

BEDFORD BUSINESS RESOURCE GROUP (BRG) (Jan. 13, 2010)

PURPOSE: To recommend the establishment a Business Resource Group (BRG), and define its role and responsibilities.

BACKGROUND: In November 2008 the Bedford Town Council established the Bedford Economic Development Commission (BEDC) to investigate the status of Bedford businesses and make recommendations towards future economic development activities. The BEDC was established as a “sunset” committee with a one year commission and the specific charge:

“The Bedford Economic Development Commission will seek to improve the quality of life for the taxpayers of Bedford by expanding the commercial and industrial tax base. The Commission shall achieve its goal by preserving existing jobs and businesses and welcoming new businesses, while maintaining Bedford’s unique characteristics and quality of life.” (Extracted from the BEDC final report, dated December 16, 2009)

The BEDC conducted forums with existing Bedford businesses, local developers and residents. The BEDC sought input from the New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED), the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC), the Manchester Chamber of Commerce and its economic development arm, the METRO Center, as well as several other agencies associated with economic development. Additionally the BEDC held discussions with neighboring towns which either have or are in the process of creating an economic development function of their own. The BEDC final report elaborates on the findings of these meetings and forums.

The resident members of the BEDC represented various business related disciplines: banking, construction/development, commercial enterprise, State Travel and Tourism, hotel development, business management and consulting. Additionally, the Bedford School Board provided a representative who also has a business background. These well qualified volunteers contributed many hours of their time to investigating the business environment of Bedford and determining how to proceed with future business development. The findings and recommendations are found in the BEDC Final Report, dated December 16, 2009. These findings were briefed to the Bedford Town Council on December 16, 2009.

The BEDC determined that three elements of business need to be addressed by any ongoing economic development function decided upon by the Town Council:

1. Business retention (keep businesses in Bedford)
2. Business growth (expansion of existing businesses)
3. Business development (bringing new business to Bedford).

Additionally, the BEDC Report noted the opportunity to influence the redevelopment/rehabilitation of several presently under utilized business properties. These

later opportunities are time sensitive and require near term attention on the part of an economic development entity.

BUSINESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

DISCUSSION: The BEDC Report (page 22) recommends “that the Town establish a volunteer advisory committee irrespective of” any other form of economic development introduced by the Town. The committee is to represent business interests and act as a sounding board and group of “business ambassadors” for Bedford. The report stated “such a committee would be critical to the long term success of business retention, expansion and growth”.

PROPOSED: ESTABLISH THE BEDFORD BUSINESS RESOURCE GROUP_(BRG)

This proposal addresses and responds only to the BEDC’s recommendation to establish a volunteer committee. In recognition of the extensive and time consuming work of the BEDC and its well considered findings and recommendations, it is felt the Council should take immediate and appropriate action to establish the recommended volunteer committee. While the Council considers further action upon the primary recommendation of the BEDC, the BRG (the committee) can be acting upon the other recommendations of the Report. In particular, the committee should address the redevelopment opportunities which the BEDC identified and urged “a collaborative approach” with the Town involved. This latter challenge is an immediate opportunity for Bedford to demonstrate its’ commitment to an involved economic development effort.

ROLE OF THE BRG: The BEDC Report suggests the volunteer committee would be an advisory body to any other form of economic development (Primary option) established by the Town Council. The identified opportunity for Bedford to attempt to collaboratively influence the future utilization of several presently under performing commercial properties and thereby help to increase the commercial tax base suggests a more immediate role for the committee. (This opportunity was also identified to the Master Plan Steering Committee by the Plan consultant.) As several of these properties are now vacated or are less than fully utilized, the opportunity to participate in the determination of how to best rehabilitate these properties is immediate. An economic development committee can serve this purpose. Additionally, the committee will be established and well prepared to advise and supplement the primary economic development option decided upon by the Town Council.

RESPONSIBILITIES: The Business Resource Group will:

1. Act as “Host” to any business expressing interest in locating to Bedford. The committee will respond to an inquiry from a business seeking information in regards to locating in Bedford. (The BRG should be listed on the Town web-site as the point of contact for economic development.) The committee will provide requested information and open a dialog with the prospective business to foster further interest. The BRG will introduce any interested party to the Town Planning Department and Planning Board policies and procedures and assist the

prospective business enter the formal planning process (as appropriate). The BRG may act in the interested party's behalf but shall not interfere in the Planning Board process. The committee shall honor and maintain the confidentiality of any interested prospect.

2. The committee shall respond to Town Administration or Planning Department notifications of business inquiries and respond as in item #1. (It is expected that both the Town Administration and Planning Department will immediately inform the BRG of all business related inquiries.) The BRG is expected to maintain any confidentiality requested by the interested business until a public announcement of interest/intent is agreed to by the prospective business.

3. The committee will seek to attract outside businesses to locate to Bedford.

4. The committee will seek to involve itself in the rehabilitation/revitalization projects of underutilized or declining commercial properties as identified in the BEDC Report or as otherwise identified.

5. The committee will establish communications and work with State and Regional ED agencies towards the benefit of existing Bedford businesses (retention/expansion) and identifying and attracting new businesses into Bedford.

6. Act in an advisory and supportive capacity to the primary Economic Development function when established.

MEMBERSHIP: This committee will consist of seven members, one being a member of the Town Council. Appointment of the volunteer members will be made by the Town Council to staggered three year terms, with open positions appointed each Council year. (The Council member will be assigned each Council year.) The Chairman shall be elected (reelected) annually from among the volunteer members. It is anticipated the BRG will be composed of members with business related backgrounds/disciplines such as banking, commercial or business development, real-estate development or business ownership/executive management.

MEETINGS: The committee will meet monthly or more frequently if appropriate. The BRG will meet at least twice each Council year with the Town Council to report on its' activities, the health of Bedford business and to make recommendations regarding economic development. The BRG is a duly appointed Public Committee and as such will comply with applicable Right to Know Laws (RSA:91-A).

BRG INTERFACE TO THE TOWN PLANNING DEPARTMENT AND THE PLANNING BOARD: The committee shall be mindful of the distinct roles and responsibilities of both the Town Planning Department and Planning Board. The BRG, while acting as "host" to a prospective new business, may assist the prospective business within the Planning Department process but shall not influence the process through the Planning Board. (If determined to be useful, the BRG or either the PD or PB may recommend the development of a Protocol among themselves.)

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend the Town Council approve the establishment of the Bedford Business Resource Group (BRG) and direct the Town Manager to advertise for volunteers with appropriate backgrounds.