

Economic Development Advisory Council

4.21.10 Meeting minutes

Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

Present:

Tracy Bardsley, Do-it
Brad Chappell, Chappell Tractor
Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co
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

Excused:

Richard Ball

Chris Costantino, Conservation Commission
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 7:35AM.

Minutes:

S. Trombly made a motion to accept the 4/14/10 minutes as written. D. White seconded and all in favor.

Follow-up Discussion - Meeting with Dan Barufaldi

T. Sapienza said that last week's presentation was excellent and some good thinking on our part was generated. J. McCormack said the direct investment aspect was interesting and it reminded him of Keene and some of the discussions with Jack Dugan. Also the correlation between the scale of Keene, Dover and Milford gave us an idea of how something like this might work; however, it would be of value to know where the seed money and the financing came from or if it went straight through the voters. We can learn from some of their soft items to create community involvement and sell the ideas. He has many sources and knows where to go and how to get support. T. Sapienza said it seemed, from him, that Dan did get a lot of support and that everyone in the community has bought into these ideas. The community calendar is something we can look at here for all our activities and events. We can show how much Milford has to offer and that there is more to Milford than just what they came for initially. The local shops could offer promotions to engage the visitors. T. Bardsley said we need to promote a way to get them to come back. Everybody working together will make Milford a more inviting place to set up businesses because it all ties in. J. McCormack also noted that the Dover DBIDA is a 501c3 corporation and asked if we could look into that. B. Parker said MIDC was a 501c3. D. White said that Milford does a good job of doing all the feel good things for the smaller picture. While events will draw people into town, the larger picture is what they see and how it's developed. You have to put money into something to get money back, so how do we promote spending money. Compare trying to put the infrastructure into Brox with Dover who is practically giving the industrial park land away. He is not convinced at this time that Milford has the support from all boards, commissions and departments. B. Parker agreed saying that we are not there yet, but this is one of the main purposes of this group, to make sure the support gets stronger, to push the message and be a driving force to make things happen. If you compare what people are talking about now versus a year ago, we've come a long way.

J. Langdell referenced the fostering recommendations document and said the first item dealt with getting everyone onboard especially from leadership of the BOS on down. At their last meeting they discussed goals and the statement was made that perhaps they need to drill down with us more as opposed to that general document, so maybe now is the time to go back to start that engagement. The message has to start with the BOS and Guy to consistently come through to the departments and then there is the engagement at the next level from all the

volunteers on the boards and commissions. D. White commented that all the other boards have to want this to happen. J. Langdell said J. McCormack concurred and said we're still at the information stage and he would like to see this group challenged a little more. J. Langdell said we would be doing this group a disservice if we only took a few ideas to the BOS. We need to bring the bigger picture and show them how everything will tie together. R. Deloge referred to the website sub committee report as an example and said the first item presented was the need for an overall communications policy for marketing, branding and to pull it all together. J. Langdell inquired if the BOS got the branding piece of that message or did they see only the website as communication. Discussion ensued. T. Sapienza said we are talking about two different levels. If someone asked him today if Milford was a good place to do business, he would still say no; however, since this group was formed he has personally seen a lot of progress on a number of fronts and we are heading in the right direction. We do need to stay on message with the big picture for the Board of Selectmen, but at the same time we could be coordinating between groups, like Hampshire Hills working with Do-It. J. McCormack said he has seen progress over the past few years but tackling some of these larger items will be a challenge until the philosophy changes.

D. White acknowledged that the Building Dept has to bring buildings up to code, but what about bringing in a first class facility or business next door to that property. It is human nature to fix up the surrounding properties. That's the mentality that the departments need to have. B. Parker agreed and said that the Planning Board does; now if we could get people to come in. J. Langdell said the flip is that you have to find the right person who wants to put a functioning, well manicured business right next to something that is unsightly. P. Seaver said we need a thread of change. There is a large picture that we're looking at and we're threading the business philosophy to get everybody onboard. She then referenced the recent sale of 1 Nashua St and the subsequent renovations to both buildings on the corners of South St.

H. Leach said that Dan was careful to say that they picked off some low lying fruit and had small accomplishments that they took to individual council members to spread their successes before selling it publically at a televised meeting. We, as a group, can also think about getting involved in the election process to support individuals who want to promote economic development and want to look at the long term. T. Sapienza brought up the website subcommittee's report. It has been presented to the BOS, Guy is saying the right things, and there have been some personnel changes. We can only do so much to make things happen; it is out there and the town has to take it over. T. Bardsley said in addition to selling the low hanging fruit, we're also trying to sell the attitude shift. Milford's attitude has been to sit on it and wait until someone with all the money comes to us who will put in the infrastructure and everything will be good, whereas it may not happen like that and it may be incremental. J. McCormack said our challenge is to communicate any potential development stories effectively and sell it to the voters and make sure they understand the benefits. We also have to be careful when we say look at Dover or Keene because people may back away, we have to sell what makes sense here like promoting some of the successes of Do-it. B. Parker said that there may be something in the works for Brox and EDAC involvement will be very important. EDAC can help by getting out there in the community to sell and promote all the different elements and aspects. J. Langdell suggested taking Brox out of the discussions for the time being because there so much more in this town than just Brox. Maybe we could look at general marketing or putting some building blocks in place to facilitate development when it does come to fruition. T. Bardsley brought up the disappointment from the land use subcommittee presentation to the Planning Board saying it was probably too much of a top lying fruit. H. Leach said it was a learning experience but at least it was thrown out there. We hit the middle of the tree; we really need the big picture of looking at the whole town and then we need to pick a smaller project. J. Langdell commented that communication is so much more than just the website. It's the overarching item if you want to market Milford as the place to do business, as the place to live, and as the place to shop.

