

Economic Development Committee

Date: July 25, 2008

Present: Susan Fuller, Christopher Mueller, Doug Clark, Mr. Van Asselt,  
Peter Ventura

I. Call to Order 7:35 am

II. Public Comments

Beth Olshansky

Thanked Economic Development Council for their work. Stated that the sale of the Town Hall has caused a stir in town and felt the Committee possibly didn't understand the historical significance to this area. She noted that one of the goals of the Economic Development Committee was to preserve the Town's character. She felt the sale of the Town Hall was counter to Committee's Mission and would like to see Economic Development Committee revitalize the downtown. Putting a drug store here (in place of the Town Hall) could close the drug store downtown. She asked if the Sale had been analyzed for the actual tax benefit per average household in Durham. Retrofitting the Durham Evangelical Church seems like a lot of money- if it only impacts by household by \$1000 each year, she would rather have the historic character instead of the tax break.

Julian Smith

As a time resident, He was here when Town Hall was in the Court House. House was a mercantile building. Town Hall had always been near the dam on the Oyster River because the mills were the center of economic activity. The center has now shifted toward Main Street and Mill Road area. We have never had a meeting house built to be a meeting house. Our current building is a symbol of Yankee frugality. The new place should be a built-to-order Town Hall and shouldn't be the Durham Evangelical Church. He suggests that the Town consider acquiring a piece of property near the plaza perhaps the undeveloped parcel of Lou Caregis' 1.7 acres (the old Hamilton Smith garden). He felt it was time to think about where we want students to live and suggest an overlay district for students- where the Town can develop parcels more densely for student housing and not so much in other areas. UNH needs do more to be a better neighbor and needs to teach students to be better neighbors.

Robyn Mower

Read a note from Diane Freedman stating that neither she nor her husband supports the Town Hall sale. It read that she (MS. Freeman) loves the building and felt the building could have been renovated if part of the property had not gone to the Irving. The letter recommended that the Town not put the Town Hall in the downtown area- and take away taxable property. She doesn't support the purchase of the Church. It is too much to take on. It is also too far to get to. Since the Wagon track bicycle trail was derailed there is no way to get there. Town Hall would have to sell the current building first and then refurbish the Church which would be a huge effort involved and large costs to absorb.

Mark Morong

Thanks Economic Development Committee for the work on this. Neil had some rough ideas of how this property would reduce the taxes and the rebate it would produce. He is not saying yes or no to the offer but would like to see the Economic Development Committee continue along this line. The Town has a lot more control over this piece of property than it did over the old Smitty's. This building is ours and might not sell for as much but the Town could put covenants on the look and use of the building. This building is woefully inadequate for the current use. Other towns have better space and he encouraged the Town Council and Economic Development Committee to go and look. He felt the Town needs to consider this aspect as well.

Annmari Harris

She stated that she hoped that the Economic Development Committee will not say what the Town Councilor said that 'Public input is a waste of time'. We are all here for a reason as community member. This committee seems to have an agenda and isn't listening to the larger group. We have a Master Plan that states the Town Hall should be located central business area. Moving it away will have a further detriment to the town. The Town has to require UNH to take more responsibility on housing more of the students. This is not the responsibility of the town to give up the character of the town for the students. Madbury Road has been rezoned for commercial. The University has housing

listed for near the tennis courts. It is possible to get public input from the general community on whether it is worth it to the community to lower the taxes. She asked how much are the townspeople willing to give for how much tax relief? How much has The Irving lowered the people's taxes? It was a split vote that gave up that property. This building could have been a very functional town center. The Town is now at another crossroads and it is time that the Town Council gives the public an opportunity to give input and to stop doing spot zoning.

Nancy Sandberg

She wanted to go on record liking location the Town Hall right here. It is convenient. The building could be renovated or torn down and rebuilt. She still wants to continue to be frugal and live with it until we can't do it anymore and then rebuild. As Co-Chair of Master plan subcommittee on this corridor, she and others took input from hundreds of people on this Town, with the focus on the center town and commercial center of the town. It is hard and frustrating to all those people who gave their input to have the input just 'wiped' out. People are already making their views know. As a member of the historic commission, there is a deep sense of the 400 year history of this town that stands with the houses from here to Church Hill. This building can still be a very beautiful place and she wants to keep it here.

Dennis Meadows

He stated that he is in favor of economic development and delighted that the committee is promoting it in the town. What the committee should do now should be for what is coming in the next 30 year as and not the last 30 years. Energy will be the focus for next 30 years. Oil prices will come down little, and ten years from now the people will be paying 8-10 dollars a gallon. The economically viable town will be one where no one will drive very much. Moving the Town Hall will actually damage the town.

### III. Town Hall Site

Mr. Mueller noted that Mr. Schoonmaker had left an email about the Town Hall stating he wasn't in favor of selling the Town Hall. He also received a letter from Mr. Nick Issac who felt that the new structure should not be franchise architecture.

