

Derry Downtown Committee Minutes

Thursday, March 4, 2010

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 by Michael Gendron, Chair. In attendance were Dan Wentworth, Brad Benson, Dave Nelson, George Sioras, Jack Roche, Diane Arrato Gavrish, Gordon Graham, David & Elizabeth Morris, Jona Bostwick & Brenda Willis

The minutes from February 18, 2010 were read and approved; motion made by Gordon Graham and seconded by George Sioras.

For the benefit of new committee members, Mike Gendron summarized the history of the Derry Downtown Committee and re-emphasized our theme to "Dream Big" which encourages everyone to work together toward the creating the best plan we can for revitalizing downtown Derry. He reminded everyone of the Derry Downtown Civic Profile event scheduled for April 24, 2010 from 8am-1pm.

Discussion took place concerning the need to nominate and elect a **Secretary** for the group. Sue Kopetz was nominated; as she has been working with Mike on the minutes for the past few meetings.

Gordon Graham made a motion to elect Susan Kopetz to the position of Secretary of the Derry Downtown Committee. The motion was seconded by Brad Benson and passed unanimously.

Old Business

George Sioras showed the group examples of the marketing materials that were used for last year's profile program and announced that he would convert these for use in marketing this year's Downtown Civic Profile event. It was hoped that between 75 and 100 people would attend this April's program. George complimented Neil Wetherbee on the creation of a glossy flier for marketing the profile day.

Michele Gagne of UNH Cooperative Extension submitted an email to our committee as she was unable to attend this evening. She is looking to the group for guidance on questions, issues, etc to be presented at the Profile Day. Mike read the group two different sets of questions to get on track with what is the actual goal of the Profile and what exactly do we want to accomplish on this day.

Dave Nelson talked about using "proxy organizations" to help us figure out the marketing strategy. Discussed was whether or not to use the students from the School of International Training when the group walks the streets talking to business owners and shop keepers about the value of attending the Profile Day. A consensus opinion was that, while we would appreciate the assistance of these students for the civic profile event on April 24, having them canvass the downtown stakeholders on March 27 would not be necessary. It was agreed that it was important that we (the members of the Derry Downtown Committee) personally visit the downtown stakeholders to encourage them to attend as we have a more vested and emotional attachment to our downtown than these students could possibly have and we could better convey the need and the reasons for us all to come together at the profile event and collaborate on improvements that would benefit all.

Dave also gave a review of the previous Profile Day and emphasized the importance of engaging and energizing the attendees to have them feel that the ideas that surface from the day are their ideas. Gordon felt that there should be break out groups to accomplish this.

Instead of being a day long program, this year's Profile session will only last from 9-1 with breakfast included. It is hoped that this abbreviated day will be successful. The hope is that Michele Gagne will be able to modify what was done last April so as to just focus on Downtown issues, rather than all of Derry. This second program is being considered a "sequel" to the first and with this profile it is hoped that there will be both short term goals and long term vision. This group is now an official committee and expected to come up with suggestions for the Town Council for the future of Derry and future budget items.

It was stated that we hoped Michele Gagne would reference the RKG report when the designing her agenda for the profile event. It was hoped that Michele would soon email her proposed agenda to us ahead of time so that it could be looked over and modified if need be.

George was asked to please revise the marketing materials to read "Downtown" instead of "Our Town" as it appears on the current documents.

George stated that the meeting originally scheduled for today concerning the initial recommendations for signage, lighting, etc. at the Birch/Crystal intersection was now going to be held on Wed, March 17 at 8 am. Even though some of this is a DOT project, it was hoped that the committee and Town will have a say in the lighting fixtures, colors, etc. Mike Fowler, Public Works Director, has indicated to George that there is a window of opportunity to do these things.

Stuart Arnett was not able to attend the meeting but he sent his report to Mike. Here is his written report.

1. Farmer's Market sub-committee 1st meeting Tues 3/9th at 1pm 3rd floor training room
 - a. Five people are interested as of now, farm stand –businesses either attending or OK-appreciative of effort
 - b. Via Councilor Fairbanks and Library: Jill Leavenworth and Jerome Miller may be attending
2. I have given a report to Town Administrator re Opera House parking options, some progress (Cc'ed)
3. Also a recommendation to include a "Downtown Investment Fund" (DIF) in next year's budget.
 - a. It could be used for best-return investment: parking, signage, lighting, demolition of blighted structures, additional Opera House enhancements – these would all be eligible-possible
 - b. DDC would make recommendation where their priorities are, a DIF priority list for Council action
 - c. Obviously, funding will be very tight next year, but we need to identify and justify any investments for now, or later
 - d. Inasmuch as the report is for his use, I will not disclose \$# recommended, but similar to what we discussed at earlier meetings
4. Architect has started on rendering 3 or 4 options for the 3 town-owned parcels:
 - a. Go over DRAFT with DDC in April
 - b. Have ready for April 24th
 - c. Then to Town Council early May before budget vote
 - d. Will look forward to getting DDC inputs, including on such ideas as College site, etc
 - e. Jim may be looking for additional site data?
5. FYI: we are working on ALL options for Pinkerton Tavern House and the restaurant business. We will be posting a FAQ on our beta Face Book site (Town of Derry NH) soon.
6. We are responding to a state eco development inquiry about a possible location of a business in downtown – very early - but George's input and having a team to respond (including great GIS info) has made a good 1st impression on prospect

