

Town of Newington, NH
Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes
Thursday, February 25, 2021 Remote Via Zoom

Attending Meeting by Zoom:

Chair Jeff Hiatt, Vice-Chair Mike Donahue, Selectman Chair Ted Connors, Jill Boynton, Bob Raymond, Selectman Ken Latchaw, Economic Development Coordinator Karen Anderson, Consultant Jerry Coogan and Town Administrator Martha Roy.

Absent: Brandon Arsenault, Alicia Busconi, John Lamson

Due to the COVID-19/Coronavirus crisis and in accordance with Governor Sununu's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, this Board is authorized to meet electronically.

J. Hiatt called the meeting to order at 6pm and read the required statement in accordance with the Right to Know law.

Minutes Approval: T. Connors moved to approve the minutes of January 28, 2021. M. Donahue seconded the motion with all in favor.

Business Appreciation Effort

K. Anderson noted that the February EDC Newsletter has gone out to the businesses and highlighted McGovern Auto, Aldi's and the Business of the Month was James Vera & Associates, recognizing their 30 years in Newington. The Board of Selectmen will be receiving a proclamation to recognize Custom Pools within the next week, and the article has been submitted for the Town Newsletter.

Open Discussion re: Informational Presentations

The first scheduled meeting was on February 10th with Christian Stalkingham on mixed use opportunities and the Newington Office Park. The presentation highlighted the fact that there is a continued need for industrial spaces and the cost to build in the Seacoast area is a problem. Existing industrial buildings often do not have the height required for the newer equipment. B. Raymond noted that Newington is in a good geographical location. The presentation also pointed out that the lack of the mixed use option has been a detriment in the sale of the Newington Office Park.

The presentation on February – by Greg Mikolaitis, August Consulting focused on how mixed use can be done. G. Mikolaitis explained that he had been active with re-use permitting for former retail space.

The next presentation will be on March 3rd at 10:00 by the Waterstone Group represented by Josh Levy or possibly Karen Pollard. They will be able to speak on the redevelopment of the South Gate Plaza and West End Yards in Portsmouth. With the South Gate Plaza project they will have some data regarding the impact on the schools from the redevelopment.

A link will be put on the website and the presentations will be posted.

Presentation on Proposed Zoning Changes

J. Hiatt told the committee that he attended the public hearing as an individual resident, not representing the Economic Development Committee, of the Planning Board to discuss the proposed zoning changes that will be voted on in March. The articles add wording to the existing regulations that already prohibit residential uses and make Newington look unfavorable to developers. Due to technical difficulties, a presentation that he had prepared for that meeting was unable to be used and he wanted to present the information to the Economic Development Committee at this meeting.

The presentation compared conditions in 1990 when retail spaces were full with today where there are delivery trucks on the roads every day and a lot of vacancies in the retail sector. He pointed out that Newington's planning regulations have not changed since that time and there are "red flags" to redevelopment that need to be removed. Newington has a strong boundary separating the residential village with the business/industrial/retail zones and residents have appreciated that. Environmental changes have affected the value of utilities and technology changes have affected the way people shop and the value of the retail properties. Changes in lifestyles have resulted in a demand for housing that is closer to shopping, restaurants and activities. These changes will result in increases to the tax rate.

J. Hiatt said that the language being added through the proposed zoning changes will show developers that we are hard to work with and discourage options from even being presented to the town for review.

J. Hiatt added that the town's Master Plan speaks about the rural character of the town and as the tax rate increases, people will be forced to subdivide their land, resulting in less farm land and open space. The town's residents were surveyed as part of the Master Plan update and the results were:

Greatest Asset: Strong tax base, low tax rate

Most Pressing Issues: Maintain rural area; Viability of retail sector; Environmental concerns.

Most Appealing Areas: Active farmlands; Low-density residential areas.

J. Boynton said that these changes are a town meeting vote and would there be any discussion. The zoning articles will be voted on at the election prior to Town Meeting. M. Donahue noted that the minutes and video of this meeting will be posted on the town website for review. K. Latchaw suggested a mailing to residents with the information, although he noted that he had recently done a mailing with similar information and received no response or questions from residents.

M. Donahue stated that the focus needs to be on how we solve the problem, not how we ignore it; he added that the Donor Town issue is even a larger issue for the town. He said his intent is not to second guess the Planning Board but rather find out how the EDC can work with them; to understand why they proposed those changes without discussing them with the EDC. The Board of Selectmen and the Economic Development Committee are spending time and effort in solving the issues and these changes undermine it.

Report on Conference Calls

NH Department of Business & Economic Affairs

B. Raymond was not able to attend this meeting.

Seacoast Economic Development Roundtable

K. Anderson reported that the last two sessions focused on the Governor's proposed budget and the reduction in funding for the Small Business Development Corporation. The proposal is to reduce their funding from \$440,000 each year to \$50,000 in 2022 and eliminating it in 2023. Many of the ED Director's emphasized the importance of that agency to their efforts helping small businesses. A letter is being put together from the Seacoast communities and K. Anderson asked if Newington wanted to sign on to the letter of support. The Office of Strategic Initiatives is proposed to be split into two existing agencies with no loss of funding.

J. Hiatt motioned that the Newington Economic Development Committee show their support and sign on to the letter requesting that SBDC be funded. B. Raymond seconded. By roll call, the vote was unanimous.

K. Anderson updated the committee on the Covid-19 efforts and immunization plans that the Department of Health reported on.

Meeting with Planning Board

J. Hiatt said that a joint meeting with the Planning Board had been set up for March although he has now been notified that the discussion has been moved to the April 12th meeting.

New Business

News Communications/Topics

M. Donahue said that he is writing an article on the off shore wind topic, although it will not be ready for the March newsletter. An article recognizing Custom Pools has been submitted for March.

M. Donahue suggested that J. Boynton work with K. Anderson on an article focusing on the home businesses in Newington, including her business and Knight Hill Surveying. He added that the beauty of these businesses is that you don't even know that they are there.

B. Raymond will work with K. Anderson on an article about the medical practices in Newington.

Adjournment

M. Donahue moved to adjourn at 7:15 PM. T. Connors seconded the motion with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Anderson
Economic Development Coordinator