

Economic Development Committee

Meeting Minutes

August 8, 2008

Present: Chris Mueller, Karl Van Asselt, Jason Lenk, Peter Ventura, and Susan Fuller

Staff: Mr. Jim Campbell, Director of Planning and Community Development

Mr. Todd Selig Town Administrator

I Call to order 7:30 am

II Public Comments

Beth Olshansky expressed concerns about the loss of character if a commercial site is built in the historic areas.

Julian Smith stated support for the concept of selling the Town Hall and felt that the new Town Hall should include the Library.

Henry Smith stated that the Town Hall shouldn't become a pharmacy and proposed combining the Town Hall and the Library on the current property.

Robyn Mower wondered if the Economic Development Committee will work with the UNH Litter Patrol to help clean up the town. If the small problems (like cracks in the sidewalk) are cleaned up then it might help. She further stated that she is not opposed to selling the Town Hall but prefers that what goes in fit the Historic gateway.

III Approval of the Minutes

May 9th Minutes

Motion made by Susan Fuller, seconded by Karl Van Asselt

June 13th Minutes

Motion to approve with no changes by Peter Ventura and seconded by Jason Lenk

July 11th Minutes

Motion to approve by Mr. Van Asselt, seconded by Mr. Ventura

July 25th Minutes requires a change from forum to quorum on last page

Motion to approve pending change made by Ms. Fuller second by Mr. Ventura

Mr. Mueller noted that the minutes are posted only when approved. This is the process for all committees. After discussion it was decided that this committee needed to be consistent with the other committees. Paper copies are available in the Town Hall.

IV. Moved Item V to VI Meeting Schedule

Mr. Mueller asked to review the schedule to see if it still works. Meeting twice a month will help get to all the agenda items. After discussion it was decided again to continue to hold the meeting on Fridays at the current time of 7:30 am and agreed to address the public tapings of meetings.

V. Town Hall Site

Mr. Todd Selig was asked to overview the problems with the Town Hall and the Space Needs Analysis. The current building is actually two rental properties merged into one. There are several challenges.

Stairs to the second floor are out of code. The railing on the second floor does not meet code and both represent a danger to the public.

Doorways and offices are not ADA compliant except in the public chambers and there is no access to the second floor except the stairs.

Not energy efficient hot in the summer and cold in the fall. The air-conditioning replaced in the public chambers five years ago is inconsistent and very loud.

There have been issues with mold in the walls which while addressed has continued to occur in other areas. Basement provides wet environment making it useless for storage.

There is no sprinkler system in the building.

Storage is primarily on the third floor is not climate controlled and subsequently materials are deteriorating. Alternative sources of the storages off site are being explored.

The electricity is not adequate for the office needs and requires people unplugging the ac in order to use the microwave. The computer room is shares the same space as the microwave which is not ideal.

The meeting space is in demand requiring the administrator to offer his private office as a meeting space which is not ideal. People are sent to the Police department and the University.

There is no more space to add staff. Interns and staff switch off on computers. The auditors have to use the public chambers due to lack of space. The copy room is also doubles as an intern space and will now be spilt as space for the DBA.

Improvements totally \$135,000 have been planned for 2009 involve adding space onto the of town clerks' office area, fix the safety issues of the stairs and the banisters, and reorient the entrance to the planning office however if they are moving they would hold off.

Ms. Fuller noted if this were a private business they would be shut down with or without the improvements.

Mr. Campbell added that the heating system comes from one side to the other and the hot water comes from the opposite side. Neither provides consistent heat or hot water. The windows leak. People are tripping the circuit breakers in the computer /break room. The stairs represent a big liability as it seems people stumble on the stairs on a weekly basis.

Mr. Muller expressed concerns over the OSH AN issues.

Mr. Selig noted that it was problematic but the area had been tested, problems were identified and had been addressed.

Mr. Van Asselt noted that no one can counter that the Town Hall needs to be replaced. He further noted that it seemed that this footprint is no longer functional to run the Town government and asked what the options are.

