

Minutes 01/21/2009

Bedford Economic Development Commission

Draft Summary Minutes

January 21, 2009

Bedford Meeting Room

10 Meetinghouse Road

A regular meeting of the Bedford Economic Development Commission was held on Wednesday, January 21, 2009 at 8:00 AM the Bedford Meeting Room, 10 Meetinghouse Road.

Members Present: Jack Sullivan (Vice Chairman)

Pam Brown

Councilor Bill Dermody

Alice DeSouza

Russell Marcoux, Town Manager

Mark Prestipino

Joseph Reilly

Michael Sandhu

Rick Sawyer, Planning Director

Terry Wolf, Bedford School Board

Vice Chairman Sullivan opened the meeting at 8:05 AM and conducted the meeting in the absence of Chairman Bechard. All other members were present.

Approval of Minutes – November 19, 2008

MOTION by Mr. Reilly to approve the minutes as prepared.

SECONDED by Mrs. DeSouza.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Item #1 - Presentation of where we are: Inventory-programs-development

Town Manager Marcoux introduced the subject and Mr. Sawyer made a presentation (attached) which noted recent development projects, projects under consideration and summarized the amount of vacant commercial land in town.

The presentation noted that there are 44 vacant or underutilized tracts totaling 305 acres. 21 of the tracts are located along South River Road and represent 160 acres or 52% of the vacant land in town.

Chairman Sullivan noted that the limited amount of available land was eye-opening and further emphasized the need for careful planning.

Item #2 – Road Map (Future plan for Committee)

Mr. Reilly and Mrs. Brown introduced a draft Road Map (attached) which includes statements on: a)the Commission's Mission, b)Planning premises, c)External Analysis, d)SWOT Analysis, e)Needs Analysis, f)Stakeholder Analysis, g)Current Client and Service Assessment, h)Competitor / Peer analysis, i)Branding, and j)Implementation.

Item #3 – Discussion with Chris Way and Cindy Harrington of NH Division of Economic Development[Marker]

Mr. Way thanked the Commission for including them in their discussions and stated that he would build on many of the statements made at the Economic Development Roundtable. Mr. Way noted that their in-state operations are primarily focused on business and job retention and that 80% of growth in the state is from businesses that are already located here.

Mr. Way indicated that expansions are currently sluggish due to diminished sales, rising energy costs and financing concerns. Unemployment is rising in NH which is having a secondary effect of increasing the number in-home or cottage spin off businesses. He stated that 25% of businesses are considering layoffs and early intervention by the state can help to reduce the impacts.

Mr. Way stated that the alternative energy and green industry is extremely strong and that NH recently saw a 27% increase in Exports to a total of \$3.4 billion.

Mr. Way indicated that it is very important to know your businesses, to have conversations as often as possible, and to understand what their needs are. Businesses need to know if there is a clear pathway for growth and if the town be an advocate for them. He suggested that the Commission look to the towns of Hooksett, Derry and Rochester as good examples.

Mrs. Harrington stated that she was primarily responsible for the recruitment of new business to the State and that the number one item that companies will look at when trying to make decisions regarding where to locate is your website.

Mrs. Harrington stated that web sites must be clear and direct with economic development being one click away with easily identifiable points of contact.

Mr. Way indicated that web sites are a reflection of the community and people can clearly tell if the town is inviting and if locating there will be welcomed.

Mrs. Harrington stated that Bedford is in a desirable location with multiple colleges, good infrastructure and roads, and an educated workforce. She stated that they do have several tools at their disposal including research and development tax credits, low interest loans and job training.

Mrs. DeSouza asked if they receive many requests about Bedford.

Mrs. Harrington responded that most of their calls in the Manchester area are regarding manufacturing related to the defense industry, biotechnology and energy and that Bedford is more suited to office.

Mr. Marcoux asked if they felt that our web site should be our highest priority.

Mrs. Harrington indicated that it should be as that is how the outside looks in on us. She stated that the site should include a map that shows our relationship with Boston, a business friendly note and links to notices and planning.

Councilor Dermody asked to she could recommend another community's page as a template.

Mrs. Harrington indicated that Claremont and Manchester are good examples.

Mr. Prestipino stated that there are best practices for the web which should be considered and that it would be possible to come up with a list of the top 10-15 economic development web sites.

