

Derry Downtown Committee Meeting Minutes  
October 28, 2010  
7:00PM  
Room 207, Derry Municipal Center

**Roll Call**-The meeting came to order at 7:04pm. In attendance were Planning Director George Sioras, Craig Bulkley, Michael Gendron, Gordon Graham, David Nelson, Bob Cavanna, John T. O'Connor, Code Enforcement Director Bob Mackey, Fire Chief George Klauber, Jack Roche, Jona Bostwick, Tom & Mary Hankins, Town Councilor David Milz and Harvey Towvim.

**Approval of Minutes**-A motion was made by George Sioras to approve the minutes of September 16, 2010. The motion was seconded by Jack Roche and was passed unanimously.

A motion was made by George Sioras to approve the minutes of the Downtown Derry site walk conducted on September 29, 2010. The motion was seconded by Michael Gendron and was passed unanimously. Those minutes are attached to and incorporated into this meeting.

**Chairman's Comments**-Gordon suggested that we move New Business to the beginning of the meeting so that we could hear from our guests Bob Mackey, Derry Code Enforcement Director and George Klauber, Derry Fire Chief.

- A. New Business-Blight Ordinance/Building Codes and Dealing with Absentee Land Owners / Vacant Buildings with guests Bob Mackey, Derry Code Enforcement Director and George Klauber, Derry Fire Chief.** Chief Klauber began by discussing certain buildings and indicated that, much to everyone's dismay, the Pet Store actually met all fire codes and was in operable condition. He stated that he has the legal authority to enter the building and, when last inspected, he felt the property just needed a little sprucing up and it could be a viable business. He stated that the Fire Dept inspects all buildings on Crystal and Broadway periodically, and he stated that no building was completely in compliance. He indicated that the owner is given a certain amount of time to bring it up to code (usually 3 years). He stated that only when residential homes become abandoned, can they consider it blighted. Commercial buildings like the Pet Store are not considered abandoned, they are just considered vacant. He stated that unfortunately, there is not a whole lot that can be done. He did state, however, that implementing an anti-blight ordinance might allow the town to assert some pressure on building owners. Gordon thought that a town-wide anti-blight ordinance might be beneficial. Mr. Mackey stated that his department has the beginnings of an anti-blight ordinance. He stated, during the last code update, his department was able to get the town to adopt the IPMC (International Property Maintenance Code). Gordon stated that there is nothing on the town books that is considered an anti-blight ordinance. Craig Bulkley stated that he had been trying to encourage owners to improve their facades for over 25 years. Chief Klauber recommended seeking grant programs that encourage owners to act. He recommended using grant dollars to offset the cost of rent for potential new business owners. Gordon asked everyone if we supported recommending that the town buy undesirable buildings. Mr. Towvim suggested an entrepreneurial nurturing program to encourage incubating new businesses. He suggested a community pride theme. Gordon discussed the DEDC and stated that the fact that there is no interaction between the town and the DEDC is a problem for our focus on economic development. Gordon summed up this portion of the meeting by stating that we must consider the use of "sticks", "carrots" and/or property purchase to achieve our goals of a vibrant downtown. Mr. Milz suggested that this committee consider drafting a letter to our new administrator, Mr. Anderson, to indicate that we feel that we need to resurrect an economic development group that employs town paid employees whose mandate it is to nurture new business in the downtown and to interact with current business owners and landlords so as to keep an open line of communication and facilitate improvements to their facades, marketing efforts and with helping to fill vacant storefronts.

## Old Business-

- A. Downtown parking field trip/walk. Next steps and action items. George/Gordon/Dave-Gordon stated that the walk around downtown was very beneficial. It included many folks from our committee as well as Police Chief Garone and DPW Superintendant Mike Fowler. Everyone observed the signage and lighting (or lack thereof) at each of the municipal lots. Many felt that there was little or poor signage indicating where to find municipal lots and many citizens still feel that the Abbot Ct. lot specifically does not feel safe (as it is often observed that there are gatherings of people generally “partying” and/or potentially engaging in activities that intimidate citizens who might use that lot). George Sioras read a letter from Mike Fowler describing the efforts of the DPW at the various parking lots since the walk. Here is the text of the letter.

*“Since the walk on September 29, 2010, DPW forces have had several dead light bulbs changed out in Abbott Court lot and East/West Broadway, conducted a clean-up of the DiFeo/Ermer Oil site and removed Graffiti from the steps on the stairs at Abbott Court. The finishing touches on the Route 102/28 intersection project are also almost completed, the Birch St. lot is striped, the decorative light has been installed and the Town has removed the dilapidated fence between the lot and D’Angelo’s. A new decorative fence will be installed in its place.*

Mr. Fowler also submitted a possible template design for a Municipal Parking Lot sign. Through George Sioras, he requested that our committee discuss and make suggestions or improvements to the template design. His letter stated that the sign would be approximately 36” tall x 48” wide, blue background with white lettering which was consistent with the color scheme decided for the directional “P” signs on East/West Broadway. Mr. Fowler’s first parking sign template design submission is attached and incorporated into these minutes.

