

Economic Development Advisory Council

8.05.15 Meeting minutes

Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

Minutes approved on 11/18/15

Present:

Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co - Chairman
Chris Costantino, Milford Conservation Commission
Lyle Fulkerson, HPM Insurance
Mark Fougere, BOS
David Hammer, Contemporary Chrysler, Jeep
Wendy Hunt, MIT
Don Jalbert, Milford HS Applied Technology Center
Heather Leach, Granite Bank
Jason Plourde, Tighe and Bond
Penny Seaver, Bean Seaver & Smith
Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc.

Excused:

Marcelle Oneal, Papa Joe's
Janet Langdell, Planning Board
Sean Trombly, Trombly Gardens

Bill Parker, Director Community Development
Mark Bender, Town Administrator
Shirley Wilson, Recording secretary

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

Minutes:

H. Leach made a motion to approve the minutes from 3/11/15, as presented. C. Costantino seconded and all in favor.

Business Retention & Expansion Program: State of the Souhegan Valley Economic Summit:

M. Ciardelli gave an overview of the final draft report and detailed some of the strategies. T. Hutchins said there was low participation both in terms of interviewers and businesses and UNH suggested a follow up with some focus groups, so we are in the process of putting together an economic summit to bring the stakeholders together; volunteers, participating businesses, NRPC, and state representatives. We will go through the strategies and break off into small groups for discussion and then formulate some plans. Both Amherst and Milford put a lot of effort in this and we want to keep it moving forward. Invitations will go out this week and the summit will be held on Thursday 9/24/15 at the Town Hall from 7:30-9:30am. B. Parker added that UNH will finalize the report with the results of the summit. T. Hutchins said, having been at the initial roundtable that launched this group, she is excited to see that the results of this survey shows how far this group has brought Milford. The results were really positive, particularly in areas where this committee has worked very hard, like streamlining policies and procedures. The businesses surveyed were very positive towards Milford, but not so much to Amherst. Kudos to everyone here.

D. Jalbert brought up the strategy to address the skills gap and asked if anyone was working with the school systems. T. Hutchins said workforce development has been an issue across the board as major employers are having a difficult time hiring skilled labor. That is a statewide problem but for this survey, one of the solutions was to work with the community colleges. M. Fougere brought up business networking strategies and said that's what the Chamber of Commerce is all about. M. Bender brought up the rail and bus service. T. Hutchins said this references passenger rail. Large employers bus employees from other areas so this an important issue. B. Parker said there is demand and we've talked about this for years. It is in the master plan to try to get fixed route bus service out this way from Nashua and the SVTC effort has certainly shown there is demand in this area. It is not a cheap proposition but it is something to consider working towards. L. Fulkerson said UNH compiled the data from all the surveys and tried to present a higher level overview with general observations. T. Hutchins said some of the projects are town specific and some of the projects aren't going to be resolved even on a regional basis.

H. Leach asked if we will pull in the local representatives or upper level management from satellite organizations like banks, grocery stores and places like Walmart, etc. T. Hutchins said we want to include some of those people on the invitation list, so if anyone has a contact please email their information. D. White said we should get the decisions makers involved.

L. Fulkerson inquired about the process and rollout timeframe for the projects. T. Hutchins said that's not been defined yet, but UNH will continue to work with us. We were the pilot program in New Hampshire that incorporated two towns and we are still the only group set up that way. We will take this step by step and it will be up to the EDAC, the Chamber, and the individual towns to determine the process. M. Fougere said he was glad we are combining forces to work with Amherst because economies don't stop at the town line. T. Hutchins said Sara Marchant brought this to her because Amherst didn't have the capacity to take this on alone and it makes sense to do more on a regional level.

