

# THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

March 15, 2016

## MINUTES

**Present:** Hope Taylor, James Kelly, George Sterling, Peter Robinson, Ed Juengst and Gary Carpenter.

**Also Present:** Peter Throop, Director and Laura Norton, Administrative Assistant, Office of Community Development

Chair Sterling called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

### **Minutes:**

A motion was made/seconded (Kelly/Sterling) to approve the Minutes of January 19, 2016, February 23, 2016 and March 1, 2016 with all in favor.

### **Master Plan Steering Committee Request for Volunteers:**

Mr. Throop explained the formation of a subcommittee for the update of the Economic Vitality Chapter of the Master Plan. “We hope to have a kick-off meeting mid-April” he said adding “James (Kelly) has volunteered as a member of the EDA but we would like to have at least one more member be involved.” Ms. Taylor asked about the time commitment with Mr. Throop noting “we hope to have this done in an efficient manner.” Ms. Taylor asked “is it an ongoing subcommittee?” with Mr. Throop replying “no, it is just for this one chapter.” Mr. Throop then looked to Chair Sterling and said “they specifically asked if you might be involved” with Chair Sterling replying “I will be a default member but I would like you to query the other members.”

### **Update of Affordable Housing:**

Ms. Taylor began by reporting “you can say the bulk of the marketing workgroup goals have been completed. The website is up and working, it is being maintained by Greg Scerbinski.” Chair Sterling interjected “while the maintenance on the website is not the bulk of the long term work it *is* huge.”

Ms. Taylor reiterated her personal goal from retiring from the Committee and told the members Mr. Carpenter (currently an alternate) had expressed interest in becoming a full member. She went on to update the members on a new concept for affordable housing which was a plan to take existing empty buildings and absorb them into the housing stock. She cited houses on Concord Street, Evans Road, Grove Street Extension and Altemont Street as examples. She noted a proposed

zoning ordinance amendment change driven by SB 146 and asked Mr. Throop to elaborate. Mr. Throop told the members “this is an effort to bring our Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance up to date and in compliance with an amendment to State Statute which is awaiting the Governor’s signature” he said adding “it is intended to create a greater variety of housing stock as well as income potential for home owners.”

Mr. Throop walked through the changes of the current ordinance as specified by the amendment. He pointed out a change to the definition of ADUs as well as the basic requirements for an ADU (primary residence is owner-occupied, minimum/maximum size, attached or detached, adequate provisions for utilities, sufficient parking and meeting all building and fire safety codes). Mr. Throop went on to say that ADUs would be allowed in all districts that permit single-family dwellings. “It would be permitted as a matter of right” he said adding “the Planning Board is proposing the amendment for the May ballot.”

Ms. Taylor interjected “this is a good first step to get more affordable housing that is not all in one place.” She went on to note these units would attract younger entry-level workforce people, older people and “as Gary (Carpenter) has mentioned the veteran community.” She concluded by noting other populations that could take advantage of this type of housing may include those attending satellite education programs and apprentice programs. “The main idea is a mix of housing types that are spread out over the community” she said.

Chair Sterling advised Ms. Taylor to look into Contoocook Housing Trust (a non-profit organization that provides affordable rental and home ownership opportunities for low and moderate income families in the Monadnock Region) “bank-owned properties donated for tax credit. That is their model” he said.

### **Implementing the Strategic Plan:**

Chair Sterling began by noting the Committee had initiated a lot of projects with few of them coming to fruition. “We have lost some members and attendance by the general public has dwindled as we find ourselves at another crossroads” he said. He then distributed a worksheet and asked the members to split into smaller groups and address the text on the handout. These word included *observation, fact finding, problems, investigation, solution* and *action*.

“Let’s have small group discussion to consider our next steps in accomplishing our goals. Who to recruit and what skills would complement the Committee” he said.

After about 20 minutes of discussion Chair Sterling brought the meeting back to order and asked for each group to report out. The first group noted the denial of HB 1180 that would allow municipal bonding to build broad band infrastructure. “We need to put some wind in our sails” said Chair Sterling. With a smile Mr. Kelly interjected “well we have a hurricane coming.” Martha Schaefer noted a disservice to the kids in a school system that does not have broadband as well as recruiting representatives from New Hampshire Ball Bearing and Monadnock Community Hospital to be members of the committee. She also noted the importance of breaking things down “so people don’t see a mountain, they see pieces of what we are trying to do.” The group also suggested newspaper articles and blog updates to get momentum going again.