Mrs. Brown asked what the top needs of businesses trying to locate to NH are.

Mrs. Harrington indicated: 1) availability of skilled labor, 2) low taxes, 3) Highway and airport access, 4) Business responsibility, 5) a responsive review process, 6) low utility costs and 7) a quick response from the community.

Item #4 – Discussion with David Preece, SNHPC – A regional program

Mr. Preece made a presentation (attached) regarding the economic development programs of the Metro Center which was formed after a 2001 regional citizens initiative sponsored by the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Preece stated that in 2006 the SNHPC Comprehensive Plan found that the largest barrier to economic growth was the lack of infrastructure and lack of affordable housing. The Plan recommended 1) updating land use regulations, 2) developing public/private partnerships, 3) adopting economic development plans, 4) maintain and expand existing businesses and 5) work with the Chamber of Commerce (i.e. Metro Center).

Mr. Reilly asked how we would best utilize the Metro Center.

Mr. Preece indicated that the Metro Center could serve as a regional economic development website that links to local web site and provides information as to available land.

Mrs. Brown asked if there were other regional groups working south of the Metro Center.

Mr. Preece that there was not.

Mr. Prestipino stated that a website is important but actions are necessary and that if we have a website that we must be actionable. He continued to say that we need an integrated approach with business interactions and follow through.

Vice Chairman Sullivan inquired as to the best way to get information from businesses.

Mr. Preece responded that we should reach out, send surveys, make them part of the process, hold focus groups.

Vice Chairman Sullivan asked what has been the most successful.

Mr. Preece indicated focus groups.

Mrs. DeSouza asked if a SWAT had been done for every town.

Mr. Preece indicated that their analysis was for the entire region.

Item #5 – Discussion with Andre Garron, Londonderry Community Development Director – A regional program[Marker]

Mr. Garron indicated that he recently took part in a webinar sponsored by the International Economic Development Association which stated that 90% of businesses will look at your website first before deciding to make contact. He stated that in Londonderry the determined that they did not have the skill set on staff to develop an appropriate web site and they developed an RFP for assistance.

Mr. Garron presented a report titled “Key Economic Development Opportunities in Londonderry, NH” (attached). The report indicates that their population grows by 10,000 people during the day and that there is a population of over 700,000 within a 20-mile radius. Londonderry is a desirable location due to its access to highways, the airport, good schools, good quality of life and abundant available land.

Mr. Garron pointed out that between 2000 and 2006 Londonderry developed over 600 acres of land building 3 million square feet of new commercial and industrial space which generated over 2,600 jobs and \$8 million in tax revenue.

Mr. Garron indicated that Londonderry has taken the approach to focus on existing and local business and not to attract any one large company.

Mr. Garron stated that Londonderry has realized that workforce housing is critical to economic development and has established a Workforce Housing Task Force with the goal of providing housing affordable for the wages paid in the community.

Mr. Garron also stated that Londonderry is fortunate to have an excellent GIS staff which has developed a site selector web site

that allows individuals to quickly find sites that meet their development needs.

Mr. Prestipino asked how the residents feel about so much growth.

Mr. Garron indicated that by keeping development in targeted or designated areas has kept most people positive. He continued to say that strong leadership by the Planning Board is also critical.

Mr. Prestipino asked if there was community support for spending money on economic development and staff.

Mr. Garron that there was support as the amount of development justified the costs and that the staff was has been able to fill many needs of the community.

Mr. Prestipino asked what his opinion of resource sharing was.

Mr. Garron indicated that while it was a good idea there simply is too much work in his community to be able to share his staff.

Mr. Sandhu asked what percentage of your development comes from leads within the community.

Mr. Garron stated that he felt it was about 60% and having business talking to and supporting each other was important.

Vice Chairman Sullivan stated that in the past towns were competitor and wondered what things we might be able to do together.

Mr. Garron sated that emphasizing the airport and marketing could be shared initiatives.

Mr. Marcoux stated that we must work to have higher level discussions amongst the decision makers regarding how we can work together.

Mrs. Brown suggested that some communities have natural advantages and that we should look at what our niche markets could be.

Mr. Garron stated that Bedford could be strong in light manufacturing, office and corporate head quarters.

