

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2019

The meeting of the Economic Development Committee (EDC) was called to order by Steven Whitley on Thursday, October 17, 2019, at 6:04 p.m. in the Philip S. Dunlap Room at the Town Hall.

Members Present: Tom Congoran, Andrea Folsom, Erik Newman, Anna Wells, Steven Whitley

Members Absent: Byron Carr, Jim Fredyma, Steve Lux, Jr.

Others Present: Bridget Beckwith (Tax Incentive Program Manager, Division of Economic Development, State of NH), Julie Voisin, Mark Stock

Approval of Minutes

The Board reviewed the minutes of the September 19, 2019 meeting. Ms. Folsom made a motion, seconded by Mr. Newman, to approve the Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes of September 19, 2019. Mr. Whitley called for the vote.

VOTE: Folsom, Newman, and Wells, voting in favor of the motion; no votes against; Congoran and Whitley abstained.

MOTION APPROVED 3-0.

ERZ Districts

Mr. Whitley introduced Bridget Beckwith from the State of NH Division of Economic Development and the basics behind the Economic Revitalization Zone (ERZ) tax credit. Ms. Beckwith stated that she toured the suggested properties with Mike Tardiff from the Central NH Regional Planning Commission. She reports that the suggested zone boundaries look to be acceptable from her standpoint. Ms. Beckwith also briefly described the program, stating that there are ERZs all over state in commercial and industrial zones. Purpose is to revitalize the area, and while it started mostly in town centers, the program spread to rural areas to encourage businesses to come and stay in those towns. Through the program, businesses can claim tax credits on their business profits tax or business enterprise tax if they either 1) invest in capital projects (i.e. wiring, equipment, new construction, etc) and/or 2) create new jobs and hire new employees. Ms. Beckwith stated that there is \$825k per year that can be awarded in tax credits, and any business that applies and meets the criteria will get some level of tax deduction. The total amount is prorated among the applicants. The tax credit can be applied over up to 6 years; it does not have to be taken all in one year.

Ms. Voisin asked a clarifying question: as a real estate owner, she could not take the deduction on her taxes, but her business tenants can take advantage of the program if they invest in their capital infrastructure and/or make new hires. Mr. Stock asked a clarifying question: the capital improvements do not have to be directly correlated to the new jobs created.

Mr. Whitley explained that the Select Board will adopt the ERZs at their next meeting and then they will go to the State for approval. The deadline for businesses to apply for the tax credits is February 10 of each year, and any improvements made, or jobs created in the previous calendar year count toward the credit.

The Committee looked at the proposed ERZ maps and clarified proposed boundaries. Mr. Whitley asked what the process is for adjusting the boundaries after the ERZ has been established. Ms. Beckwith replied that the town just needs to contact her with that request; a new application is not needed.

Mr. Congoran asked why Burnham Intervale is not included in the Contoocook Village area ERZ. Mr. Whitley replied there were a several considerations as to the way the zone is being proposed. Ms. Wells expressed that perhaps one consideration ought to be that with increased business development may come increased trucking through Contoocook Village, which may be problematic. Mr. Whitley responded that perhaps one consideration is that we don't want to make the zone too big initially, so we may want to consider Burnham Intervale at another time. Mr. Newman responded that one consideration may be that the residential neighbors on Burnham Intervale were not in favor of increasing business development in that area. Mr. Congoran wished to express that he would like to include Burnham Intervale given that there are business there and they might benefit from the program. Ms. Folsom raised the idea of expanding the zone within the village area to go across Kearsarge Ave. and Park Ave to include the Colonial Plaza. Mr. Newman stated that if the zone expands in that direction, more letters would need to go to the landowners, and if that will be happening anyway, then he would be in favor of including Burnham Intervale also.

Mr. Whitley suggested that the zones be adopted in their current iterations in the interest of getting them created before the end of the year. He suggested that the discussion about expansion be taken up at a future meeting, at which time the committee could suggest either creating new zone or adjust the boundaries of the existing zones. The other members of the committee agreed.

2020 EDC Budget

Mr. Whitley directed the group's attention to the draft EDC budget. He stated that the committee needs to decide on amount to request from the Select Board and Budget Committee to be put forward and voted on at Town Meeting. He explained that last year, the EDC initially asked for approximately \$30k to fund an Economic Development Director for the Town, but that ultimately, that item was removed from the budget. This year, the EDC is proposing approximately \$22k for a half time position. Discussion ensued as to whether it was better for the EDD to be a town employee with benefits or a contractor or consultant. Mr. Congoran was strongly in favor of the position being a contractor or consultant rather than town employee, as 1) the cost would lower without benefits, and 2) it would allow the town to be flexible with the new position as it becomes established. Mr. Whitley reminded the group that the main task at that time was to decide whether to request that the position be created, and that the details could be worked out at a later time in conjunction with the Town Administrator, Select Board, and Budget Committee. All members present were in favor of requesting funds for this position. This group was comfortable with funding it either as a town employee or consultant.

MTAG

Mr. Whitley reported that the MTAG Citizen Advisory Committee and the MTAG Consultants made a presentation to the Planning Board and it was very well-received. Currently, the consultants are working with Karen Robertson, Planning Director, to craft the language for the suggested zoning changes. That will then go to the MTAG Committee for review. Then the Planning Board will hold public meetings to discuss the proposed amendments and carry forward. Mr. Whitley sees this all as very positive in terms of economic development, as it will send a good signal to future potential developers in these areas.

Highway Signage

The group discussed how to best facilitate business signage on State of NH-maintained highways to make travelers more aware of attractions in Hopkinton. Signs are placed if the business meets certain guidelines. And there is a fee of \$500 per year per direction of travel. The group agreed that the EDC would try to help businesses become aware of the signage possibilities and add information about highway signs to its webpage.

Complete Streets

Ms. Wells has gathered a group of citizens and board members to serve on the Complete Streets Committee. The first meeting will take place on October 30 at 5:30pm at Town Hall. It will be an open meeting and anyone is welcome to attend. Ms. Wells clarified that the process going forward is that the Complete Streets Committee will craft the language for the policy and design guidelines, then it will be brought to the Select Board for adoption. Mr. Whitley suggested, and Ms. Wells fully agreed, that the Roads Committee be engaged in or at least made very much aware of the work of the Complete Streets Committee.

Town of Hopkinton Website

Suggestions were made for updates to the new town website. Links to ERZ and business highway signage should be included on the EDC page. Furthermore, the pages having to do with "Businesses" should connect somehow to the EDC page. Other suggestions will be directed to the Town Administrator.

Next Meeting: Thursday, November 21, 2019, 6:00 p.m. – Town Hall

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Anna Wells