Sale of a Portion of the Town-owned BROX Commercial-Industrial properties to the Monadnock Economic Development Corporation:

B. Parker said after fifteen years, we finally have a buyer for most of the Brox Property, 93 acres between the 101 bypass and the Community Lands. A purchase & sale agreement has been worked out with MEDC who will purchase and develop the property and then turn it over to the Stoneyard, out of Littleton, MA, an international company that creates stone veneer. He then described the project that will start with a 60,000SF manufacturing building. This process will involve a community development block grant. The Selectmen, who have the authority to sell the property, will hold a public hearing for that on 9/14/15 and it might be good to have EDAC support at the meeting. This has been a long time in coming and the town is very excited.

M. Fougere said this is something we've been working on for years. The big liability has been its remoteness and the up front development costs, but that's not an issue for this project. The advantage of this sale is that it will be controlled by company who doesn't need sewer instead of multiple companies in an industrial park, which would be difficult for the town to develop. This is a solid company that has outgrown its current location and has a need for storage space for the fieldstone and they looked in many communities before choosing Milford. B. Parker said the owner is also very excited about relocating closer to his home in New Ipswich. Kudos to Steve Desmarais for introducing him to us and thanks also to Jack Dugan and Cynthia Harrington for working with us to get through the process so far. We've also met with the wetlands bureau to keep them advised.

M. Bender said this is a good site because of the remoteness and amount of acreage. Just to bring the infrastructure out to the site with roadwork, power and water is in excess of \$700K, so that had to be factored in the sale price of \$168,000. The real value to the town is the ongoing tax revenue which could generate \$75,000-\$100,000 in revenue, once developed. In a decade we could recoup the town's cost of the Brox property and still have the community lands to utilize for years to come. Future plans include a display showroom and distribution center and the Stoneyard could become a 200 employee employer. This will be a good project for the town and has long term advantages. Perry Rd and the Service Rd will be paved to the building site and they will bring water and electric onto the site; their process doesn't require sewer. A pump station would be needed for sewer in that area. M. Fougere said another benefit is that this will give frontage to several more town lots on a paved road with water. B. Parker added that the Hendrix piece will also become more developable. M. Bender stated that there is a misconception about the use out there and they are not quarrying stone. They cut raw materials supplied by others, including farmers with the tote bag system and left over gravel materials. If you google the company, make sure you get the correct address because there is a quarrying operation across the street.

D. Hammer asked if any chemicals were involved in the process. B. Parker said they use a lot of water. M. Fougere explained the process and confirmed that there is runoff from the wet saws but no slag pools. M. Bender added that the business is growing by about 20% a year and also experimenting with new products. They will be moving the entire operation up here.

D. White said having one owner and one building is a better approach, environmentally.

C. Costantino said personally, she prefers this approach but has concerns. She hopes that the trails can still be accessed. They also generate revenue for the town because cyclists come here from other communities to ride and then go out afterward to eat and shop. Further discussion ensued.

D. Jalbert inquired about the general timeline to get up and running and the skillset for future employees. M. Bender said there will be a mix of general laborers, truck drivers, machine operators and office staff. Any special labor would be trained in house. They will need state and local approvals but are hoping to be in operation sometime next year. B. Parker said we'll connect Ben with the schools to see if something can be done.

After a brief discussion, M. Ciardelli said our group is here to help support business and the town in a responsible manner. H. Leach suggested putting together a fact sheet that includes basic information like estimated tax revenue, estimated infrastructure costs, business information; it would help to talk up the positively.

Community Development Office Reorganization and EDAC Support:

B. Parker gave the council an update on the office reorganization. Dana MacAllister, our Building inspector resigned to take an out of state position and Jodie Levandowski, the town planner resigned to go to Manchester and my retirements is looming before the end of the year. With all that, the Selectmen and Town Administrator are looking at a reorganization of the Community Development Office. I just want to make sure that the momentum of this group keeps going forward and you get the support you need. As it stands right now, there won't be a Community Development Director as the two positions will be combined with a focus on planning. The community development and economic development aspects have not yet been determined. M. Bender said he may play a bigger role with this group. M. Fougere said the Community Development Planner position really depends on the quality of the pool of applicants. We also need to address the zoning administrator and GIS positions. The goal is to get someone in as soon as possible to get some transfer of knowledge from Bill before he leaves. M. Bender said we've received several qualified resumes. He also stated that Bill has been great advisor and confidant. I respect what he does and want him to be part of this process.