Subcommittee Reports

Website Development – results of presentation to the Board of Selectmen:

T. Bardsley said the report was presented, accepted and is in the Selectmen's hands to go forward. D. White suggested following up with Guy. T. Bardsley said that Guy gets it. He was at the public forum and he heard communications, so things were in process before we presented to the Selectmen. J. Langdell said that this group should come up with a strategy for follow up. It could be basic emails, one on one discussion with Tim or Guy or it may take a liaison between this group and whatever the next step is to keep the ball rolling.

T. Sapienza said the website subcommittee's report, contained three main items in the summary; communication policy, supporting resources and information process. The low hanging fruit was the website and we left them with the bigger picture. We shouldn't just walk away after the report; we should go before the board periodically to inquire about the progress and to offer support. H. Leach said we need to figure out how to keep economic development in the forefront of the Selectmen on a regular basis. The Selectmen are there to serve the town and serve the people in town, so if we can become more visible and show them that this is what the town wants or how this will benefit the town, they will get behind it. The Selectmen got more than just the website from the presentation because they put a communication plan on their list of goals for this year; however, it may take help from us to get from the communication plan to marketing and branding. T. Bardsley added that part of the presentation focused on the need for an overall branding and marketing strategy, so we have to keep working with the Selectmen and reminding them about the bigger picture. The downside is that the website will take money to implement and a brief discussion followed. J. Langdell said everything we've talked about is an investment; personal opinion investment, financial investment and staff time investment. P. Seaver brought up private donations for funding. B. Chappell added funding for advertisement. B. Parker said that it is very important for this group to keep communicating with Guy and the Selectmen regularly as well as during the budgeting process. T. Bardsley ended the discussion saying that the website process has begun and an RFP was just put out for a new platform which is needed for the new website.

J. McCormack inquired if the Selectmen's objectives are shared because their objectives can be expanded downward to make them operational through the various departments and committees. Is there a timetable where we could see where economic development or any of these components stand? D. White said Milford doesn't have Dan Barufaldi and Guy and Bill may have to share a greater part of that role to be the driving force. Dan said he worked with the different individuals and groups, but that everything is totally transparent. That is the key to drive this.

Policies and Procedures – status of work and next steps:

J. McCormack said as noted before, the basic premise of the group is that "time is money" and the system works best with an effective set of practices that are transparent and communicated amongst the various departments and with customers. We've met with multiple departments, most recently with the Water and Sewer commission. One of the successes that this group has enjoyed was the overhaul of the infamous blue book, the Public Works Construction Standards and Specifications for all public improvements. The previous version of this manual had been difficult to navigate and clearly not helpful to developers. Public Works did not have the time or resources to do the revisions, so kudos to Sarah Marchant and all those involved for taking on this task and doing an excellent job. The question now is how do we get this out to the people who are going to be using it and to those who will be impacted by it? The new specs have been referenced throughout the Development Regulations and will be moved forward for publicizing them on the town webpage and the DPW and Community Development web pages. This is an excellent example of a key piece of policy that has gone through substantial improvements and more importantly we're now looking at how to effectively put it into practice and communicate it. I would like to think that this subcommittee has helped to encourage it along. J. Langdell said Sarah took this on prior to our group becoming involved and she has done a phenomenal job pulling DPW in to get this done. They vetted this by sending it out to a variety of developers and engineers to get their input, so that it contains the best practices and is thorough and internally consistent. J. McCormack said that was a good point because that's where the transparency and communication comes in. M. Ciardelli inquired about the content of the document. B. Parker said the document is large, but it is a technical reference with state and town regulations that was made more clear and consistent. J. Langdell said it comes on the heels of the Planning Department's revised Development Regulations last year using the same internal and external vetting process.