Peter Robinson reported out for the second group and began with “what we are doing is not working, we are a town of 6000 people and we have no power.” He went on to say his group came up with a recommendation and that was to go get a bond to fund the broadband. “If it is illegal let them sue us. Let’s become the disrupter” he said. He added “this is a David and Goliath story and we should get a lot of media coverage out of it. If you have no high speed internet you are out of business, forget that this is a beautiful area and a wonderful place to raise your family, it is no good if you do not have internet.” He noted his group advocated taking the bull by the horns. He suggested that another avenue was to sue the state for infringement of trade and of impairing business. He offered two outcomes the first of which was “nothing happens and we stay the way we are” the second was “we get hushed by Comcast while we get accommodated and get what we want.”

“I absolutely love it” replied Ms. Taylor adding “that is thinking out of the box and I love it.” Mr. Robinson noted “we can’t just ditz around, we will have not chance.” Mr. Kelly interjected “Ed (Juengst) is willing to research and pursue this for legal action.” “I will see what the risks are” said Mr. Juengst with Mr. Robinson replying “there is risk if we don’t do it, in 6 years it will not matter. It will be all over.” Mr. Juengst told the members he would speak with Nancy Valhinger (Finance Director) and Town Administrator Rodney Bartlett about it adding “I am not sure if you can do such a thing without state approval.” Ms. Taylor replied “I hope we do it without state approval. That is what I liked about it.” From the audience Pelagia Vincent noted the restriction of trade associated with low speed internet as well as a restriction of education to the students in the school system. “That is a real story” she said.

Mr. Kelly continued by noting the other main idea they discussed was the notion of the types of skill sets they would like to attract adding specifically “high tech and legal people.” He also noted the need to have innovative new enterprises

(environmental, social, economic) be created in town “and not wait for them to fall out of the sky for us.” He noted the establishment of a new enterprise committee and suggested the Chamber’s Sean Ryan and People’s VC Akhil Garland participate. “This will be aimed at entrepreneurial value” he said.

Ms. Taylor reported out for the last group who noted they had reviewed the list with the goals of the EDA’s strategic plan in mind. She noted the status of the EDA workgroups and the focus on the subcommittees. She cited the website as an ongoing mechanism for branding and emphasized the need to identify and reach out to the global players market, education (including vocational programs), healthcare, and agricultural sectors to maintain momentum as well as investigate all the (numerous) overlapping committees and organizations “seeking collaboration and to see what they are doing and what they are *not* doing.”

Mr. Throop noted the exercise was important “to go through the process for each goal in the plan” adding “George’s group focused on broadband which makes sense because we cannot do it all at once. We need to pick two or three things to tackle.” “I agree” interjected Mr. Juengst. Ms. Taylor also noted the importance of recruiting new EDA members. Mr. Robinson replied “finding new members that last six months is not going to work for us.” Ms. Taylor noted part of the reason she was retiring was that she did not feel she had her finger on the pulse of the businesses anymore. Mr. Juengst interjected that while he had not been on long he has noticed a steady decline in audience attendance as well. Chair Sterling replied “the jazz is broadband.”

Mr. Throop noted “that broadband brought in lot of people, but they have to understand that the broadband solution is a three year process no matter how you slice it. People want to see results so of course there will be attrition.” He briefly reviewed the steps the town has taken. This included hearing for multiple providers and enacting legislation to allow the town to bond for the utility (HB 1180 which failed). “So now what is our next step” he asked adding “so we go out and stir the pot like Pete’s group suggested? Are there other initiatives?” He told the members “Comcast has said it would build out the network if we participated financially) but they will not build it out on their own nickel.” A brief discussion about cost sharing followed with the consensus being this provider will not react unless they have been contracted out to have them do what they should have done in the first place. “But that is one solution” said Mr. Throop.

The members moved on to discuss public attrition knowing people may not have the patience. “It is a long process and so far we do not have a lot to show for it”

said one member, while another member added “people do not want to come in to see the sludge.”