Mr. Mueller started off by stating that Mr. Selig asked the Committee to talk about the draft option agreement that calls for two million dollar option on the Town Hall property. Discussion should revolve around what should be done with the property post town office. Community thoughts are really important and no one is voting on this matter today. Purpose is to start to understand all the implications on all the options with the sale of the Town Hall and its impact on economic development.

Mr. Clark felt the Committee needs to address for the public each of the following questions: Do we need a town Hall? Can the Town renovate this area? What is the historical character and its significance? Is the Town really interested in expanding outside our central business district and do we want the Town Hall here? Mr. Clark stated that the Committee and Town Council have to get better at communicating with far more transparency to get all this out to the public.

Ms. Fuller noted that she had heard it would not be very cost effect to rehab building and she further noted that the Town would need to get an appraisal and an architect and it will cost money but it is needed.

Mr. Van Asselt stated when you get an offer that is double what a property is worth then you need to least listen. The Town needs to figure out what the offer mean to the Town. What is the land worth? Let's have an appraisal done. It will cost 3-5K to have the corner appraised but Mr. Morong is right, in that Mr. Selig has facts that the building isn't adequate. There are also numerous other areas for a Town Hall. The Town needs to have a discussion about the offer on the table. It doesn't mean anything at this point. He furthered stated that we need get the answers to Mr. Clarks questions and then make those recommendations to the Town Council.

Mr. Mueller noted that Mr. Campbell and Mr. Selig said that they are having an appraisal done. They had felt the property would be at \$600,000-800,000 so a two million dollar offer is a discussion that needs to be listened to. As background for the public, the Durham Evangelical Church, the Town Hall

and the two million dollar option are 3 different options coming together at the same time. The timing made the three options come together as one item because these things started to happen at the same time not by any plan.

Mr. Clark suggested that the Committee ask Mr. Selig to do an assessment of what is working and not working in the building; get the appraisal done which will be informative in terms of cost of rehab. The committee also needs to gain an understanding of what are all the rules with this being an historic space and what kinds of covenants can be used in designing a space?

Mr. Van Asselt asked if the Committee wanted to sell the Town Hall because of the price that is offered and he noted that numbers are not only the reason. Mr. Mueller stated that no one has jumped to that conclusion or said that. Mr. Van Asselt stated that Committee should not feel pressured to make a recommendation because someone has made the offer.

It was decided that Mr. Mueller and Mr. Clark will frame the questions for Mr. Selig.

#### IV: Action Plan

Mr. Mueller began by reviewing mission of the Economic Development Committee's action plan for the public.

Mission: The committee will work to make recommendations to the Town Council to foster the stabilization of the residential tax burden through thoughtful economic development that encourages diverse business, commercial, office, and research activities, maintain and create jobs, create a good mix of users and maintain the rural character of Durham.

During the discussion that followed, MS. Fuller suggested changing the wording of the mission to make recommendations to Town Council and Planning Board. Mr. Van Asselt and Mr. Clark agreed.

Mr. Mueller went on to ask if seven months into this are we still happy with this as a mission. What are we doing beyond what we do at 7:30 in the morning? We've talked about 3 zoning changes which went to the council. Are we supposed to do more than that?

Mr. Clark stated the Committee has even more of an opportunity to open these conversations for the public. He felt it would be more useful to have the public comments before we moved these recommendations or not and cited Pendexter corner as an example. He stated that no one wants spot zoning, but we do. We want to cluster the business. This committee has the opportunity to have far more sophisticated conversations than any other committee or council.

Mr. Van Asselt stated that he felt what we are doing with the Town Hall is the best process we can do by asking the public first this time.

Mr. Mueller noted the same process was used for Beech Hill. Mr. Clark noted that it changed our minds and then stated the committee needs to look deeper and harder for the things that create the balance.

Mr. Van Asselt defined balance by discussions with the public.

Mr. Clark agreed and added that it is only going to work by reaching out; by working to constructing language that will allow things to happen; and by creating plans that will work.

Mr. Van Asselt added that the committee also needs to work harder in the committee negotiating and compromising before it goes to Town Council.

Mr. Clark stated the committee should create a structure with specific agenda- if we don't start integrate into the Master Plan then nothing will happen and he stated the Town can't just start building things. Economic Development Committee might be the best committee we have to deal with every aspect if we are talking about the profound change. He went to state that the Committee can't do one offs. Need to decide collectively as a town where do we want business or student housing.

Ms. Mower appreciated the interests in the public input and input from the Committees, reiterated the bad time for the meetings for the public and requested that the Committee reconsider changing the time. Mr. Clark stated he wasn't sure the Economic Development Committee should be the hub of this wondered if that wouldn't be another committee of the chairs.

Ms. Harris noted that the committee of chairs is the Master Plan and suggested beginning to implement that the Master Plan.