Item #6 – Road Map Discussion & Committee Assignments

Vice Chairman Sullivan indicated that we need to focus on two elements: 1) Marketing and 2) Web site.

Councilor Dermody stated that a schedule or timeline was important as the Commission has been established as a sunset committee with only one year to act.

Mr. Prestipino stated there were two ways to proceed with the web site; 1) Throw up a site and hope for the best or 2) spend time developing details first.

Mr. Prestipino suggested that we should conduct an assessment of existing resources such as staffing. He stated that we can not create the front end without having the backend value. The Commission should report to the Council as to what would be required to perform the function.

Mr. Prestipino stated he was struck by the enormity of the land development process and questioned what would define success for the Commission. He questioned what the ideal development of our vacant parcels would be. He questioned if the gross value of increased revenue from the development of our vacant land would justify the amount of investment we may need to spend on economic development.

Councilor Dermody stated that is the kind of information that the Council is looking for and we need to understand how to maintain the value.

Mr. Marcoux stated that the potential value of development on the vacant land should be easy to determine.

Mrs. Brown said that items A, B & F on the Road Map should be done today and that items C, D & G should be completed by committees. She stated that there are several assumptions: 1) That the Town must make an investment, 2) That there is a need for economic development, 3) That there is a fiscal benefit from development and that it should be identified, and 4) That we will invest in a good web site.

Mrs. DeSouza stated that there has to be a reason for economic development and her assumption was that it was to improve the commercial tax base.

Councilor Dermody referred the Commission back to the charge of the Council which is to, *“The Bedford Economic Development Commission shall seek to improve the quality of life for the taxpayers of Bedford by expanding the commercial and industrial tax base. The Commission shall achieve it’s goal by preserving existing jobs and businesses, and welcoming new businesses while maintaining Bedford’s unique characteristics and quality of life.”*

Mr. Marcoux stated that he felt the 8 members of the business community on the Commission need to lead the charge with completing the committee assignments. He stated that there should be a focus on business retention and a survey of needs. He will provide the Commission with a list of people who have volunteered to help.

Vice Chairman Sullivan that he would like to have the two subcommittees meet and report back at the next meeting. He also wanted to know how much of the 305 acres are buildable.

Mr. Sawyer stated that he did not feel that spending a lot of time on the details of the vacant land would be important at this time.

Mr. Garron stated that Londonderry had spent in excess of \$300,000 developing their GIS and were now able to complete build out scenarios using Community Viz.

Mr. Marcoux suggested that Mrs. DeSouza should take the lead on the Marketing and Web Site Development Committee and it was stated that Mrs. Wolf had agreed to help. He suggested that Mr. Reilly and Mrs. Brown could continue to work on the Program and Development – Roadmap Committee. He suggested that Mr. Prestipino should take the lead on the Business Retention and Outreach Committee and it was stated that Councilor Dermody and Mr. Reilly would be willing to work on the committee as well.

Councilor Dermody agreed that starting the outreach committee was the highest priority and that we will continue to learn as the process moves forward.

Mr. Sawyer stated that he felt having the business and citizen forums early in the process would be helpful.

Mr. Marcoux and Mr. Sawyer referred the Commission to the Planning Board Development review process chart (attached) and described the process. It was stated that one criticism is that we require all state permit to be acquired prior to action by the Planning Board.

Mrs. DeSouza stated that a web site should be thought of like a newspaper with the important information being placed, “above

the fold”.

Councilor Dermody indicated that one citizen had offered to help on the web site committee and that he would pass the contact information on to Mrs. DeSouza.

Vice Chairman Sullivan stated that the next meeting would be February 18, 2009 at 8:00 AM.

New Business:

Item #1 – Discussion of Alternate Members

It was agreed that the appointment of alternate members would not be helpful at this time.

Item #2 – Meeting with Town Council

Mr. Marcoux stated that the Council has placed the Commission on the February 25, 2009 agenda for a 15 minute update. It was agreed that the Commission could discuss what to present to the Council at its next meeting.

MOTION by Mrs. DeSouza to adjourn.

SECONDED by Mrs. Brown

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

ADJOURNMENT at 11:35 AM

Submitted by: Rick Sawyer

Audio tapes of this meeting are available for listening during regular office hours at the Town Office Building, 24 North Amherst Road, Bedford, NH.