They also discussed recruitment for their membership. Ms. Vincent noted seeing positive press in the newspaper on what the EDA is doing. “You look alive and well” she said. The discussion moved to the importance of making sure agendas were publically posted in as many places as possible as well using the town’s email system to notify people of the EDA agenda items. Mr. Robinson reiterated the focus to attract and maintain a younger population in town and said “you don’t skate to where the puck is, you skate to where it is going to be.” He asked the members to think about the infrastructure needed to support new ventures coming to town and creating fertile ground. Mentioning Akhil Garland he said “it would be good to have him involved, he is always thinking about it.”

Another brief discussion about outreach (greater promotion, using the town email list, getting press in the local newspaper) followed with Mr. Throop reminding the members they could network and promote the EDA through members of other organizations and groups.

In conclusion Mr. Throop reviewed the status of the membership noting Gary Carpenter and Michael Henry were the current alternates. When Ms. Taylor asked for clarification on the alternate’s role Mr. Throop explained their responsibilities and the importance of them attending meetings on a regular basis.

#### **Update on EDA Specialist Position:**

Noting the warrant article for the EDA Specialist position he told the members “we must be in a position to answer questions, we must be prepared.” Mr. Throop briefly reviewed the request was for a contract position for \$48,000. “The hours are not spelled out” he said adding “it is more like here is the job you need to do with a timeline.” Chair Sterling suggested they develop a white paper on the position. Mr. Juengst reiterated the proximity of town meeting saying “we need to be really ready by early May.” A brief discussion of when the warrant article would be discussed followed with members lending suggestions on how to support the warrant item (letter writing campaign, newspaper articles, letters to the editor). Chair Sterling noted “we have goals and expectations and we have a good base to work from to transition to a contract position that would be funded for one year.” Mr. Juengst replied “I want to be able to support this and I am willing to speak for it but we need ways to get the message out. That is critical if you want to be successful.” Chair Sterling noted “the subcommittee meets next week, we’ll get started on it.” One member interjected “wait for Jeanne (Dietsch) she is a real champion.”

**Other Business:***Invitation to Meet with Hannah Grimes Board*

“There is a Hannah Grimes Board meeting this Friday at 8:30 a.m. and we have been invited to come and share what we have been up to. I am going and would welcome having someone from the EDA to join me” said Mr. Throop. He went on to note “they have programming in place to support entrepreneurs and they provide space to new ventures. Hopefully there will be a little give and take to see how we can support each other.”

**Future Meeting Topics and/or Speakers:**

The members unanimously agreed they would (for the time being) prefer to have working meeting sessions like they did this morning than have guest speakers at the meetings. Mr. Robinson noted “we work together and it get us to where we need to go.” A brief discussion about outreach and interaction with the community businesses and getting business owners involved in their working meetings followed.

*Meeting Date*

Noting the current meeting schedule Mr. Throop asked the members if they would agree to meet the **fourth Tuesday of the month**. This would allow him more time to prepare given other meeting responsibilities during the month. Personally feel I am running uphill just to get the agendas out to the Committee members” he said. The members unanimously agreed to move their meeting date beginning in April.

*Nominations*

A motion was made/seconded (Taylor/Robinson) to nominate Gary Carpenter and Martha Schaefer to be full EDA Board members and that nomination be sent to the Board of Selectmen for approval with all in favor.

*New Members*

Mr. Throop reminded the members about Joe Ierna, a gentleman recently retired to Peterborough and who was interested in participating in the committee. “He has a lot of experience in economic development” he said adding “and may be interested in sitting as an alternate.”

Ms. Vincent pointed out a need for younger members and to keep that in mind when considering new people for the committee. Mr. Robinson reported he has no interest from the young people he has approached. Ms. Taylor interjected “they are probably up to their eyeballs in their businesses.” Chair Sterling noted he has

reached out by phone and has not heard back. “Did you call them again?” asked Ms. Taylor with Chair Sterling replying with a smile “No, I am up to my eyeballs.”

In closing Ms. Vincent suggested the Sharon Arts Center Campus Director Camellia Sousa as well as Ellen Smith be considered as potential new members.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 a.m.

**Next Meeting:**

April 26, 2016

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Norton  
Administrative Assistant