

Meeting Minutes

Town of Adams Board of Selectmen

TOWN CLERK

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Board of Selectmen Meeting

November 12, 2014

On the Above date the Board of Selectmen held a meeting at Town Hall at 7:00 p.m.

Chairman Arthur Harrington presided. Present were **Members John Duval, Joseph Nowak, Jeffrey Snoonian,** and **Vice Chairman Richard Blanchard.** Also in attendance was **Interim Town Administrator Donna Cesan.**

Meeting called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman Harrington.

Chairman Harrington gave an overview of the agenda items.

NEW BUSINESS

2003 Downtown Development Plan

The Downtown Development Plan was completed in July, 2003, and is approximately 90 pages long. A committee was developed through a partnership between the Adams Community Development Department and the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce to implement the Adams Downtown Revitalization Program. Essentially the program's goals were to:

- Define a shared vision of Downtown
- Strengthen and expand the Downtown's businesses
- Attract appropriate new businesses within the Downtown area
- Promote and market the Downtown area to improve its image
- Enhance the appeal of Downtown's private and public real estate

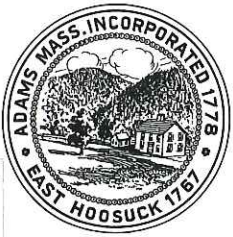
Projects Completed from the Plan

Many of the projects outlined in the plan have already been done or are in progress, such as the Façade Project, the Rail Trail Extension, the Roundabout, Greylock Glen, Summer Street Improvement, and the Park Street Project. Chairman Harrington gave credit to Community Development Director Donna Cesan and her department for following through with items from the plan and seeking out the funds to get them accomplished.

The plan covers what needed to be done, how to go about doing it, how much it would cost and who should be responsible to do it. The Town needs to look at the document and take inventory of what has been done, where the Town currently is and where it is heading. Today's needs may be different than 10 years ago.

Pedestrian Traffic

Pedestrian traffic is needed to support businesses in the town. The town needs quality merchants that provide a product to attract tourism. The Town can help with signage, façade improvements, and



Meeting Minutes

Town of Adams Board of Selectmen

getting grant money, but also to attract businesses into the community by encouraging the businesses to create a cohesive Downtown shopping and living area.

Downtown Zoning

Zoning helps to make a vibrant, business-friendly community, and walking loops and amenities like the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail increase shopping in the Downtown area. Despite the projects that have been completed from the plan, there are still empty buildings and storefronts, and dilapidated buildings. Residents are leaving, and people are driving through town without stopping and spending money. The Town needs to decide what steps to take to go forward, using this study as a base for the future.

Historic District

There are historic buildings in town that could create a "historic district" in the Downtown. This would make money available for certain types of renovations, but also controls the type of businesses and buildings that come into town.

Attracting Business to Downtown

Town Government needs to play a role in attracting businesses to the area. There is not an organization where businesses can come together to come up with ideas, work together to bring businesses into town, and determine what kinds of businesses should be in the Downtown. The question is who would oversee that type of program.

Adams was a wholesome community. Everything that a family needed could be found in town. With the advent of the big "box" stores it is more difficult for businesses to stay viable because they need to have a special niche or product that is not available in those stores. Niche businesses are usually higher priced, and must be sustainable and able to compete.

Creating Online Business

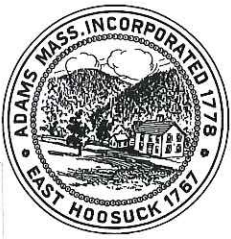
Transportation in this area makes it difficult for businesses that rely on a customer base to come in. Making it easier to work in the community through broadband and other resources will help. The Greylock Glen will bring people to the community and boost the economy. If the Town can find a way to harness it there would be a benefit.

Downtown Development Plan Presentation

Interim Town Administrator Donna Cesan gave a presentation on the work that was done since 2003 on the Downtown Revitalization Plan.

Adams had not been as successful as other communities in transitioning to a more tourist-rich base. The majority of the town's population continues to reflect a low income. Over 83% of housing in the Downtown area was built prior to 1920. The economic strategy for the Town has always been through the Greylock Glen.

A Downtown Development Committee of 15 members was created with the Chamber of Commerce. With funding from Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) the plan was started. In 1999 the



Meeting Minutes

Town of Adams Board of Selectmen

Town got grant money to create a 2-year community vision effort and to recognize its strengths, which culminated in the Downtown Development Plan.

