

Economic Development Advisory Committee

MEETING MINUTES

October 28, 2020

Present: Mason Parker, Heath Mitchell, Norm Nickerson, Marcus Dube, Andre Wood (via Zoom) and Janice Pack

Mason called the meeting to order at 6:33 PM.

Mason then resigned as Chair, and nominated Heath Mitchell to assume the role of Chair. Janice seconded. All were in favor; motion passed.

Heath asked if everyone had reviewed the minutes, and had any amendments. No one did. Regarding the minutes, Norm said that the discussion about Crotched Mountain might be a moot point right now. The Committee talked about the proposed new owner of the property which is a For Profit organization, and how that would impact revenue. They may still qualify for a partial exemption. There was a discussion on whether or not the Barbara C. Harris had a PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) agreement. Apparently, they are owned by a church, so they would have a religious exemption.

Heath noted that the minutes reflected a conversation about broadband. Heath will invite Tom Bascom to our next meeting.

We discussed the adoption of 79E, and looking into the adoption of other local ordinances that would benefit the town. Mason will follow up on that for our next meeting.

Regarding improving the Village District and keeping the ball rolling, Heath wondered about the implementation of the Master Plan and the Charrette. Mason said there were a lot of loose ends. The Conservation Commission had talked about putting in blueberry bushes in the “septic field” and planting wildflowers along the railroad bed. Norm said that was a great idea but wouldn’t work because of all the salt. Heath said we should be looking into grants. There are volunteer committees in town who are doing things on the side; he sees a lot of opportunities to connect this committee to other committees in town. He feels we should focus on one project and get it done and then move on to another one. We could focus on what the economic benefit of each item would be, and prioritize. Heath said we should think about what we feel is in the best interest of the town and share that with the other committee members. Heath will email everyone to remind them to do this.

Heath wondered if people were aware of all the things we do have around town. The previous version of the EDAC had worked on “bullet points” and talked about rail trails, the train and events that used to be held like the Blueberry Festival.

Andre said the biggest task the EDAC is grappling with what Greenfield wants to do. With the exit of Crotched Mountain, we have a loss of revenue to the town. With COVID we have an economic impact along with the ability to work from home. We need to bring in more businesses.

Mason shared a hand-out called “Starting a Business in Greenfield”. The Planning Board saw an influx of Home-Based Businesses (HBBs) last year. It is allowed and encouraged in this town, and they have approved several HBBs lately – 4 new businesses last year. Heath asked how we generate income from these HBBs. Mason said rent for businesses is expensive. The benefit is for someone who wants to live in Greenfield and operate a business; the potential tax impact is that if someone is using their property to make money, they see the value of the taxes they’re paying that allow them to do this. Andre said if you’re a small business, you’ll be able to pay your taxes. You may put improvements into the property, thereby raising the value of the property. It makes you more inclined to stick around.

Mason's document (attached) was discussed further. It talks about scheduling a Preliminary Conceptual Consultation (PCC) with the Planning Board if you're thinking of starting a business, noting that you may need to have a site plan review. He said the Greenfield Storage site is now full and they want to add on. They came before the Planning Board to see if they needed a new site plan review; the Planning Board said they did not, they just needed to contact the Building Inspector.

Andre asked what the Planning Board's view of Air BnBs is. Heath said a lot of places are looking at Air BnBs as a way to generate tax revenue. The benefit we would get is that of bringing people into town. Mason said he asked Mike Borden about it and he said if you're renting the entire house, its legal. If you start renting individual rooms, it could be a problem. Andre just would like the town to take a stand on this. If someone is turning it into a party house, it has a negative impact on the neighborhood. If not, we can ignore it and reap the benefits of the economic impact of having people in town who may buy from other local businesses.

Mason feels that the EDAC can use the Planning Board's document as well. Heath will send this out to everyone for review and comment. He feels it will be useful for people thinking about bringing a business into town. It was agreed that it can be intimidating to open a business. Norm said this is a good start. As an applicant, he had issues before, and it turned into a bad experience. A result of that was a guideline published in the SPIRIT.

Heath said bad experiences and confusion – such as do you need to get a permit or not – are important. This committee can help HBBs in town by answering questions and assisting in the process. Norm said while HBBs aren't going to generate a lot of income, they are going to keep people in town. We are a graying community and it's important to attract young people. Andre said one of the problems we've had in town is getting volunteers; it's a whole lot easier to get volunteers if we have more people working in town. The Planning Board has talked about what works in Greenfield. Home based businesses seem to be what's working. Preserving the rural character of Greenfield and keeping the tax rate down can go hand in hand. Promoting HBBs does give homeowners more buy in.

Mason noted that Allrose Farm is coming before the Planning Board to renew their approval. Mason is against this process of needing re-approval. Andre said it's really a study on impact. The Planning Board will address that requirement at their next meeting. Heath felt it was completely unfair to Allrose; its like you don't have confidence in the way the ordinance was written. Norm said regulations change. Heath said it's a benefit to the town. Norm agreed that the EDAC has looked at the overlay before and found we're really not a business-friendly town. Andre said the original purpose of the 3-year review was to give the Board the opportunity to adjust the ordinance. The Board at that time wanted to be able to realize the impact.

The meeting adjourned at 7:35. The EDAC will meet again on November 24th at 6:30 PM at the Meeting House. All are welcome to attend.