

Economic Development Advisory Council

3.10.10 Meeting minutes

Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

Present:

Tracy Bardsley, Do-it
Richard Ball, Cirtronics
Brad Chappell, Chappell Tractor
Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co
George Infanti, Milford Paint
Heather Leach, Centrix Bank
Tom Sapienza, Hampshire Hills Sports Club
Penny Seaver, Smith, Seaver & Bean
Sean Trombly, Trombly Farms
Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc

Chris Costantino, Conservation Commission
John McCormack, TIFD representative
Bill Parker, Director Community Development
Janet Langdell, Planning Board representative
Michelle Sampson, Wadleigh Memorial Library

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

Minutes:

M. Ciardelli made a motion to approve the 12/2/09 minutes as written. D. White seconded and all in favor. There was discussion on the 10/14/09 minutes and B. Parker said he would look into whether they were approved or not. They can be brought to the next meeting, if needed.

Subcommittee reports:

T. Sapienza said the subcommittees have been doing a lot of work and there are some exciting things going on. M. Sampson introduced herself and explained that she was taken aside by Fay Richie at the deliberative session who suggested involvement with this committee. Last year the library was used by 200,000 people and we are bringing all that foot traffic to area businesses without any competition, so it's sort of a win – win situation.

Policies and procedures:

J. McCormack reiterated that this subcommittee is off to a great start and offered congratulations to Dale on being elected to the Water/Sewer Commission. The subcommittee met on 12/16/09 with Public Works; Bill Ruoff and Rick Reindeau, the highway manager. The notes from that session are available if anyone wants to read them. Again, DPW is not on the Munis system but Guy is very proactive in making sure that some of these communication mechanisms and management tools are being implemented. Communication between DPW and other departments particularly Bill's group is quite good. We were concerned with the communication with Water Utilities relating to the challenges pertaining to digging and paving, but Guy reassured us. Overall a good session, but some fine tuning will need to be done. We met with the Water Utilities group on 1/6/10; Dave Boucher, interim superintendent and Jessica Hardwick in administration. The session was good as far as technical issues and understanding our challenges on meeting standards and long term planning. Some of the Water/Sewer Commissioners took exception to us looking into their activities, so a meeting was scheduled on 2/2/10 with the Commissioners. It is very clear that Bob Courage has a deep understanding of the infrastructure, what goes on, and has a lot of history. The Commissioners have yet to come onboard with what this council is trying to promote. They need to be a little more visible and let the residents and businesses know that they are doing good things. There is a direct responsibility to the voters yet the utility group takes administrative and financial support and services from the Town and from various departments so there has to be a good bridge to allow communication and support to go both ways. I am hopeful with Dale coming in, that he will bring his practical and business sense for economic development. There could be improvements as far as transparency, communication and interdepartmental interaction. Dave will not be an impediment and will grow into the job with some guidance on the administrative and management issues. We are waiting to finalize our notes until the

EDAC, 03.10.10 Meeting minutes

official minutes from the 2/2/10 session are posted; we wanted to see the commitment from their notes and make sure the perception going forward was the same. The subcommittee has now met with the Planning Department, Building Department, Fire Department, DPW, and Water Utilities, both with and without the Commissioners. J. McCormack highlighted the preliminary overview of the results from Matt's notes.

General findings:

- All departments were cooperative and open to the meetings
- The message is getting through for a common theme between all departments about the recognition and importance of economic development
- The importance of good customer service

Things we need to build on:

- Good communication among departments, which can be achieved through regular meetings to share views and objectives,
- Linkage will be more complete with DPW and Water Utilities
- Munis software system as a way to track permits and speed communication between departments
- Support initiatives such as online permitting applications and infield access to permits
- Streamlining permits into a common format
- Utilize town website as a tool to communicate the permitting process
-

Discussion:

J. Langdell brought up the term, taking financial assistance from Town Hall for the Water Department and said she was under the impression that the Water Department pays for those services. J. McCormack acknowledged that there is a sharing amongst the Water Department as with other departments and a line item in the budget to support that activity. Bob Courage made it very clear that Water Utilities are run as a business and are therefore responsible to look at all costs and revenue streams to make sure they run at a break even or profitable point.

B. Parker added that he certainly noticed, as a result of the subcommittee's work, an awareness of the importance of economic development with department heads and in the various departments. The work this committee is doing is mentioned all the time. There have been huge gains within the last year.

T. Sapienza said although there may have been some initial trepidation on the part of some departments, they have realized that this group is more of an ally.

D. White said this has been a good check and balance and one of the things to come out of this has been that some people have been made more aware to put their personal feelings aside to work for the betterment of the taxpayer.

P. Seaver said everyone we met with has been very receptive, but when things got difficult it was good to have John representing all of us; he has been so level and welcoming in explaining what our marching orders are. That has been really important for the policies and procedures subcommittee and for all of us on a whole because there were a few situations that could have been more difficult or stickier than they were. T. Sapienza concurred.

J. McCormack noted that the subcommittee will need to work with Guy on the inclusion of certain recommendations and then chart the progress in six months or a year.