Strengths of the Town

Having the historic building base and a well-defined center were identified as strengths of the town. The downtown is compact and well framed with a supermarket and drug store at the ends. What set Adams apart from other areas was the benefit it had from outdoor recreation. The Rail Trail, Mount Greylock and the Greylock Glen became more important to the town in the Downtown planning effort.

The most important items in the plan were to

1. Eliminate blight conditions in the Downtown
2. Strengthen existing businesses and recruit new businesses to Downtown
3. Improve the physical design of the Downtown to attract tourists

In 2002 the town did a Slums and Blight inventory and rated the buildings in order to focus CDBG funding to the area. The inventory identified 75% of commercial buildings, 72% of residential buildings and 85% of the infrastructure of the Downtown area were noted to be in poor condition. Building owners were the biggest impediment to the Downtown revitalization effort.

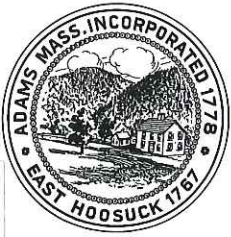
To address this, the Town undertook key individual projects, implemented the Downtown Façade and Signage Improvement Program, continued the implementation of the Housing Rehabilitation Program, and improved code enforcement by hiring a code enforcement officer.

Projects Initiated from the 2003 Downtown Development Plan

The projects that launched from this effort were

- *Armory Court Improvement Project*
- *Jones Block Redevelopment Project*
 - Funded under the Community Development Action Grant for \$1 Million
- *Adams Downtown Façade and Signage Improvement Program*
 - 59 buildings were renovated with the funding received in a 7 year span
- *Adams Housing Rehab Program*
 - 280 units renovated in a 15 year timeframe
- *Tourist-Base Economic Development Projects*
 - Ashuwillticook Rail Trail
 - Visitor's Center
 - Armory Court Park
 - Topia Arts
 - Way-finding and Banners Programs
 - Streetscapes, including Summer and Park Streets

Additional community projects were undertaken with funding available, including Renfrew Park, and the restoration of Maple Street Cemetery.



Meeting Minutes

Town of Adams Board of Selectmen

Other Studies

The Town used tools and funding sources to obtain architectural studies, project master plans, and engineering studies. Brownfields has been utilized to create environmental site assessments and hazardous material surveys.

Funds and Resources Used

A limited amount of Town funds have been used in these projects, and significant state and federal grant resources have been utilized. The Town has used a targeted approach, created a strategy through Town Staff and the Select Board, and have used resources available to enhance the Community Development, Building Inspector, and Code Enforcement staff capacities in these projects. Over the past 11 years of implementation, the original plan may no longer be relevant as several projects outlined are now completed.

Areas of Improvement

An area that could be improved is business development and recruitment. The Board's Strategic Plan can keep this plan current, as it has in the past with the 2005 Strategic Plan and the Economic Development Plan that was adopted in October 2013.

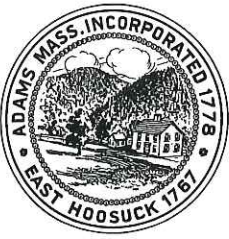
The Town is looking to support existing businesses to stay and improve, and to recruit more businesses. Having exit interviews with businesses that leave was suggested, to get a confidential assessment of what the challenges are.

Adams Business Council

Vice Chairman Blanchard suggested forming an *Adams Business Council* to form a partnership between the community, the Town, and the businesses, as well as the businesses with each other. He proposed having 5 district business associations; one for Park Street, Summer Street, South Street, North Side, and the Rural Business Districts. He advised he thought each association could have a President and Vice President, and meet with 2 Select Board Members, the Town Administrator and a Recording Secretary for monthly meetings. The main focus would be to share information, be helpful to each other, and solve problems in private meetings. He said there would be no cost to the associations, and it would be primarily a Think Tank for businesses in Adams. Only 41 of the Town's 208 businesses are currently located in the Downtown area.

With Select Board Member changes, changing business owners and busy lifestyles, it is possible that the meetings would not be well attended or be able to maintain a consistent focus. Town government needs to work more with current business owners to create more business and recruit businesses to the area. A suggestion was made to find funding for a position to be created to work with business owners and to go out of the area to encourage businesses to relocate or create satellite offices or stores in Adams.

The Town can develop a campaign to advertise with realtors and local banks to help businesses economically. Insurance companies may be able to help with the teaching aspect of starting a business and giving seminars or information to those interested to help them to be successful. Park Street is the front door to the Town image and both the private and the public sector have a stake in what happens.



