

Minutes 09/23/2009

Bedford Economic Development Commission

Draft Summary Minutes

September 23rd, 2009

Bedford Meeting Room

10 Meetinghouse Road

A regular meeting of the Bedford Economic Development Commission (BEDC) was held on Wednesday, September 23rd, 2009 at 8:00 am at the Bedford Meeting Room, 10 Meetinghouse Road.

Members Present: Henry Bechard

Councilor Bill Dermody

Russell Marcoux, Town Manager

Mark Prestipino

Joseph Reilly

Michael Sandhu

Rick Sawyer, Planning Director

Jack Sullivan

Terry Wolf, Bedford School Board

Matt Henry, Intern

Members Absent: Alice DeSouza

Pam Brown

Call to Order

Chairman, Russ Marcoux convened the meeting at 8:00AM.

Approval of the Minutes – August 19, 2009

- **MOTION** by Henry Bechard
- **SECONDED** by Jack Sullivan
- **MOTION CARRIED** Unanimously (9-0-0)

Mr. Prestipino said that he read in the minutes that there was a sign project that was mentioned between the Town of Bedford and Centrix bank. He indicated that it was a great partnership and asked if there were any new developments. Mr. Marcoux said that the application has been completed and the town just needs to send it in to Centrix Bank. Nothing has been finalized.

Agenda:

1) Review of WEB Site Development Schedule. (TW)

- **A Sneak Peek look at the new front page!**
- **Development of Economic Development page (ADS)**

Ms. Wolf began by recapping what has happened with regard to the website. She said that the Commission has selected Virtual Town Hall as a vendor and the sense of urgency was driven by the BEDC's desire to get their website online. There is a preliminary design that was sent out to website committee members and comments were made on it. Ms. Wolf displayed a graphic of the website on the computer screen for the Commission members to view. Ms. Wolf said that they were 95% toward going online with it.

The next change is the removal of the seal in the upper right hand corner. Ms. Wolf said that she is going to place the seal in a different location. Virtual Town Hall is also going to change the names on the left-hand corner to suit the town better. Next week Virtual Town Hall will come in and meet with department heads about the website. That is when the content begins to take shape, as of now it has been exclusively graphic design. The reason we picked them in the first place is for their expertise and depth in content. As you can see, the website is very easy to navigate and easy to find content.

Mr. Reilly asked if from a BEDC perspective, there was a direct link from the front page. He asked if an individual would have to go through the business section in order to get to the economic development page. Ms. Wolf responded by saying she spoke to Virtual Town Hall about it because she too felt it was important to have a direct link. It is indeed possible. They are also adding an "about us" and a "BCTV" section. "Forms and Applications" is a very important tab because that will give the public access to important items. Mr. Prestipino said that the state attorneys and developers he spoke to indicate a strong demand for the "forms and applications" section on the website.

Ms. Wolf specifically discussed the Economic Development Webpage. She reiterated that there will be an economic development link on it. There are already some items that she can put on the page. Ms. DeSouza is looking to take it a bit deeper. Ms. Wolf referred to an e-mail that was passed out prior to the meeting and said that some ideas that were in the marketing subcommittee report are items that should go on the webpage. We should also make sure we place any decisions that are made with regard to specific businesses that we may want to attract. She suggested that a separate subcommittee be established to work on the economic development webpage. Ms. DeSouza has set a timeline of November or December. Ms. Wolf said that it is a living website that can be altered even after the Town Council has read the final BEDC report in December.

Mr. Dermody asked if there could be a section on the economic development page to place a directory of all Bedford businesses. Ms. Wolf said that she had spoken with Virtual Town Hall about having some sort of search feature that could search for businesses located in Bedford. They said it is possible but it would be the town's responsibility to maintain the database so when a business leaves town it is updated on the directory. Mr. Dermody said that it has mutual gain potential. It is a way for us to maintain a correct number of businesses we have in town and a way for businesses to advertise.

Mr. Sandhu said that he thinks that they will sign up for the service but will most likely not contact the town when they leave. Bedford will have to develop a system for finding out when businesses leave Bedford. Mr. Marcoux said that a way to maintain the directory would be to maintain a relationship with the local Chamber of Commerce so that when they find out about a business leaving the town gets the information. Ms. Wolf recommended that in order to sign up, they must provide contact information, that way the town has a means of contacting them regularly.

