



Town of Hopkinton

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Public Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 14, 2022 – 5:30 P.M.

Hopkinton Town Hall

Members Present: Louise Carr, Sam Delgado, Andrea Folsom, Jim Fredyma, Ian Hart, Alexander Pooler, Greg Sagris, Steven Whitley
Members Absent: Meredith Lee
Public Present: Byron Carr
Staff Present: Anna Wells

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Whitley called the meeting to order at 5:30pm. He warmly welcomed two new members to the Committee: Sam Delgado and Louise Carr. Each member introduced themselves.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES from [November 16, 2022](#)

Andrea Folsom made a motion to approve the *Economic Development Committee minutes of November 16, 2022*. Ian Hart seconded. There was no discussion. **Motion passed 7-0**, with Steven Whitley abstaining due to his absence for the bulk of the meeting.

III. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

1. Downtowns and Trails Steering Committee

Ms. Wells reported that the MOU has now been signed by both the Select Board and UNH Extension and the EDC portion of the payment has been submitted. The group brainstormed people to ask about being part of the 15-20-member steering committee. The goal is for the group to be highly inclusive and diverse, so folks of different ages and interests will be asked, as well as those of differing abilities and who represent a range of locations in town. The EDC agreed that the Steering Committee should be open to folks who “live, work, and play” in Hopkinton/Contoocook. The goal is to have the Steering Committee formed by mid-January, to begin meeting and working in early February. The group will make some initial invitations and will continue to discuss this at the next meeting.

2. Zoning/Policy Changes for 2023 Town Meeting

a. Update from Planning Board Meeting of December 13

Ms. Wells reported on the outcome of the Planning Board meeting she attended the previous evening, at which she presented recommendations for changes to the “Commerce and Community Overlay District.” This zoning overlay was adopted in 2020 with the intent to “provide an opportunity for a range of residential housing choices and small-scale neighborhood retail and services in a planned development that incorporates open space.”

Ms. Wells explained that in addition to the corrections the Planning Board already plans to propose, she and Ms. Robertson worked together to propose changes to the language to improve clarity. Based on previous discussions with the Economic Development Committee, Ms. Wells also proposed that the CCOD be applied to other appropriate areas of town with the intent of enabling a wider range of residential housing types. Before making these recommendations to the Planning Board, Ms. Wells explained that she analyzed Hopkinton’s zoning code to determine what types of residential uses are possible in the existing M-1/Industrial and B-1/Commercial districts and compared them with the three other options available to develop housing that may be applied in one or both of those districts: the CCOD, Conservation Subdivision, and Affordable Housing Option. The analysis she compiled is attached to these minutes.

The Planning Board decided not to move forward with EDC’s recommended updates to the CCOD. Nor are they considering applying the CCOD to other areas at this time. They are moving forward with a few helpful clarifying edits, but at this time they felt they did not have a thorough enough understanding of the implications of additional changes to move them forward.

With information provided by Ms. Wells, the Economic Development Committee discussed the housing shortage and affordability crisis that exists in New Hampshire and particularly Merrimack County. The group discussed at length the importance of housing availability and affordability and how these factors are vital for economic development. In particular, housing matters to economic development because businesses cannot hire and retain employees if their workforce cannot afford to live locally. They discussed that increasing Hopkinton’s housing choices should be a priority for the EDC to advocate for in 2023. Part of the discussion touched on the belief held by many that increased housing development automatically contributes to an increased school budget. The EDC agreed they need to come to a common understanding of the facts around this idea and be able to easily explain the truth around that notion. They will continue to discuss this at future meetings.

The EDC felt they wanted to better understand how the Planning Board may also be working to address housing availability and affordability and decided they’d like to attend a future Planning Board meeting to collaborate and begin to figure out a path forward. Mr. Sagris and Mr. Fredyma invited EDC members to attend the January 10th Planning Board Meeting. The EDC would like to frame the discussion in terms of how the EDC and Planning Board can collaborate to meet the stated and accepted objectives of the Master Plan.

b. RSA 72:81 Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Exemption

The Committee discussed possibly suggesting to the Select Board that a warrant article be added to enable the “Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Exemption,” which discounts the incremental tax amount for certain businesses resulting from expansion or improvement for a limited number of years.

Adoption of this statute is suggested as a goal in the 2022 Master Plan. The EDC had many questions about this incentive, wanting to know about other municipalities that have adopted it, whether it has worked to increase investments, and how it interacts with Economic Revitalization Zones and Tax Increment Financing Districts.

On this last point, Ms. Wells explained that the ERZ allows for a reduction in State of NH Business Profits Tax and Business Enterprise Tax. If adopted, RSA 72:81 could work in combination with the ERZ to allow a qualifying business in the ERZ to claim both exemptions and reduce both state and local taxes (for a limited number of years). The purpose of a TIF is to capture some or all the incremental tax amount resulting from development to be reinvested back in the district. But if this tax exemption is adopted and applied to properties in the TIF, that incremental tax amount would be lower. While that seems contrary to the intention of the TIF, it is only for a limited amount of time before the property is taxed at its full amount. Nonetheless, this point should be considered when specifying the terms of the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Exemption.