Ms. Hirsch-Mayer suggested that the Committee could continue at this time and then using the format used for the Mill Pond Plaza Study by having periodic Public Forums. It was decided that the Mission was still missing the catalyst portion and stated he would work on it for the next meeting.

#### Action Plan - High Priority Objectives

Mr. Mueller started by stating that this list was 2 months old and so things might have changed. The Committee reviewed the high priorities with the following comments and decisions.

1 Respond immediately and provide proactive support to assess, investigate and advocate for all appropriate economic development opportunities. No changes.

2 Develop an Economic Development Vision document. This document would identify measurable targets for additional town revenue and outline strategies to meet those targets. It was noted that adding the resulting tax impacts to those goals would be helpful.

During the discussion that followed Mr. Clark suggested the document use the word strategies instead of visions as the Economic Development Committee should have a strategic plan while a vision would come from a group that is more inclusive.

Mr. Van Asselt emphasized the need to translate the goals into real world action. People are interested in having a down town and stores being full. The Economic Development Committee needs to decide what to do to about that. We have to identify a tax incentive or other mechanism that will get the business owners there.

It was decided to Mr. Mueller would reword that objective.

3. Assess the true financial impact of UNH on the Town of Durham

After some discussion it was decided that this was too broad and that the Committee might spearhead it but wouldn't do it by itself. Mr. Mueller volunteered to rework this objective.

4. Identify and assess the potential for economic development partnership between UNH and the Town of Durham. Mr. Mueller stated that this is big and important. The Town needs to understand UNH is doing to bring it academic works to the marketplace. Mr. Clark noted that there were two opportunities: the opportunity of impact and the opportunity of UNH on the economy objective need to look at both of those opportunities.

5. Actively recruit and place tenants for the Durham Business Park

Mr. Mueller stated that this gets to what do we do outside of our meetings.

Do we look for the business? He volunteered to contact the State Office for Economic development and SEDC to help facilitate placement of business in Durham. Why not make a list of preferred businesses for Durham. Mr. Clark felt the goal was too specific and should be changed to the marketing of Durham. The rest of the committee agreed.

6. Review the student housing market as an economic development opportunity for the Town of Durham.

Mr. Clark felt that this objective doesn't mean much unless the Town had a document that stated student housing was the number one industry and provided a matrix for evaluating each proposal. Mr. Van Asselt agreed and stated that we should discuss what really should happen. Mr. Clark I think it this committee needs to do it using the same process as Mill Plaza study committee. Mr. Van Asselt recommended using the Mill Plaza Study format for the big issues: student housing is one of them UNH opportunities is one of them. Central Business District is one of them.

Mr. Mueller asked if any discussion had happened with the rental housing commission.

MS. Fuller stated students will always be here and private land ownerships will always be here so the question of wanting them here seems done

Mr. Clark disagreed and stated how the Committee deals now with student housing invites ourselves to inconsistent student housing management.

It was decided to boil that objective down.

7. Investigate town owned property for development or sale.

Mr. Mueller started the discussion by stating that this is a holdover from the last action plan could easily say that this is something we should be focusing on. MS. Fuller noted that it is kind of in the works since Mr. Campbell has provided a map. Mr. Clark noted that we need to do the planning. Again make sure that it is thought through before forwarding. The Town does need to look and assess each one for optimal use.

8. Work with outside organizations such as Municipal Resources Inc, Southeast Economic Development Corporation, DRED and real estate developers to improve the economic development climate in the

Town of Durham.

Mr. Mueller began by noting we didn't need to list all the organizations. Mr. Clark stated the Committee needs to be active in bringing the groups in. Ms. Fuller suggested including the public in this objective. Mr. Clark said we should be the hub for public input. Mr. Van Asselt suggested a changing the objective to: the Committee should on behalf of the Town, develop a better relationship with the Durham Business Association and other organizations and then combine all the medium and low priorities into this one objective.

Ms. Fuller noted there is a benefit to listing the other objectives as they move up. Mr. Mueller agreed.

Mr. Clark stated the need to add an objective to address infrastructure. It needs to be front and center in all the discussions. Streetlights and side walks can encourage economic development. Mr. Van Asselt also said the Town needs to do something about the water and sewer issues. . Mr. Clark suggested a statement like identify investments in infrastructure that could enhance development.

It was decided that Mr. Mueller agreed refocus on high priorities and Mr. Clark will work the infrastructure objective

Ms. Harris again asked that the issue of public input be reviewed.

Mr. Mueller noted the issue was included was in objective 8. He further stated that it would be added to the agenda but the time of the meeting will not change.

MS. Fuller suggested we could have a public forum and have it taped.

#### IV. Minutes

Unable to approve minutes as there was no forum.

Ms. Mower asked if it was possible to make them available with Draft on top.

#### V. Next Agenda

The next meeting is 8/8/08.