Mr. Dermody said that a benefit of having Virtual Town Hall as a vendor is that if we see something that another town does that we wish to "replicate", Virtual Town Hall will implement it to our website at no cost. Mr. Marcoux said that other municipalities have been very useful to Bedford when we were calling for information about their websites and they all had great things to say about Virtual Town Hall.

Ms. Wolf also posed the question of whether the Bedford Economic Development website should be a subset of the town website or should it stand alone as it does in places like Manchester. We may decide at some point that the Economic Development department may want to do more than what Virtual Town Hall can offer and we may go elsewhere. That is a consideration that we may wish to put in the report.

Mr. Prestipino said that the site looks great. He asked for the URL so the Commission could navigate the site and get a feel for how easy it is to navigate. He then said that Bedford should join a user group with other local communities where Bedford can make recommendations to Virtual Town Hall about improvements to the site template.

Mr. Bechard asked if she looked into putting advertisements on the page in order to generate revenue and sustain its service. Ms. Wolf said that it is a discussion we should have and should look into what the town policy is regarding advertisements. Mr. Marcoux asked Mr. Prestipino to also assist Ms. DeSouza with the page.

2) Review of Business Outreach Forums:

- Summary of all the outreach forums (RS)**
- Summary of the Business Visitations (MH)**

Mr. Marcoux referred the BEDC to the summary of all of the retail forums that Mr. Henry wrote. He mentioned that it was not all inclusive but gives the commission an idea of some common themes that have been discussed. Mr. Marcoux walked the commission through the forum summary describing some of the main points. He then asked for some feedback from the commission.

Mr. Sawyer said that the notes from the forums could be included as an appendix in the final report. That way we do not waste valuable space in the report. Mr. Marcoux suggested that the business visitation summaries also be included in appendix of the final report. Mr. Marcoux said that the five forums that were held were all extremely successful. There was even valuable discussion at the professional forum even though only one person showed up to. Mr. Marcoux also sent thank you letters to all who attended any of the forums. Mr. Marcoux said that he is going to put the two summaries on the current economic development page.

3) Program Development, Updated Road Map (MH)

- Discussion and Work on Draft Report to Council (PB & MH)**
- Update on Economic Development function Plan (JR)**

Mr. Reilly started by addressing the Commission about the handout he passed out with the three possible options he is suggesting. He is putting out the three options as possibilities as to how a sustainable and effective function could be established. Each option is beneficial in different ways and Mr. Reilly suggested that somebody help him with determining the pros/cons, and eventually determine which option is more desirable for Bedford. Mr. Reilly said that he has been consistent about his desire to go with option #1 which would be hiring a full-time economic development director. However, the Town Council has indicated that option #1 is not likely right now due to the current economic climate. Mr. Reilly said it may not be worth spending a lot of time on option #1 for that reason. Mr. Bechard agreed to work with Mr. Reilly on analyzing the three options and determining which would be the best fit for Bedford as well as helping him write a narrative accompanying a recommendation. Mr. Sullivan also volunteered.

Ms. Wolf asked if the plan was a part of what is going to be drafted in the final report. Mr. Reilly said that it was going to be part of an implementation plan for whatever the recommendation is going to be.

Mr. Dermody said that not only should the commission develop options that Bedford has, but to strongly recommend the best option for Bedford to pursue. Mr. Bechard asked if the BEDC should pursue something that they think would be best to the town even if the Town Council is not likely to fund it. Mr. Bechard said that we should be less concerned with if the Town Council is going to agree and be more concerned with performing the charge. If the BEDC thinks that option #1 is the direction Bedford needs to go, they should recommend it.

Mr. Dermody said that his feeling of the Council is that now is not the right climate to implement option #1. However, that does not mean the BEDC cannot give the Town Council a report that says it is the best direction to take. There may be short-term options that could be pursued until the time is right to go with what the BEDC says is best. We would be doing the town a disservice not to recommend something we thought would be beneficial because we do not think it would be popular with the Town Council.

Mr. Reilly agreed and said it should be the consensus of the entire Commission as to what BEDC pursues. Mr. Dermody said he feels passionately about the benefits of option #1 and that the BEDC should make a business case similar to Mr. Henry's analysis as to what economic development does and how option #1 can be paid for. Mr. Sandhu said that because we are going to be built-out in less than ten years and 80% of development comes from within, we need somebody who can look after the businesses that are already in Bedford. We clearly need somebody to focus on that even though times are tough right now.

Mr. Prestipino said that even if the Commission decides to recommend hiring a full-time staff person, there should be a movement toward partnering with other regional organizations. Mr. Prestipino said that he disagrees with the statement that this is the wrong time to hire a full-time staff person. He said that an economic downturn is when you need this individual the most in order to bring in tax revenue. The numbers do not lie when you look at predictable growth and the benefit it has on expanding the tax base. You can pretty much estimate what the impact of development will do if past development is to continue into the future. Shifting more of the burden onto the residents will occur if the budget trends continue but the development does not. We should not back away from a recommendation that will shift the burden off of residents.

Ms. Wolf said that the business case is very important no matter what option we choose. The Council will look to a business case

in order to justify any recommendation that they are going to make. Our competitive review is also important because we need to move forward with our function before our competitors do. By doing so, we maintain the upper hand for those who have not done this as well as stay competitive with those who have addressed the issue. With that being said, it is very important to acknowledge the importance of partnerships with our competitors as well. Ms. Wolf said she has always thought that the recommendation would include hiring a full-time economic development employee. However, if that is not going to happen we should describe a plan B.

Mr. Dermody asked if there is a “catalyst” that we could point to in order to argue to the Town Council that it is indeed the time to consider this option. For example: the airport access road or something like that? That road changes Bedford so drastically we need somebody to oversee that. Is there a strong specific item we can point to in order to articulate that it is the best time for a full time employee? Mr. Reilly said there are many strong catalysts that signify that it is the right time. We may also get a great deal on a qualified individual for low cost because of the poor economy. Mr. Prestipino pointed to the shift of the tax burden onto residents, the economic times, the airport access road, and drying up revenue, all are catalysts that would make a strong case.

Mr. Henry said that this discussion seems like consensus. Everyone has said today that they think there should be something in the report advocating for a full time position that performs the economic development function. Whether that should be conducted now or done incrementally, that is another discussion. Because everybody has said that is the direction we should go, Mr. Henry said it should be written down in the draft. Mr. Reilly said that doing so would be premature at this stage. He said that we should continue the process throughout the next few weeks and have the discussion at next Commission meeting as to exactly what we want in the narrative. Mr. Marcoux said that it is Mr. Henry’s charge to draft these recommendations and bring them to the BEDC for next meeting.

Mr. Sandhu said that the BEDC should view the current economic climate as cyclical and make a recommendation under the assumption that the economy is going to bounce back some day. We need to position Bedford for success in the next 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years into the future.

Mr. Marcoux said that the BEDC should keep in mind that we have just two regularly scheduled meetings prior to the delivery of the final report and therefore the Commission needs to stay on target as to the delivery of the final report. We are by no means behind other communities who are looking at the same issues that we are. We are not like some communities that are eliminating their economic development functions. That would have very severe consequences. At least our community is addressing the issue and is receptive to finding a sustainable solution. The Council is also working on their Infrastructure Master Plan and changes to their Capital Improvements Plan. That too makes the case for a meaningful economic development function because we need to pay for all of these items.

Mr. Sandhu said that VHB has done a great job on the economic conditions chapter of the Master Plan.

Rick has said that there is so much work that needs to be done in order to maintain what we already have and serve as a cheerleader for businesses. It would be tough to make the case that an economic development function would be necessary just to pay for improvements. It should be just a piece of the argument.

Mr. Prestipino brought up the City of Concord, NH and how it has an Assistant City Manager rather than an Economic Development employee. An Assistant Town Manager could perform the function in addition to other projects. This was brought

up to Mr. Prestipino at a business visitation and from what he has heard this model has worked very well, and the employee has been praised for how the City has conducted economic development. Mr. Marcoux was clear about the fact that he had no discussion with Mr. Prestipino on the subject. Mr. Prestipino affirmed Marcoux's statement.

Mr. Marcoux then turned it over to Mr. Henry to explain the draft that he has been working on. He stated that we now have just two regularly scheduled meetings to complete the draft. Mr. Henry explained the format of the draft explaining exactly the process that took place, as well as some background that was given. He said that the first portion of the report is geared toward garnering credibility with the audience saying "look at all the BEDC has done to arrive at its recommendations". The BEDC met with subject matter experts, conducted business visitations, held leadership business forums, and invited peers to come in and talk to the BEDC. The report is followed by Mr. Henry's analysis from last meeting as to what exactly economic development does with regard to expanding the tax base and providing tax burden shift off of residents.

We now have all this data and it is time to begin putting some of the common themes down on paper. However, Mr. Henry does not want to put something in the report that only one person thinks should go into the report. Mr. Henry said that he has provided some consensus that he feels was reached from business visitations and leadership forums, and he requested direction from the BEDC as to what he should include from these documents.

Mr. Prestipino said that Mr. Henry has a good framework for the structure for the report but he should wait a bit until Mr. Reilly and his team has their portion completed before he writes about some conclusions the BEDC should include. The next three to four weeks will be critical to the Commission when they begin to determine what they want in this document.

Mr. Dermody said that Mr. Henry should feel free to include some of the SWOT analysis that has been discussed in all aspects of the research process. He said that the BEDC could essentially extract a lot of what was written in the Merrimack report because it also applies to Bedford too. Residential attractions such as the school system, education attainment levels, lack of expansion of businesses, build out issues, small lot sizes; all can go into the SWOT section. Mr. Prestipino made a presentation last spring that was helpful in completing the SWOT section. Ms. Wolf said she would e-mail that to Mr. Henry. Mr. Prestipino was also asked to provide his analysis to Mr. Henry. Mr. Marcoux agreed to address the issue with Metro Center - NH

Ms. Wolf said that she would be happy to draft the competitors review section and include some of the media attention that our competitors have gotten recently. She also recommended that a Metro Center - NH section be added to the draft. The commission agreed. Ms. Wolf also said she was going to add a marketing section to the draft.

One thing the BEDC has not discussed is infrastructure concerns that economic development would bring. Would economic development bring in more crime and therefore require more police as a result? Mr. Henry said that there is validation to those concerns. The infrastructure piece should tie into the target industries section. Attracting certain businesses also brings certain clientele that have an impact on the amount of crime that could result. The commission should address the infrastructure concerns so that it compliments the target industries section. Mr. Marcoux asked Mr. Prestipino and Mr. Sullivan to work on the target industries section of the draft.

Mr. Marcoux said that he will work on a section that addresses road issues that are going to come up in the future. Bedford is on its third year without a road bond now. Even without economic development it is a major concern Bedford has to address. He said he is going to work with Jim Sanford to draft a section on that.

Mr. Reilly said a focus should also be placed on the public's perception that "development is bad". The Commission should also work to change this perception. Mr. Prestipino said that at one of the forums Merv Taub, Chair of the Conservation Commission said that it is important to articulate this to the public. The major difference between what the future holds and what has happened in the past 10 years has to do with the rate of residential development. However, he does not think that trend is to continue at the same rate. Therefore, if Bedford does not address the issue they miss a great opportunity to lessen the percent of the tax burden that residents pay. Development that exceeds the rate of residential will shift the burden in a more desirable direction. Mr. Marcoux asked that a look forward be included with a look backward. Mr. Prestipino agreed that he would look at that section with Matt.

Mr. Sawyer said that he has a list that states the highest valued properties in Bedford. It is often not residential properties that are the highest and best use of land. Target and Lowes are also not the highest and best use. Surprisingly, mixed- use is often the best use. Office space often increases the value of surrounding businesses. That is the main difference between the BEDC and the Master Plan Steering Committee. While BEDC is charged with determining best value, the Master Plan should address how they are to obtain the best community. Mr. Sawyer also said that diversification brings about long term stability in tough economic times. We need all of the above: retail, office space, industry, development, healthcare etc. Mr. Sawyer also suggested changing "executive summary" to "introduction" and the executive summary should be the very last thing. Mr. Dermody said that we should only advocate development along 101 if we get the state revenue for improving the road.

Mr. Marcoux also suggested that he run through the restrictions that are placed with regard to how many Commission members may meet at one time. Mr. Marcoux agreed and said he will also summarize what each individual's tasks are. Mr. Marcoux went through what each individual task was and who each person was working with. (Lists were e-mailed out to each member after the meeting)

4) Updates:

- Update of Joint Meeting with Master Plan Steering Committee (BD & MP)**
- Update of Airport Master Plan Review Committee (BD)**
- Update of SNHPC Regional Plan Review committee (BD)**
- Update on Ambassador Program with SCORE (HB)**

Mr. Prestipino began by summarizing the meeting that was held at the Master Plan Steering Committee which Mr. Dermody and Mr. Marcoux presented their questions to the committee. The outcome was to take two members of the Master Plan Steering Committee and two members of the BEDC and discuss what each entity was doing and how we should move forward in accomplishing both of their tasks. One of the chapters that came from the Master Plan draft had to do with economic development. The chapter seemed to mesh very well with what the BEDC was trying to do. Some things did appear to be inconsistent. Mr. Dermody and Mr. Prestipino met with Karen McGinley and Dave Danielson to discuss the chapter. Both

individuals were very receptive to feedback and the meeting accomplished a lot. Much of the work that we have been doing such as looking back at the 1990's, inventorying available parcels they have done as well. Redevelopment was a key component of the discussion as well. Overall, the meeting was very positive and both parties agreed that it was important to maintain good communication between the two groups. Mr. Prestipino said that we need to continually look at the charge of the BEDC with regard to its impact on the overall tax base. The Master Plan Steering Committee's charge is much broader. They are discussing issues such as mixed use, vs. best use, traffic congestion, workforce housing etc.

Mr. Dermody said that Ms. McGinley has a lot of concern about affordable housing and mixed use, and the BEDC really has not been paying as much attention to those areas. Mr. Dermody said that when he initially read the Economic Conditions chapter he read about workforce housing and mixed use development along South River Road and that was a major concern of his because he thought that that was not the best use of that area. However, after talking with Ms. McGinley, he now understands that their concern was more focused on the redevelopment of the Macy's area and he agrees that is a better location for workforce housing and mixed use development. Mr. Dermody was very pleased with the meeting as well.

Mr. Dermody said that he has nothing to report on either the Airport Master Plan Review Committee or the SNHPC Regional Plan Review Committee. There is a SNHPC meeting next week. Mr. Marcoux told the Commission about the GACIT Commission meeting which is next Monday, October 28th, at 7:00pm. The GACIT Commission is the Governor's Commission on Transportation. They review the ten-year highway plan and are touring the state prior to finalizing their ten-year plan. Ray Wieczorek who is our Executive Councilor will be hosting the meeting in the BEDC meeting room. Bedford's 101 project that was on the plan has been dropped. We should articulate to them how important this project is and the importance of the 101 project as a major east/west highway. Mr. Sawyer said that the 101 project was Bedford's solution to the congestion on Meetinghouse Road. It was ranked the number one project in the entire state that was left out of the ten-year plan. It was ranked by members of the SNHPC so our competitors also agree on the importance of this project.

Mr. Reilly asked why it was left out. Mr. Sawyer said that it was a funding issue. The widening of I-93 was the major project that consumed most of the available resources. There was little left over for new projects. Any available money is going to go toward sustaining what is already in place and improving red-listed bridges. Mr. Marcoux said in the end it is a political decision, when the decision was made it was because money got moved from the south to the north country at the last GACIT meeting in 2007.

Mr. Dermody agreed about the importance of the project. 101 is the most important east/west highway but money went to the east side and to the north country. Mr. Dermody said that all of the towns that 101 runs through should form an alliance to send a strong message to the state and articulate that it is a need and not a want. Mr. Marcoux said that Mr. Wieczorek has been a great advocate for the project and to understand that he is not to blame for being taken off of the ten year plan. Mr. Marcoux said that he will send a letter to fellow towns encouraging them to attend the meeting.

Mr. Bechard said that once the BEDC is closer to the final report he can get focus as to exactly what SCORE can assist us with. SCORE works with both new and existing businesses.

New Business:

- **Discussion of incorporating the Capital Regional Development Corporation (CDRC) into our recommended report to the Town Council and invite their Director to present what they offer to businesses relative to financing at our October meeting.**

Mr. Marcoux asked the Commission if the CRDC should come to the next BEDC meeting to discuss how they can work with businesses in Bedford with regard to lending money for economic development and improvements. The CDRC is not competitive to what the BEDC does, but is a funding mechanism for businesses looking for a means at obtaining capital. The Commission agreed to invite them to the October meeting.

Commission Member Comments

- Mr. Marcoux will send out a letter to communities about September 28th meeting. He will try to garner support for the 101 project.
- Mr. Marcoux asked the Commission to refrain from hitting the “reply all” button when responding to e-mails. There is a six person “window” that is discoverable in the Right to Know law (RSA 91A). Please be aware of that restriction.
- Mr. Marcoux also mentioned that if the press approaches any of the Commission members refer them to him, the BEDC Chairman.

Adjournment

- **MOTION** by Mr. Reilly to Adjourn.
- **SECONDED** by Mr. Sullivan.
- **MOTION CARRIED** Unanimously (9-0-0)

December 11th – Deadline for the final report to the Town Council

December 16th – Discussion of the report with the Town Council

Next Meeting: October 21st, 2009 8:00am

Respectfully submitted: Matt Henry