

Economic Development Committee Minutes 07/18/2016

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Accepted Meeting Minutes

Recorded by Janice Pack

July 18, 2016

Members Present: Paul Renaud, Jack Moran, Norm Nickerson, Andre Wood

Meeting Opened: 7:00 PM

Minutes: JMoran motioned to accept the Minutes; this was seconded by PRenaud, and all were in favor.

Old Business: The Committee went over what had happened since our last meeting. PRenaud said he had not heard back from Scott Brooks at TDS. AWood has spoken to SBrooks, who said he would love to see TDS come in here, but his "higher-ups haven't bought into the idea yet." All he can do is give them information; he can't make the decision. AWood reminded him that they could easily take over the TV market, but again, he said the decision wasn't his to make.

PRenaud said he had spoken to some people in Peterborough about Comcast. He feels that as time goes on, the TV part of it will be less of a draw to new customers. With Hulu, Netflix and streaming available, that service is starting to transition. However, the internet service we currently have seems to be very much improved, much more reliable. PRenaud asked if this is still worth pursuing. AWood said that for the business side of it, it definitely is, but maybe not for the average consumer. For someone starting a new business, he would recommend that they begin with the residential service, and grow their business first. PRenaud said that some on the outskirts of town still have a problem with reliable service.

If we want to go forward with TDS, we still need them to give us a breakdown of costs. There is no way that we could go in front of the Town and ask for money without it. AWood feels that the Town should subsidize the costs, but you can't guarantee a return, so there isn't a good chance of that happening. There is no way to determine what kind of benefit it would really be, and whether or not it would be a draw. Nothing really seems viable, and the cost cannot be justified. The best we can do is tell SBrooks that we're interested when you're ready, and then wait to see what happens. If someone new comes in to town, we can give them the information we have, but we're not going to be a communications hub.

NNickerson thinks we should table this for now; we've gone as far as we can go, and now it's a waiting game to see who's interested in us. The primary interest of the companies we've talked to is the residential business. AWood sees a victory – we did get Fairpoint to improve our service on the residential size, at a reasonable price. PRenaud says he will talk to the Select Board and let them know where we're at.

We talked about putting a somewhat anonymous article in The Spirit talking about Fairpoint, but PRenaud missed that deadline. Is this something we should proceed with? The next deadline is September 1st. PRenaud feels that it is worth doing from an informational basis to just get the word out, telling people about our small victory, as most people wouldn't know that service has improved.

New Business: NNickerson wonders if we want to go off on another tangent now. AWood says "let's figure out some other way we can help." But JMoran says "we're back to square one: no chairman, no committee." PRenaud feels that with his responsibilities with the Planning Board, he doesn't really have time to chair EDAC, too.

At the last meeting we talked about the rail trail. AWood said he had looked into that more, and found that the one in Amherst is owned by the town, maintained by the town, and they have paved roads. Here, we have a bunch of existing properties with railroad easements over them with people who may not want the trails there. AWood asked "if we did a rail trail, who is going to benefit"? AWood said he doesn't see where it would be an economic benefit, and JMoran agreed. NNickerson also agreed, and said there would be costs involved with maintenance.

Moving forward, JMoran feels that a Solar Array might still be the way to go, and we need to find out what does and what does not apply to a town sponsored solar array. PRenaud said that the Planning Board has to work on the Energy chapter for the Master Plan, and the two could be tied together. NNickerson said we should touch base with others in town about this, such as Peter Davenport from the Harvester Market, and Ray Cilley. Apparently RCilley will not be pursuing the land he was originally looking at for that use, but he may still do something on the roof of American Steel. However, in running the numbers he's not sure if it still makes sense. The way it would improve our tax base would be to put it on town land that's not already in use, and get people to buy into it, so we could turn it into a profitable use. Or another option would be to power the Town through it.

AWood asked what other avenues do we have? If our draws include our quiet, rural character, and lack of lake pollution, then recreation is our niche. Are there changes we should make in the regulations or ordinances that would make change easier? Would a Farmers Market benefit the town? If it was on town land, there could be a small fee involved. AWood said we could promote it but JMoran said he didn't see that we have the farmers to support it.

PRenaud mentioned that the Planning Board still needed to complete the Site Plan Review. One of the things he feels that would make things easier, so people don't get stressed out, would be to stipulate that if a proposal has no impact, and it's not a change of use, it should not need a site plan Review. We could streamline the process.

PRenaud wondered if it would make sense to change some of the districts. JMoran said It would make sense to allow all except industrial use in the village district. Should we change the ordinance to allow more business opportunity? AWood feels there is a balance that has to be met to do this with the people in town. JMoran says that it is in our charter to do so, and it would help the town. Since we don't have a lot of area to work with, this would help us utilize what we do have.

It was decided not to have an August meeting. At our next meeting on September 19th, we have 2 things to go over: The Charter says that we are supposed to present to the Select board our long range plan. What is our plan? Also, what about the website?

Back to the continuation of this Committee, JMoran asked PRenaud if he had told the Select Board that he'd like someone else to step up and chair this Committee. PRenaud said No. JMoran said that the Select Board are the only ones who would be able to post the opening for a new Committee chair, if they decide they want the Committee to continue. PRenaud says the thing he's afraid of is that the Committee would be turned into something completely different. We'll discuss this again in September.

JMoran motioned to adjourn. AWood seconded, and All were in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:57 PM

These Minutes were Accepted at the regular EDAC Meeting of 9/19/16.