Meeting Minutes

Town of Adams Board of Selectmen

Gail Kolis Sellers praised Vice Chairman Blanchard's proposal, especially because it is a cooperative venture and addresses the outskirt businesses. She said many people would step up if nobody else did, and there is a lot of energy in this realm percolating in town. Gail also praised the 5 Hoosac Street Gallery, who had 2,500 visitors so far and said these statistics show what businesses are capable of doing. She also praised volunteers as she had a volunteer for 40 hours a week at the gallery that made the business more successful.

David Bissaillon said he was happy the Select Board and Interim Town Administrator were bringing up this issue, and that the public, private sector, residents, and businesses will do the work. He suggested thanking the businesses that are here already and showing them appreciation. He gave input that for the proposed Adams Business Council or other types of associations it is hard to get people to go to meetings.

Proposed Business Recruitment Plan

Interim Town Administrator Cesan outlined a draft of her proposal for a *Downtown Business Recruitment Plan* for the Town of Adams.

Retail development goals include 5 development strategies.

1. *Identify the space in the Downtown area for bringing in businesses*
 - a. Identify impediments to using the spaces, such as ADA compliance, or other issues
 - b. Determine the code requirements
2. *Involve property owners, especially areas not updated since 2006*
 - a. Have a preliminary talk with ProAdams to identify and document it
3. *Identify building and property ownership and use information.*
 - a. Develop a new questionnaire and revisit the old database
4. *Create a Downtown database*
5. *Look at the market for each type of business demand*
 - a. Do analysis and make a match based on this analysis

Direct Recruitment

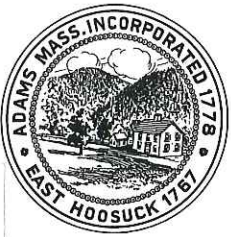
A suggestion was made to create a 100 mile radius to see what type of businesses in that area match the need in Adams that exist in other similar areas. Cold calls, directly meeting business owners, and looking at the market would be intensive work for staff.

Business Showcasing

Some ways to boost this process are to have a showcase space to target and market to potential businesses, while working with brokers and developing incentives.

Streamlining Approval Process

Expediting public permit approvals by creating a Town Center Zoning District would help to streamline the process. Having a "one-stop-shop" for businesses to get permits would be helpful.



Meeting Minutes

Town of Adams Board of Selectmen

Student and School Engagement

Chairman Harrington challenged the 3 different area school systems and local colleges to help solve the Downtown problem. He proposed having the students use this as a project to outline the problems, identify what Adams currently needs and will need for the future, and put more meaning for the students to engage in Adams. The schools can be mentors for the groups of students in the project. This would get the community involved through their youth.

Local colleges can use a Downtown storefront as a satellite campus to reduce travel and to increase enrollment in their schools. Hoosac Valley High School and McCann Technical School could also use this area for high school students taking college classes.

OTHER BUSINESS

Town Administrator Search Committee

The *Town Administrator Search Committee* (TASC) has narrowed the 41 candidates down to 4 candidates to present to the Select Board as finalists. One of the 4 has withdrawn due to being offered another position. Interviews will be set up within the next couple weeks, and they will be open to the public. The Select Board is encouraged to move quickly so other finalists are not lost as many applicants apply for several jobs at the same time. Once booked, the interviews will be posted.

The Chairman and Vice Chairwoman of the TASC will approach the Select Board in executive session on Wednesday, November 19, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. to report to the Board their summary of the finalist candidates and provide information.

Motion to Adjourn made by Vice Chairman Blanchard

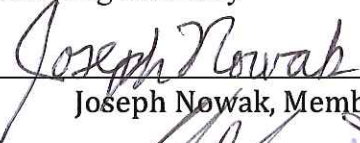
Second by Member Snoonian

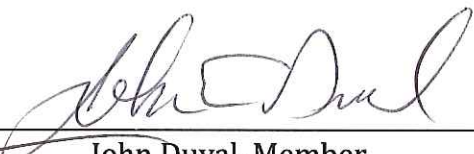
Unanimous vote

Motion passed

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.


Respectfully Submitted by Deborah J. Dunlap,
Recording Secretary


Joseph Nowak, Member


John Duval, Member


Jeffrey Snoonian, Member


Richard Blanchard, Vice Chairman


Arthur Harrington, Chairman