The group ultimately decided they wanted to hear more about the pros and cons from other towns and fully understand all the implications before suggesting this for Hopkinton. The group unanimously agreed to recommend to the Select Board to start the exploratory process into creating a warrant article for 2024.

c. [RSA 674:44-i](#) *Establishing A Housing Commission*

The Committee discussed whether to propose to the Select Board that an article be added to the Town Meeting warrant to establish a Housing Commission for Hopkinton. A Housing Commission primarily has an advisory role on matters related to housing, and also has the ability to acquire real property in support of the development of housing if approved by the Select Board. Ms. Wells provided the group with some resources, including the enabling legislation ([RSA 674:44-i](#)) and NH Housing's [Guide to Housing Commissions](#). The EDC will read up on the topic and discuss again at their next meeting on January 4, prior to attending the January 9th Select Board meeting, at which the EDC will potentially make a recommendation.

3. [T-Mobile Hometown Grant](#) // *Re-envisioning Riverway Park*

Ms. Wells extends sincere gratitude on behalf of the EDC to Terrain Land Planning for their help in preparing cost estimates and plans. As a reminder, this is for up to \$50k for Phase 1 of renovations at Riverway Park. Phase 1 is to increase capacity and re-pave the parking lot, renovate/stabilize the boat launch, create the single-track walking trail around the edge of the park (to later be widened and resurfaced to accommodate the Concord-Lake Sunapee Rail Trail), and landscaping improvements.

Byron Carr provided public comment that he does not believe the "bike path" in the location along the river embankment is the best use of that space. He suggests holding off on submitting the grant application this cycle. He provided details on his alternative ideas for the area slated for a path. Ms. Wells offered that if the group is not comfortable with the location of the walking trail as currently proposed, that element of the proposal could be moved to Phase 2 to allow time for additional consideration. Discussion ensued.

The two new members of the Committee asked how the community had been involved in determining this plan. Ms. Folsom reminded the group that the original idea for improving the park came from a diverse group of interested citizens who brought the idea to the EDC to figure out how to get it funded and the best way to move forward. Mr. Sagris explained that this topic had been on many EDC agendas, all publicly-noticed, since the spring and was also discussed at a Select Board meeting at which the plans were presented and approved by the Select Board.

After much discussion, Ian Hart moved that the grant application be submit as prepared by December 30. Andrea Folsom seconded the motion. **The motion was approved 8-0.**

4. **Hopkinton Village Intersection**

Ms. Wells told the Committee that Thomas Lipoma is taking the lead on this for the Hopkinton Village Precinct and the Select Board. Steven Whitley will be the point person for the EDC moving forward. There was some discussion to fill in the new members on the background of this project.

IV. **UPDATES**

1. Grants update:

Ms. Wells provided the group with a list of potential upcoming grants. The Committee discussed them all, and their applicability to economic development. It was determined that some are outside the realm of economic development and should not be the purview of this committee, whereas some are squarely within the stated mission of the EDC. The group discussed that some sort of process should be put in place by the Select Board for pursuing grants that are outside the scope of the EDC.

a. RTP Grant (past - approved)

Ms. Wells explained that the Town was approved for this grant, but that the transfer of the old railbed land from TDS Telecom to the Town of Hopkinton has yet to be completed. This is a condition of being awarded the grant money. Ms. Wells and Neal Cass, Town Administrator continue to be in contact with TDS in hopes of moving this along.

b. [Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling Grant Program](#) (Jan 16)

With input from the committee, particularly Ms. Folsom, who is highly informed about this particular grant, all agreed that this is beyond the scope and capacity of the Town.

c. WWTF/Sewer [Energy Audit Measures Implementation Grant & Loan](#) (Jan 31)

Ms. Wells reported that, having been given pre-approval for this grant, the Water/Sewer Superintendent and Mr. Cass are moving this process forward with the engineering firm Hazen & Sawyer (who is contracted with the Town and Contoocook Village Precinct for water & sewer work).

d. InvestNH [Housing Opportunity Planning Grants](#) (Jan 23)

Ms. Wells and Ms. Robertson are working together on applying for all three phases of this grant.

e. [National Culvert Removal, Replacement & Restoration Grants](#) (Feb 6)

The group discussed that, while this grant is certainly applicable to Hopkinton, it is not within the purview of the EDC. The group suggested that the Conservation Commission and the Department of Public Works would be better suited to pursue these funds. Mr. Pooler offered his assistance in putting together the grant package should they want it.

f. [AARP Community Challenge Grant](#) (Spring 2023)

The group agreed this grant should be pursued and will discuss further when the deadline is known and guidelines are made available, likely in January.

2. Business Outreach

Ms. Wells shared the survey she compiled for businesses and the group gave their feedback and suggestions for additional questions they would like to include. Ms. Wells explained that this survey would be provided in paper form and also made available as a Survey Monkey. The group also gave additional feedback on the cover letter she has drafted and suggested that she hold off sending/delivering the letters until the new year.

3. Other Board/Committee Updates - N/A

V. OTHER

Next Meeting Date(s): *1st and 3rd Wednesdays @ 5:30pm*

January 4 & 18

February 8 & 22

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Andrea Folsom moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ian Hart. There was no discussion. **Motion passed 8-0.**

There being no other business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 7:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Anna Wells

Economic Development Director