J. McCormack explained that when they met with the Water and Sewer group on Feb 2nd, Walter Murray, the former chairman said at the outset of the meeting that this was a business. That's a good start but the question for any business is how to improve it. From experience, you start by listening to your customers first and foremost and by being transparent. In the case of the Commissioners, that would be working with other town departments. The meeting notes were finally issued last Friday after more than two months; however, the minutes were in summary format and left out many of the shared commitments and details, so we're in the process of trying to reconstruct them to include our final report. It is not our mandate to tell them how to improve their business, but in terms of transparency, things can certainly be improved upon. Minutes could be added to the town website in a

timely fashion. They are updated now, but they went almost a year without having anything on the website. D. White, the new Commissioner stated that they now get approved at the next meeting and go on the website the next day, that's how simple it is. J. McCormack acknowledged that was a big step. We should also encourage open dialog with other Milford departments, especially Public Works, Finance and Human Resources. Personal dynamics should not play into communication. There should be sharing of long term facility plans and fundamental needs. The Commissioners' approach is very keen for the bottom line, but it does tend to be reactive rather than proactive for long term options and sharing the capital budget. Facilities' planning certainly has impact on other departments and discussion on the CIP followed. M. Sampson inquired if there was a liaison from the BOS on the Water/Sewer Commission. J. McCormack said Mike Putnam is a Selectman and a Commissioner.

J. McCormack asked that comments from the EDAC group be submitted for the final report within the next day or two. The subcommittee will then review the recommendations with Guy and try to set these in the objectives and then review the follow up with Guy in six months to a year. J. Langdell suggested a worksession between the Selectmen and a small group from EDAC. If economic development is on the BOS goals list, we may want to be part of that dialog. She referenced the EDAC fostering document saying that the first objective/goal had to do with the paradigm of thought. Discussion on how the presentation followed.

H. Leach said when we talk about what is going on in town, there seems to be concern or frustration with getting things through the town's processes. If we don't communicate that with the Selectmen, then all we're doing is complaining. They can't fix the problem if we don't bring it to their attention. Now we have examples. D. White said we can talk all we want, but until departments and committees start working together and the communication is fixed, we'll not go anywhere and that starts at the top. H. Leach said business is about working for the customer and inquired if the town considered the citizens their customers? J. McCormack said there was openness at the departmental meetings and a view from the Building and Fire departments of how to improve things for their customers. Guy has also gotten that message across. There was consensus that things are better.

Land Use - status of work and next steps

H. Leach said everybody has been working on separate sections of town to see what is out there, how it is zoned and what is actually in it. It has taken longer than we all had anticipated, but the new GIS system has been helping with this long term "big picture" project. The Planning Board asked to see where things are and what do we have available. Dan Barufaldi brought up ERZ credits where the town applies to the State for a property to be eligible; in a low census tract area, or vacant or in dire need of repairs. That way if somebody buys that property and renovates it they can get tax credits. That might be something our group could take on as a low lying fruit project because it would fit well into the project we have been working on. There a few properties in town that might be eligible such as the former McDonalds, the Bradler building or the Boston Shoe building and this would be something very visible without requiring any money. That is something that would be very hard for people to say they don't like. J. Langdell added that getting the foundation information, which we need in order to do a full and complete analysis of what is out there right now from a zoning and marketing perspective, is a good thing. H. Leach said there is bound to be a learning curve, but if you look at the Dover website, a lot of what they have to offer is not town money. Dan did a good job of pulling a lot of resources together that are already out there, some of which are tied to existing programs. He created something out of very little, brought it to the forefront and ushered it in. Milford can certainly do that. J. Langdell said that maybe these are some tools that could help in specific areas.

Discussion – EDAC next steps/tasks/efforts

T. Sapienza said in summary it seems that Land Use and Policies and Procedures are still very active but the Website committee is possibly available to branch off to something else on the list of recommendations like branding or communications.

B. Chappell said that a follow up with the Selectmen on would be good. We could discuss what was presented and also get their input as to how to best move forward. B. Parker said it's almost been a year since this group was formed and maybe we could go to the BOS in June with an annual report to show what has been accomplished and bring up what EDAC still sees as issues. J. Langdell said there should be a worksession discussion as well as an on camera annual report to keep the transparency and engage the public. Are the BOS are

ready to have a deeper discussion about economic development in the town of Milford? P. Seaver suggested written correspondence between the two chairpersons first, then a worksession followed by an on camera public presentation and lastly a thank you showing what was done and what are goals are for the next year. T. Sapienza said the small group could consist of Matt, himself and the three subcommittee chairs. It would be a good opportunity to sit down with the Selectmen to talk about what we've done and the issues we've run into. J. Langdell said the discussion could be tied back to the original document but we need to be clear on what to do going forward. P. Seaver said good strategy is to keep them informed and we could rotate who brings the information regularly. D. White said that the development world and Joe Public need to hear through the grapevine that Milford has made some changes. T. Bardsley said we need to make our message positive. P. Seaver said "make it in Milford" not do it in Dover. H. Leach said it is important to make sure all the departments know that we are paying attention and are ready to step up to the plate to hold them accountable. It's a tough message but this is business and we are expecting departments to do their job.

T. Sapienza asked that the members email their thoughts on the next action item to focus on.

OTHER BUSINESS:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20AM.