All in attendance at tonight’s meeting discussed the template and determined that it needed to be simpler. It was a general consensus of the committee that the sign should be changed to simply read “FREE PARKING” so as to “keep it simple” and because it was agreed that the most powerful marketing word that exists in our language is the word “FREE”. The words “Derry Municipal Parking” and “No overnight parking Nov. 15-Apr. 1” could stay on the sign but in a much smaller font so as to have the driver focus more on the simple words “Free Parking”. However, everyone had other possible suggestions for better signage and/or lighting. Gordon requested that George Sioras have Elizabeth Robidoux redistribute the minutes of the downtown walk so as to create an email conversation to include all of our ideas for better signage etc. Gordon asked that we discuss via email ideas for signage and lighting and then create a response letter to Mr. Fowler.

- B. Planning Department – CBD Parking Survey Discussion of the parking survey: presentation/discussion and next steps. It was indicated that there was not enough time to complete the survey. Dave Nelson stated he would be contacting GIS Manager Doug Rathburn to discuss mapping the parking capacity at the west end of downtown to start. Chief Klauber suggested that the properties that are near the rear entrance to Abbot Ct. lot are the properties we should be focusing on having the town purchase if we want to make the lot safer for all. **It was the consensus of the committee that making the Abbott Ct. lot safe, well lit, accessible and clearly marked should be one our biggest and most immediate priorities as it is a major catalyst to business success in the downtown.**
- C. Merchants Association – Update on first Merchants meeting. Tom Hankins. Tom summarized the inaugural meeting of the newly named *Derry Downtown Business Association*. His first action step is to propose a mission statement. He indicated that the association would be

inclusive of any business that wished to join them. Mike stated that he felt it was important for the Derry Downtown Committee to continue to foster the efforts of the newly formed Downtown Business Association and to keep an open line of communication between our two groups. Here are the minutes of that meeting.

### **Downtown Derry Business Association**

Summary of 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting October 26, 2010, 7PM

Thanks to the group of 15 downtown business owners who attended and contributed greatly to our 1<sup>st</sup> organizational meeting on Tuesday October 26<sup>th</sup>.

There was general agreement that we share many common concerns and the goal of making Downtown Derry a better and special place to shop, dine and visit. The number of problems has grown recently and need to be addressed head on. There is great potential for the Downtown going forward if we work together with the other parties and players including landlords, Town Hall, Derry Town Council, etc.

Here is a summary of the major points of the meeting and action items.

1. The name of the organization will be the Downtown Derry Business Association
2. We briefly reviewed the language in Mission Statements from other Business Associations in NH. Tom Hankins will circulate a preliminary mission statement for the group to review.
3. The geographic scope of the Downtown Association was discussed. We agreed that all independent business were welcome either in the actual Downtown or on the outskirts. We are an inclusive group open to new members. Please contact any downtown neighbors or associates and welcome them to join us at our next meeting.
4. The selection of officers was also discussed. Tom Hankins agreed to be the Chairman. Susan Friedrich of Edward Jones Co. volunteered to be Secretary. We are still in need of a volunteer to be Vice Chairman.
5. Most of the meeting time was spent discussing the various issues affecting the businesses in the Downtown.

**Parking** – The group agreed that the parking lot at the Opera House was a necessity. The town must find a way to lease and improve the lot for parking. The West Broadway parking shortage affects the Veterans Rec Hall, Halligan Tavern, Derry Barber Shop, Rigatoni's, the Opera House and more.

Beyond that, a serious contributor to the parking problem on East Broadway during daytime business hours is the fact that business owners and employees occupy the majority of the primary parking spots along Broadway. The group agreed to come up with several ways to resolve this problem among the business owners and through increased police enforcement of the 2 hour limit.

There was also considerable concern about lighting and signage for the existing parking lots. We are awaiting a response from the DPW coming out of the walk around held last month.

**Downtown Appearance** – The overall appearance of the down town has gone downhill over the past few years. We discussed the various eyesore buildings and are anxiously awaiting town action on the Broadway Pets Building and relocating the Friendship Center. There was also agreement that the landlord of the JJ Pizza block be approached and asked to sell.

**Dept of Public Works Maintenance** – The biggest concern here is snow removal. While the roads are well plowed, the large remaining snow bank on each side of Broadway is either not removed, or finally removed 3-5 days later, preventing shoppers from opening car doors and getting to the sidewalk. This must be addressed. Another major concern is the need for overall improved maintenance by the DPW on Broadway. When the streetlights are out, it takes too long for repair. The lenses of the lights are black in the center and need cleaning. Several trees are dead, and should be replaced. The Christmas lights are a problem, poorly installed and not removed in spring. We would like to meet with Mike Fowler of DPW at our next meeting.