L. Fulkerson said if well qualified, legitimate candidates are applying, that is a testament to where Milford is and that we are doing something right.

H. Leach said as we're cutting back or shifting areas of focus, I have some concerns because as the economy picks up, we can either be reactionary or pro-active. Change is going to come out here and if we're not focused on what we want and go after what we want, all we will get is what everybody else had left. M. Ciardelli said, from an EDAC standpoint, we want to make sure that we don't lose the quality of care for our customers; the developers, the homeowners or builders. We need to maintain the same level of customer experience and that is the litmus test that needs to be passed. M. Bender said we're not planning on taking any steps backwards.

P. Seaver suggested asking the candidates their thoughts on economic development and what it means to them during the interview process. We've done so much work with the community and the community leaders to convey the mindset of economic development; we wouldn't want to change that. T. Hutchins asked if the short list of applicants will be able to meet with any of the boards prior to a final offer. M. Bender said we haven't decided that yet.

Community Development updates:

B. Parker noted that we are very busy right now, with less staff. There is interest in Milford.

- Alene Candles has started construction on a 60,000 SF warehouse and office expansion.
- Red Oak Apartments has gotten approval from the Planning Board for 60 units; that could be good housing for Stoneyard employees.
- CVS has Planning Board approval to construct the pharmacy at the corner of Nashua and Clinton Streets.
- The West Meadows subdivision is under construction for single family homes with two permits issued.
- St. Joseph's is holding their grand opening this weekend.
- DTM Autowerks has relocated from Mill St to Elm St and there has been interest in the Mill St property.
- Ciardelli Fuel has an office expansion under construction and is going for a variance for more storage units.
- Good Mojo is relocating from Emerson Rd to Elm St.
- Butler Bus received Planning Board approval to move to the Gurney Automotive site on Elm St.
- There are discussions with a prospective buyer of the Fish Market property.

M. Bender added:

- The Green Bridge/Jones Bridge will be coming down tomorrow.
- The Prospect St water tank will be removed on Monday.
- The Jennison Rd bridge replacement will begin later in August.

M. Ciardelli inquired if there was any progress at 1 Nashua St. B. Parker replied very little. H. Leach inquired about the status of the South St project. M. Bender replied that we're going back out to bid in October. We only had one bidder during the initial posting and they were high. We're optimistic that we'll get more bidders and also the engineer revised their costs. The delay will not jeopardize our funding. M. Fougere said it's a tight market and several communities haven't even gotten any bidders for their projects. South St will not be torn up for the Pumpkin Festival.

Other Business:

M. Bender said Fox News Boston will be doing a Zip Trip for their morning show in Milford on 8/21/15 on the Oval with Keyes Park, Emerson Park or Rotary Park as back-ups. He also said that he is continuing his visits to the larger employers in town. He's completed 4 out of 10.

D. White said the West Elm St water line construction is complete and two customers have signed up already. There is excellent potential for growth in that area, now that there is water. B. Parker noted that there was a very good article in the Telegraph last week.

W. Hunt asked if there will be any roadwork done for the new CVS. B. Parker said there will be minimum traffic impact from CVS; however, there is a dedicated additional ROW if the road is ever to get widened, which is one of our future transportation projects. CVS has also committed \$175,000 towards a future signal, if built. Right now you won't notice much difference, but there will be some driveway consolidations. The town and CVS want a signal but the signal has to meet warrants for the State to approve its construction. We're working towards that.

H. Leach inquired if the Planning Board was still looking for representatives because she uses that as a response for people who complain about development. B. Parker stated yes, the Planning Board and the Zoning Board.

The next meeting will be at the economic development summit on 9/24/15.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40AM.