Mike indicated that he had heard that among those attending that meeting on Tuesday, March 9 concerning the Farmer's Market idea would be Phil Ferdinando, proprietor and farmer of J&F Farms. It was agreed that it would be critical to have Phil and his produce as the cornerstone of the farmer's market as well as the produce of any other farms in town or in the area. Diane Arrato Gavrish indicated that she had spoken with some folks that were very interested in seeing a farmer's market come to fruition. She indicated she would get contact info for Caroline Shulz, Ken Merrill, and Kate (last name unknown) and let them know about the meeting scheduled for Tuesday, March 9.

Stuart's report indicated that discussions were "ongoing" with the owner of the property adjacent to the Adams Memorial Opera House to somehow acquire this plot of land for parking. There were comparisons made to parking situations in Portsmouth and Claremont. Claremont has built a very simple concrete multi level garage that serves the downtown well. Jona stated that Claremont applied for grant money for this project. Portsmouth has multiple parking garages, but they are further away from some of the downtown. People are used to having to walk to get around in the city, but that is part of the experience.

As was learned at our last meeting by Councilor Coyle, there apparently exists a Building Capital Reserve Account with approximately \$300,000 in it that could potentially be used to acquire either the vacant lot adjacent to the Adams or the property adjacent to the Library. Gordon Graham indicated that it was important that this reserve account be funded regularly as part of the annual budget. Mike wondered if this existing account would be the same account as the "Downtown Investment Fund" that Mr. Arnett was proposing.

The new attendees Elizabeth and David Morris spoke about their vision to have a resource center for teens near where the Difeo property was located. This would be connected to the bike path and offer such things as roller blade parks where teens could "hang out" in a safe environment. Gordon envisioned making this area "mall like" with paths and the Farmer's Market, as examples.

It was indicated that Mr. Arnett was working with the architect, Hunter Wolf on the three buildings now owned by the Town. He will go over this draft plan with us and have it ready for our next meeting and to go to the Council. Other ideas mentioned were potentially moving the Pinkerton Tavern to the Downtown. It was stated that Backman's Florist was adding a bagel

shop on the other side of the flower shop. Stuart's report concluded with a hint at the possibility of new businesses coming into town.

Diane spoke about the Shugrue property and the need to act quickly on acquiring this property if at all possible. She has corresponded with Mrs. Shugrue's niece, JoAnn, recently and has found that the family is interested in the Town buying the house if possible, but within a reasonable amount of time. If no offer is made, Catherine Shugrue and the family are considering renovating the house and renting it once again. Diane indicated that she spoke with Town Administrator Gary Stenhouse earlier and he offered a few suggestions. One idea was to have the town consider buying the property over a period of 2 years, costing \$90,000 each year (the assessed value currently is \$189,000); a second idea was for the Library to pay a portion, perhaps \$40,000 out of capital reserve funds and the Town pay the remainder. Discussion took place about the need for parking at this end of town and how to prioritize parking needs within the current economic times. Diane listed reasons the property is so essential for the library and McGregor Park, including the safety of families walking from the Municipal Lot on the uneven sidewalks, the need for extra parking for Rec events held in the park, etc. Jona and Gordon concurred and others seemed in agreement that this is a deal that is too good to pass up and very timely.

Brad Benson reiterated that the Town is going to be \$750,000 off budget thru December. He reminded the group that there needs to be a plan for acquiring property and that the Town Council would react more positively when they could see a vision for this new parking lot. The Wall Street parking lot was discussed as well as the businesses downtown that have patrons now using these lots for their evening and weekend programs.

A small discussion about eminent domain took place. It was indicated that the use of eminent domain to take property is possible if it's for the great good of the community and/or improvements to public safety. There was also discussion about improving the Municipal Lot since no landscaping or extra work was done on that lot after it was acquired during Paul Collette's term as Mayor.

A motion was made by Dave Nelson and seconded by Jack Roche that the Derry Downtown Committee make a recommendation to the town to attempt to acquire the Shugrue property adjacent to the Derry Public Library to augment parking for both the library and McGregor Park." This was approved unanimously.

Mike brought up the issue of the students from SIT and it was decided to use them during the Profile day but not during the canvassing of the town on March 27th.

Jack Roche offered to chair a sub group that would look into bringing a college to downtown Derry.

A motion was made by Michael Gendron and seconded by George Sioras to create a subcommittee of the Derry Downtown Committee whose purpose is to conduct an investigation into possibly bringing a college to downtown Derry. The motion passed unanimously.

A motion was made by Michael Gendron and seconded by Gordon Graham to nominate Jack Roche to chair the new "College Search Sub-Committee". The motion passed unanimously.

Mike mentioned the questionnaire for the business canvassing on 3/27 and the need for accommodations for the students who work with the group. He welcomed the new committee members who attended tonight and reminded everyone to vote on March 9 and to get their friends and neighbors and families out to vote, as well; this is a very important election.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Arrato Gavrish