussion on the setup of the committees and subcommittees followed. T. Bardsley said a short term task committee would be web site and long-term or ongoing task committee would be PR. We need to establish the nuts and bolts then move forward with recruitment to. D. White said PR is important because we need to let people know we're here; when was the last time an engineer received a call from the Town? T. Bardsley then referenced an informational flyer from Biddeford, ME that gives direction for someone opening a business in downtown Biddeford; where to find financing, what departments to go to, what permits are needed, and how to access the sign ordinance. That is something this subcommittee could do as well as make marketing calls for the Brox property or for vacant buildings on the database. We can prioritize what types of businesses were looking for or lacking. Biotech was brought up in past meetings, which would provide a lot of jobs. The subcommittee could do research on the demographics and put it all together. We could get packets out to the Souhegan Valley Chamber of Commerce, DRED, and the SBA.

T. Sapienza said he and Bill will poll the current committee members to see if they want to continue and where their interests are. D. White said that Matt Ciardelli, Brad Chappell and he would like to be considered to serve on the new committee. J. McCormack suggested circulating the draft as there are a few members who are not in attendance today. Bill Parker said he will try to set up a meeting with the Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board within the next month to follow up. There was discussion pertaining to the ongoing committee meeting schedule and it was determined that they could be extended out to not meet weekly and that subcommittees could set their own schedule. J. McCormack inquired about the relationship and linkage of the council to the other boards and a brief discussion regarding MIDC followed. H. Leach asked if there was anything we should be doing so that we are viewed as a resource for the Selectmen and the Planning Board rather than just being another committee knocking on their door asking for something? B. Parker said we can just explain that to both boards at the follow-up meeting; we are a resource so that you can get some of your other work done. M. Putnam said he,

as a Selectman, already considers this committee as a resource, especially with the presentation made last night. The Selectmen are busy with day to day issues and we want to keep the forward motion of the town going and start looking into to the future to take the burden off the residential taxpayer and increase the commercial tax base. However, this committee should present a recommendation in such a way that we can as developing a subcommittee to work on what our vision for the website would be rather than just saying we need to update the website where the Board will say ok Dave, update the website. We would rather have the committee work hand in hand with Dave. The Selectmen should put discussion on their agenda as to where they want this committee to go.

General discussion:

Tom Sapienza said the next meeting date is open but the committee will be notified by e-mail of the date and a copy of the draft charter will go out by email as well.

R. Ball said he intends to share this report with the BIA, the statewide chamber of commerce. B. Parker also offered to send a copy and his business card to anyone who would like.

J. McCormack suggested updating a link to some of the things we already have available on the website for the TIF District.

B. Parker informed the group of a potentially substantial project starting its way through the system right now with Hollis Line Machine involving a substantial addition to their building at the intersection of Old Wilton Rd and 101 and redeveloping a commercial corner with a multi-story office, and restaurant complex.

T. Sapienza thanked everyone for their time and effort with this committee over the past five months; for phase I of the work.

Other business:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00AM.