

Economic Development Committee

Tuesday, September 13, 2011 7:00 PM
Old Library, 5 Fairbank St., Harvard, MA

MINUTES

Members Present: Rich Maiore, Chairman, Al Combs, Elaine Lazarus, Bruce Stamski
Members Absent: Jim Stevens

Others Present: Jim Higgins, Bill Johnson, Kara McGuire Minar

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the July 12, 2011 meeting were approved by unanimous vote.

2. Five Year Strategies and Objectives

The Committee reviewed the draft Five Year Objectives and Strategies as discussed at the July 12 meeting. The Committee decided to make modifications to the draft to:

- a. Lengthen the time necessary to work with state representatives to finalize the ETA designation to include 2013, reflecting what the actual legislative time frame could be;
- b. Clarify the wording of the objective relative to expanding the EDC's mission to include businesses elsewhere in Harvard and not just those in the C district, to indicate that this would support the entirety of the local economy;
- c. Adjust the time frames for working on infrastructure in the C district and clarify that these objectives are to provide an assessment to get the Town to a point where a decision can be made as to whether to go forward or not; and
- d. Add an objective to provide an assessment and recommendation in 2015 as to the feasibility of actual substantial commercial development in the C district.

Ms. Minar suggested that the EDC might want to consider a split tax rate where businesses would pay a higher rate. Mr. Johnson stated that previous groups have looked at this and have determined that it would yield little revenue because there are so few businesses, and would be negative for businesses that pay their fair share already given the proportion of the tax revenue that goes toward the schools. He noted that it could be revisited in the future if there is substantial commercial growth.

Ms. Minar asked about the objective to consider modifications to the C district boundaries. Ms. Lazarus noted that the EDAT report noted that a good portion of the C district contains open space parcels and wetlands that can't be developed, so it doesn't necessarily make sense to include them in the district. She added that there are other outlying parcels that may make more sense residentially zoned, especially if the Town decides to concentrate new infrastructure in another area. Mr. Johnson noted the Town could concentrate on areas with infrastructure.

Mr. Johnson asked about the status of the signage review with the Planning Board. Ms. Minar stated the Board would like the EDC to do the legwork for any proposed changes, and the Board is willing to work on proposed modifications.

Mr. Maiore stated that the revised Objectives and Strategies would be transmitted to the Board of Selectmen by the end of the week.

3. Review of Sign Bylaws

It was noted that the compiling of information on the sign bylaws of other communities is nearly complete, and should be finished by the next meeting. Mr. Higgins updated the Committee on his efforts to find out from the businesses as to what their specific concerns/issues are with respect to signage, and didn't get much of a response. He noted that one issue that came out was that the bylaw needs to address signage for multiple businesses on one property.

Ms. Lazarus noted that one item that she noticed when looking at the other bylaws was that some communities provide a procedure for approving signage that exceeds the maximum in the bylaw via the Planning Board or other entity, and this is one way to address unique circumstances without sending the applicant for a variance.

Mr. Johnson stressed the need to educate voters as changes are proposed, possibly by providing illustrative examples.

4. Infrastructure Next Steps

Mr. Stamski noted that no new meetings had been held, but that he had revised numbers slightly based on new distance measurements and contingencies. He noted that the same number was the outcome. He stated that Devens would welcome the sewer flow to better run its treatment facility, and Ayer is looking to reduce the amount of capacity it has reserved. Mr. Johnson asked if Old Mill Rd. is the best route to Devens for sewer, noting that an overland route had also been mentioned before. Mr. Stamski replied that from a management standpoint, it is best to have it in a road. He noted that this would need to be discussed further, especially if it will be a private system.

5. Communication

Mr. Maiore noted that it is probably time to provide an update to the businesses via email, and asked about when the Committee should report next to the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen. Ms. Minar stated the EDC should let the Planning Board know when it has something to discuss, and suggested the first week in November as a possible meeting with the Board of Selectmen for this purpose.

Documents used at the meeting: Town of Harvard Economic Development Committee, Five-Year Objectives & Strategies, dated 9/7/11; Draft Minutes of the 7/12/11 EDC meeting

Adjourned: 8:30 pm

Submitted by: Elaine Lazarus

Approved: