

Town of Newington, NH  
Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, October 29th, 2020 Old Town Hall

**Present:** Chair Jeff Hiatt, Vice-Chair Mike Donahue, Selectmen Chair Ted Connors, Jill Boynton, Bob Raymond, Brandon Arsenault, Alicia Busconi, Karen Anderson, Special Projects Consultant, Jerry Coogan, Economic Development Consultant, Police Captain Mike Sullivan and Town Administrator Martha Roy.

**Minutes Approval:** T. Connors moved to approve the minutes of August 27th, 2020. M. Donahue seconded the motion with all in favor.

**Retail Update-Alicia Busconi:**

The focus now is on theaters, there is only 20% attendance at this time. They can't operate at this capacity. The theaters won't be able to open until the entertainment industry opens which isn't expected until the spring of 2021.

It is unknown what will happen with retail stores for the holidays. Many stores have rolled back black Friday hours of operation. Grocery stores are doing well. Lenders rates are low. Courts are closed so legal assistance is not available. Retailers are waiting to see if there will be another stimulus bill after the election which could create a couple of months of stability. Sales at entertainment parks are only at 30%. M. Donahue asked if Regal Cinemas are a tenant? A. Busconi answered yes. A. Busconi explained that the theater had recently upgraded their seats and other renovations that put them in debt. Before Covid-19 theaters were competing with Netflix etc. 2021 is a pivotal year to see how this is going to play out. M. Donahue asked A. Busconi to help think of ideas for business appreciation in 2021.

**Crime Rate Breakdown-Mike Sullivan:**

85%-90% of all Newington's crime is in the business zone. Newington has only around 900 residents and national statistics are kept on a "per resident" basis. Newington's crime rate doesn't reflect the 50,000 to 60,000 people passing through Newington daily and often stopping at businesses in town. There were 179 crimes reported. 156 of these crimes were property theft and 12 were assaults. There were 22 crimes in the village district. 20 of these crimes were property and 2 against persons. There were 84 crimes in the PDA zone, none against persons. M. Donahue added that there is a demographic section in the business portal on the website where we might develop a response to the request the EDC received, that we put, what appears to be a high crime rate, in context so that businesses wouldn't be put off in considering Newington. M. Sullivan added that going forward the police department will help the committee in any way they can. They are currently gathering a lot of data that is helping them

analyze issues and develop goals. M. Donahue thought that this information could translate into capital items in the future. M. Sullivan explained that years ago the mall paid for one of the Newington officers and the PDA also contributed a small amount. Domestic crimes up ticked at the beginning of the pandemic. The midnight shift in Newington used to be a ghost town, but now there is a lot more activity, dumpster diving and people living in their cars.

### **Mixed Use Study:**

J. Hiatt had a conversation with Waterstone about what goes into a mixed-use development that makes it functional and successful. The answer was to find out what is needed in the town and tailor the development for the town and not to overwhelm the schools. They are currently working on a property in Westbrook, Maine. to developed it into an entertainment (concert) facility. There would be inside and outside concerts with a 5,000 people capacity with retail, office and residential components.

J. Hiatt explained that retailers were struggling before Covid. Retailers that survive are going to be experimental by offering experiences with the products, try before you buy kayaks, bikes, virtual reality gaming, sporting goods, etc. In 2020 80% of commercial properties were retail. J. Hiatt also talked to a group that wants to develop the area by JoAnne's Fabric and Savers.

M. Donahue asked what the mall is considering in the future. Many owners are waiting to see what happens with JC Penney, etc. The trend is moving to experiential-( not new products), rather retailers offering experiences with the products- think: try before you buy- kayaks, bikes, virtual reality gaming and sporting goods. Mall Management has not responded to several requests by the Board of Selectmen to get together and talk about the future of the mall. M. Donahue pointed out that the Mixed-Use study said that if you work with the town you get better results. J. Hiatt started a conversation, via email/phone with Spinoso Management. As the EDC we are trying to proactively interact with businesses/tenants and prospective business to draw them to Newington. This email led to a meeting with the Spinoso Management and their engineer, Gregg Mikolaities. M. Donahue added that the town has to make a thoughtful decision about the area.

J. Coogan thought that the group that wants to develop the Savers area should bring a conceptual plan to the Planning Board and present an educational forum for the residents. J. Boynton suggested an article in the Newington Neighbor explaining mixed-use would be helpful. A. Busconi said that Acton, MA just had a zoom call with 150 people on to take a survey of residents and commercial owners.

J. Coogan gave a development update to the committee.

**2021 Budget:**

M. Roy told the Board that the proposed budget for 2021 has been prepared for the committee's review. Discussion ensued about various lines. B. Arsenault asked about the allocation of part time wages and the role of consultant. They also discussed engaging consultants to enhance hits on the website portal. The total budget is proposed at \$19,643 a decrease of approximately \$900 from 2020's budget.

**Business Appreciation:**

K. Anderson led a discussion about Business Appreciation and plans for the future. She told the committee that Rockingham Electric recently reached 50 years in Newington. A certificate was prepared and signed by the Board of Selectmen and chairman of the EDC, which was then presented. K. Anderson is continuing the research of other anniversary dates of Newington businesses so recognition can be given.

**Adjournment:** J. Hiatt moved to adjourn at 7:26pm. T. Connors seconded the motion with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,  
Martha Roy  
Town Administrator