Website:

T. Bardsley said the website committee has been busy correlating the data and distributed their final report in draft. We would like this group to review the information and provide comments before we present to the BOS. We held a public forum and there was a good cross section of people that attended; from technical individuals to a few vocal citizens with good ideas. What came out of that meeting was not really a surprise to any of us around the table.

- Basically the website needs to be updated
- The look doesn't reflect Milford
- There is a lack of current material
- It is difficult to find information

We reviewed other websites. The town of Claremont has a very good website and Guy noted that if Claremont can do that with all the issues they faced over the past years, so can Milford. That really drove the point home that we need to address our website. We sent out a survey to the town employees and their responses were mostly in line with the public forum although most of the employees were able to find the information they were looking for, which obviously makes sense because they deal with the website on a daily basis. All agreed that the site did need updating and that it didn't reflect Milford as we would like. The main thing that came out of both the forum and the survey was that this is really bigger than just the town website. What Milford needs is an overall communication policy, from the top down, that gives attention to how news and what the town is doing gets out to the general public. That is what our main recommendation will be to the BOS and in listening to John a few minutes ago, I was thinking how similar our reports are. There needs to be correlation and talk between PEG Access TV, the town website, resident email lists and other media like the Library's use of Constant Contact. All those pieces need to come together so that there is consistency and that the same message gets out.

J. McCormack suggested drafting a policy for the BOS and drafting an estimate of resources and budget requirements based on some of these other towns. R. Deloge said that the committee actually stepped back a little in that regard, but on the third recommendation we did mention other appropriate advising entities. We would be very happy to continue to help the BOS in drafting something up. H. Leach said the land use committee did a lot of work and we came out with that full end recommendation for the Planning Board and we caught them off guard. You almost need to do this in steps because it seemed that we couldn't get some of the members to see where we were or all the work that went into this, as we were just so far ahead. J. McCormack said at the same time we should have the final process ready. J. Langdell said the difference between these two things is that at the Planning Board presentation, there was a feeling by the subcommittee that this was actually going to get on the warrant this year and that was too far, too fast. John is suggesting going in with a draft written policy in your back pocket is probably a smart move to keep the momentum going. H. Leach said you have to get their buy-in beforehand so that they feel some ownership. T. Bardsley said we are ready and hopefully the BOS will dedicate some funding. D. White said Guy will have to be part of this. T. Sapienza said Guy was part of the focus group meeting and felt compelled to make some statements that were very positive. B. Parker said it would be important to suggest to Guy that he make sure people who can help guide this project and people who have a stake in this project are included and involved when this is presented to the BOS. Using the example of the Facilities committee, they should have more than likely been pulled into the selling of the land warrant. One recommendation could say that the sub committee would be happy to get involved with a steering committee that also has Dave Kirsch and Rosie or whoever else has a stake.

J. Langdell said it was interesting to see an ad for *Nixle* on channel 21 to learn about road closures and emergency updates. At some point in the future, maybe it will include town information. There needs to be integration as to not duplicate efforts.

T. Bardsley called attention to the fact that the website is just one piece, we're really looking at some committee or some person where all this filters through. Maybe at some point the Town could consider hiring a communications director. Right now the Police Department and Fire Departments each have their news and events and there is other information coming out of Town Hall. It's all different and maybe if everything was filtered through someone, there would be consistency and no duplication. J. Langdell said the alternative is that we have a set of standards or guidelines that allow for individuality of the different departments yet sets a look and format for the entire town without additional staffing. We talked a lot about town government, but what about the schools, in terms of communicating Milford's image and branding? Is there a way to encourage more communication there so that the entire community of Milford is on the same page? Also, there are two separate issues; the marketing from an economic development standpoint, perception of people looking at Milford and the policy or tool piece, the mechanics. J. McCormack said some of the tools are now available to streamline the information and to standardize the look, but the overall responsibility to make the philosophy won't happen right away. H. Leach added that PEG Access has so much potential as a communication tool. J. Langdell said that there is also a third channel that could potentially match the website, for additional money. T. Bardsley requested that this group submit their comments on the final report by April 1st.

Discussion:

There was a brief discussion regarding the Claremont website. J. Langdell inquired if we know how many hits there are to our website. B. Parker said he didn't know if there was a counter, but could find out. J. Langdell inquired if the employee survey was made available to the general public.

B. Chappell said it is a challenge to keep up a town website with all the boards and committees, but Claremont did a good job. It would be easy for a town website to become cluttered because there is so much to it. R. Deloge said that is why we have a recommendation that there needs to be a process for how the information is gathered and gets to the website. The school district is no different; we don't have a process either. The internal process of how the information gets there and what gets put on what pages really needs to be talked about and outlined.

B. Parker suggested presenting this to the Selectmen on April 12th. There was brief discussion on current changes to the website and the RFP for the new platform. H. Leach asked if there should be some coordination with the local education group doing the school survey because a big part of the survey was on communication. R. Deloge said any resident could access the Local Improvement Survey Plan directly from a link on the school's website and submit commentary. Would it be worthwhile for this subcommittee to contact that group to coordinate processes? R. Deloge, as the School District representative, she could certainly go to the Superintendent and the chair of the local education improvement committee and make a recommendation. The website is milfordschools.net.