Mr. Selig stated they continue to make use but doesn't recommend spending money on the building.

The concept of the selling the property with covenants that would require the new building to have architectural elements that don't detract from the historic views cape was discussed.

Mr. Selig pointed out that town wide there are inadequate facilities. The Emergency Operations center is in a fitness room at the fire department requiring the emergency officials to move the weight equipment out of the way first. There is only 1 phone and the different individual's cell phones. Police have no storage and have just built a new shed to help. Library also has no storage.

The parking in the back of the building is used for the court house when in sessions. If the Town chose to relocate then the Town must accommodate parking for the court.

Mr. Selig stated Scott Mitchell is the owner interested in acquiring the Town Hall property. Mr. Selig feels that the drugstore would be worthwhile. He would like to fill it in to match the grade and access would only be from the Irving plaza and from the current access to the Town Office. There would be no access from School house lane. Mr. Mitchell is willing to cooperate with the Town and change the architecture to make it look nice. He would need help with a variance. He is offering two million to do what he wants to do with the property. He is open to modifying the plan but Mr. Selig feels the price might change as the uses change.

The preference would be to be in town, but the cost to be in town is high.

Mr. Selig noted he asked the Economic Development Committee and the Council to evaluate the Church and is awaiting a report from them. The church has been gracious, wonderful community partner. Mr. Selig could see a Town Office combined with a library as a space that would allow the staff to share meeting space and a more efficient physical plant. When Mr. Selig asked noted the report would be ready mid September. Mr. Selig noted that he had three architectural firms provide concepts: McManus and Whit, Stanhope group Peter Knight in charge) and McManus and Nault.

In summary Mr. Selig asked the Economic Development Committee to weigh in on the appraisal and to recommend if the Town should put out a RFP to see what other developers would offer.

The committee noted that Mr. Selig would need to do this from a due diligence standpoint.

Ms. Fuller noted that the commercial market is really good right now so to walk away from this kind of offer would be foolish.

The committee noted that the Town had to look at other options.

Ms. Fuller pointed out that in surrounding areas all the commercial property is on one road. Ideally on the outskirts and the downtown is saved for the independent stores as seen in Newmarket, and Portsmouth.

Mr. Selig outlined some alternatives:

The Durham Evangelical Church could possibly be used for the court and Town hall. The land is being appraised with the Church splitting the cost with the Town. Sumner Davis is doing a space analysis of the Church.

There is the Varsity Building which is being appraised again with the owner splitting the costs. There is the property behind the Band and ATO but that there is a 30 foot easement there that the Town is looking to extinguish.

Pettee Brook parking lot would be an option too.

VI. Council Update

Seven amendments were on the agenda and two amendments did not pass first read:

Expanding the central business district to the Church Hill did not pass first read.

Expanding the MUDOR into Resident B in Pendexter Road area did not pass.

There is a public hearing on 9/8 on the extension of the ORLY off Mill Road to include Spruce Wood.

August 18th There is a public hearing on changes to the habitable floor areas to include baths and closets on; to lower the area per dwelling the Central Business District from 1200 to 900 sq. feet. to lower the density from 420 to 300 square feet.

There is a meeting on 9/22 for the conditional use amendment for a property on Mast Rd for stable use on a parcel long used for horses and stables.

VII. Other Business

PUD/TDR update

Mr. Campbell updated the committee on the action regarding the PUD. The ordinance was passed onto developers to see it would be a valuable tool for them to use. He also recommends taking it to be Planning board.

The TDR The Economic Development Committee has a map of the areas as does the Conservation Committee and two areas of conflict has arisen the Beech Hill and Mill Rd by the

Oyster River. The two groups still haven't met to review the differences and to draft language for the ordinance.

Robyn Mower recommended that the groups meet prior to the 9/18 hearing on rezoning the RB to ORLY because it is an area that would be impacted.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 am.