**Security** – There is widespread concern about break ins and the need for greater crime prevention in the downtown area. The group would like to meet with the Derry Police Chief or Captain at our next meeting to discuss the options of increased patrol, better communication, suggestions from law enforcement officials on prevention, and locating downtown surveillance cameras.

**6 West Broadway** – The 3 story brick building is a major centerpiece of the downtown. It has gone from being in good condition and fully rented to less than ideal condition and almost empty except for Section 8 residents on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor and 2 remaining retail

stores. The DEDC is supposedly being discontinued, and has passed the management of the building to the Derry Housing and Relocation Authority. The building is for sale. How do we return this building to better condition and fully rented with quality tenants?

Depot Steak House – This important downtown building was purchased by the Town of Derry, Restored by the DEDC, and sold to Tim and Janie for \$150,000. It is now appraised for \$452,000. The building has been apparently abandoned by the owners and subsequently stripped during an auction of the interior equipment. We need another restaurant to locate there ASAP. However we need to determine the status of the building ownership in order to explore options for purchase or rental.

Opera House Utilization – The number of events held at the Opera House has declined significantly over the past 5 years. This results in fewer people in town to shop and dine. We need to turn this around and schedule more events at the Opera House. A parking lot would be the first essential step

## 6. Closing Thoughts

Greater Derry/Londonderry Chamber Affiliation – The DDBA expressed interest in some form of collaboration with the Chamber, while understanding that the intent is for our group to be an independent and unified voice. We will discuss this further with the Chamber after their November board meeting.

The group briefly discussed the opportunity to develop a web site, cross promotion, conducting downtown events, etc. This will be sorted out and discussed at future meetings. The first order of business is to solve the most pressing problems affecting businesses and commerce in downtown Derry.

**The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday November 16th at 7PM in Derry Town Hall.** Details are to be confirmed next week. At that meeting the intent is to meet with the Derry PD and the Derry PW Department to discuss concerns and solutions.

Mike Gendron wanted to thank Tom & Mary for heading up the new committee and reiterated that, while there are several groups working simultaneously towards economic development in Derry (Derry Downtown Committee, Downtown Derry Business Association, Moving Derry Forward Committee, Greater Derry-Londonderry Chamber of Commerce and the DEDC), our goals were unified towards making our town more economically vibrant and that we should all work together as one and communicate well with each other.

- D. Moving Derry Forward Meeting-George Sioras stated the last meeting of this committee was “very good” and that many ideas for marketing the TIF district were discussed. He stated that the CEO of Parkland attended the meeting and wants to help in any way possible. George stated that Sanmina was expanding in town as well. Gent Cav of G4 communications was in attendance and explained that Derry is one of the few towns in New Hampshire that has fibre optics installed right down Broadway. George stated that he urged the committee to consider reviving an official town economic development organization to include a town paid employee that would serve as downtown development coordinator (as was done many years ago during the last downtown improvement effort of the late 1990’s. The next meeting of the “Moving Derry Forward” Committee will be on Nov. 18 from 8-10:30 at Cedar Point on Rt. 111 near Brookstone restaurant.
- E. Chairperson’s closing statements-Gordon suggested that we create an agenda item to revisit the ideas created by Stuart Arnett for the Abbot Ct. area.

## Committee Updates-

- A. NEIMT update – Jack Roche stated that his college was now a charitable trust. They submitted paperwork to lease space. He was working with Parkland to get an operating room “mock-up” donated to them. He stated that the CEO of Parkland indicated she would like to offer the course to their employees and allow them to submit the cost of the schooling for reimbursement. He stated he would be talking to other hospitals throughout New Hampshire to allow students to intern in their operating rooms. He indicated that was just waiting for the grants to come through as he still needs about \$20,000 to finance the start-up costs of the school.

- B. Other Committee Reports – Pedestrian Friendly, Friendship Center, Façade Improvements- George Sioras stated that Dennis Hebert, proprietor of the Friendship Center told him that they understand the concerns of the Derry citizens and they want to work with the town to make some changes and seek an alternative site. George also stated he had met with the owners of Halligan's Tavern and they stated that the rumors of them closing are completely false and that they "are in it for the long run". George also noted that the Farmer's Market would go on at the Vet's Hall from Nov. 7, 2010 through March 20, 2011. Chief Klauber suggested that our committee review the height limitation ordinance to allow for taller buildings if we hope to lure major businesses to our town. Gordon took the suggestion under advisement.
- C. Field Trip to Claremont Update-Jona Bostwick stated that she would revive the Claremont field trip visitation.

**The next meeting of the Derry Downtown Committee will be  
Thursday, Nov. 18 2010 at 7pm in Rm 207 of the Derry Municipal Center**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15pm