R. Ball said it appears that there is an analogy here in that first we have to get the information to somebody's purview and then convince them that this is an important thing. What we really have here is a tool and it's pretty obvious that the glasses don't fit. Some people's do, but some people's don't, and if the glasses were fixed those people would be able to see it real good. He is a little bit concerned with saying there is a problem and that we have to fix it. People don't really understand sometimes what that means so we really have to be sensitive that the Selectmen and everybody involved have enough background information to understand what we are talking about.

Land use:

H. Leach said we had put together a draft and presented some zoning changes to the Planning Board for the North River Rd/Rte 13 area. Their reaction was interesting and although we somewhat expected it, we were surprised that it came out at the initial discussion. One member and several residents took exception to us picking that small area to make changes in. Another comment we took back was that they really wanted us to look more at the town as a whole rather than a specific area. Several comments repeatedly said were why businesses have to go on North River Rd or Rte 13; why can't they just go on West St or Elm St. Part of that is going to be an education because businesses don't have to go on Elm St, they can go to Amherst or Merrimack and the town doesn't have to get the development. We need to look at what we have but also need to look at economic development and the subcommittee has divided the town out into pieces. We each took a piece to look at how the area is zoned and what is really there. Part of the issue on North River Rd is what is really there and the activity that keeps coming in is not consistent with the zoning. Are there other areas in town that are not zoned appropriately? Are there other hot spots? We also realized that we probably need to be checking in and communicating with the Planning Board more regularly. The Planning Board had some very good points and some good questions. They do realize that we are out there but might not have comprehended that this process was going on or that we met every week for two hours or that we put a lot of time and effort into the presentation

Discussion:

D. White said when he heard how the presentation went; he was disappointed at the lack of open-mindedness of some of the board members. To have one or several persons be so dogmatic against a particular area is not necessarily representative of the town's views. To be shut down that aggressively and that quickly is unacceptable. D. White referenced a development meeting a few weeks ago where the Economic Development Director of Dover spoke and offered to contact him to come speak at one of our meetings. Although Dover has very different dynamics and their setting is very different from Milford, they started with a very compressed area and economic development is economic development. R. Deloge said she served on the Dover City Council many years ago and offered assistance. J. McCormack said getting fresh input keeps our thought process regenerated. T. Sapienza said that would be very useful and maybe for the next meeting.

J. McCormack said he was at the session and this is not a final product, but the committee started a process with a fresh new look. Some of the ideas expressed were not what people were used to seeing, but it will get people thinking.

J. Langdell said that when this whole group came to the Planning Board there was a request for information in context to what's happening from a commercial perspective throughout the entire town. That was the kind of data the Planning Board members were looking for. H. Leach said we didn't follow through on that perspective. J. Langdell said we've come full circle now and part of our getting this closer to six of the seven members and what we've learned is that we've got to walk in and sell more than just a great idea from an economic development standpoint. It's the why and I don't think that was really there. When five residents take the time to come down to a meeting with something to say, they are going to have the right to stand up at that microphone to speak, that's the meeting I run. B. Parker said he took some exception to that because this was meant to be a worksession and there really wasn't enough time to explain why before it got into dealing with the NIMBY discussion. It's just a matter of working it through the process before it gets out to the public. J. Langdell added that timing was an element here and we were butting up against the warrant deadline. There might have been a misperception that the group wanted it to go onto this year's ballot, no matter what.

G. Infanti said we came in with a lot of information, all at once, so it may have been too much too quick. If we look at all the areas and come back with this in the future, it may work. A lengthy discussion followed.

H. Leach learned from that experience that the louder people, not necessarily the majority, get more time. We need to get that economic development voice heard more than just from us. D. White said we could get more support from the entire committee and the other groups in town; more voices means more power.

C. Costantino relayed Conservation's comments in that it was too big a project. People consider North River Rd more rural and at Rte 13 North less rural. By looking at those two roads very differently you can not apply the same standards to both. H. Leach said interestingly, the people who came to the meeting didn't like the development happening on Rte 13 and the Conservation Commission didn't like the development happening on North River Rd. J. Langdell said the majority of the people speaking up on the Rte 13 project lived in one neighborhood and it was a different group than the one that came out for the recycling center. H. Leach said we set the stage to come back in and that is part of the process.

Other business:

Development Update

B. Parker said things are starting to move. The TIF Board and Selectmen have been working with a group that is presenting a potentially exciting opportunity out with the Brox property. Once that becomes public, we'll be pulling Economic Development in. There is a potential affordable housing development going in across from Pine Valley Mill. Alene Candles is expanding their warehouse with a 17,000SF addition. Another fifteen lot subdivision is proposed for Mile Slip Rd. Renovations to the Bradler building on the corner of South St are moving forward. T. Bardsley added that the old Boston Shoe Store has been purchased and will be renovated. There are also a couple of pieces starting to move on Elm St.

B. Parker distributed flyers for the new GIS system.

Meeting date:

The next meeting will be determined at a later date.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05AM.