

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

April 22, 1992

PRESENT: Chairman Shirley Ganem; members Robert Garland, Robert Grott, Barbara Jackson, Paul Kimball, Robert Murphy, Erik Piper, Tony Triolo, Tim Sullivan

ABSENT: Joan Lovering, Andy Milligan, Sharon Severy, Mike Toomey

GUEST: Bruce Mayberry, consultant on the Master Plan

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m. Mr. Mayberry was introduced to members present. He is here to answer questions on the results of the Community Survey.

Tony Triolo said he would like to know how townspeople feel about economic development, and what else they were concerned about that would affect the committee's deliberations.

Bruce Mayberry responded that he was surprised at how much support there was for economic development here compared to other towns he has worked with. He recalls a 60-70% positive response.

Mr. Triolo asked if the favorable response could be due to the present recession, and if attitudes might change later.

Mr. Mayberry said this could happen. In answer to open-ended questions many singled out high property taxes as a concern, he said. From his own experience, he said, taxes here were not that high by comparison with other towns, though they had increased significantly.

The question about overcoming weaknesses, Mr. Mayberry recalled, asked whether the Town should do something. Only a small number described lack of economic development as a strength. His answers are general because he hasn't written the final report yet. It should be ready next week.

The year-round people, he said, were more in favor of some direct action to expand the economic base. But they stopped short of advocating promotion--recruiting entire industries, advertising, offering incentives. Rather they wanted to improve the infrastructure, keep high-quality services, plan for growth.

Mr. Mayberry saw the majority as pro-business and wanting Town government to be more "open-minded," while also performing a regulatory function. Other groups in Town were also seen as anti-business.

Mr. Triolo said he inferred from this that most people wanted the Town to provide leadership.

Mr. Mayberry added that for the majority, their support for expanding the economic base depended on preserving historic qualities, environmental integrity, and visual appeal--particularly in downtown. Some people

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referred to second homes as an industry that produces more taxes than it costs in services. It's not just creating jobs, these respondents indicated.

Robert Murphy said that his reading of the Community Survey results indicated that the EDC has approval from the townspeople to proceed with economic development. No one wants that to change Wolfeboro into Revere Beach, however.

Bob Grott said apparently people want economic development to go only so far. But how do you distinguish between facilitating it and promoting it? At what point do we stop? What are the numbers for these opinions?

Mr. Mayberry said he had grouped responses according to the degree of activism desired: level one wanted no action taken; level two wanted to actively preserve the quality of life and the environment, thus making the town attractive to new businesses; level three would expand the infrastructure to accommodate new businesses while improving the climate, and level four would actively pursue economic development through promotion.

Mr. Mayberry said 34% were for expansion and 22% for promotion; therefore 56% favor positive actions. Tim Sullivan pointed out that these percentages reflect the opinions of those who answered the questionnaire, not necessarily those of the entire Town.

Mrs. Ganem said that the response was 26%, leaving 74% who did not respond.

Mrs. Jackson mentioned the negative response to spending money on the Wolfeboro Airport and asked if this translated into a possible negative response to an industrial park. Mr. Mayberry answered that general questions usually evoked a positive response, but when you specified costs the responses became more negative.

Wolfeboro's weaknesses, Mr. Mayberry said, also fell into four categories: physical, socio-economic, attitudinal, municipal problems. The Town government's perceived attitude toward attracting new business, as reflected in regulations and their enforcement, was seen as the greatest weakness by respondents, Mr. Mayberry added.

A discussion followed on which groups of people wanted a more favorable attitude toward business and which favored the status quo.

Responding to a question from Mrs. Jackson, Mr. Mayberry said he interpreted much of the apparently anti-business sentiment as actually anti-land development. Business was used as an over-all term in the questionnaire, he explained.

Mr. Kimball asked if perhaps respondents assumed active promotion would

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necessarily cost money and were less enthusiastic for that reason. Also, can you measure the attitude toward economic growth by the fact that this scored just above the dump in response?

Mr. Mayberry said he thought people made a direct connection between planning and regulation. Planning, he concluded, became the lightning rod for frustration over regulations.

Referring to the Routh 28 Committee's work, Mr. Triolo said that people wanted controls put on business development along Route 28. These, he pointed out, would have to be developed by none other than the Planning Board.

A discussion of the planning and regulation function followed. Some members questioned if these had gone too far, others argued for some kind of control, and others complained that decisions took too long. Each gave examples of their experiences.

Mrs. Ganem mentioned a check-off list of requirements to help applicants get through the process faster. She said this had been proposed in 1986.

Mr. Sullivan responded that people were willing to jump through three or four hoops, but not 20. It got too expensive and that's why business people shied away.

Mr. Kimball reported that he suggested to the Planning Board they solicit public input to arrive at a more balanced approach. Policy was being made by a small group of people instead of by the public at large, he said. In a town of 5,000 people, only two volunteered to serve on the Planning Board. Mrs. Ganem added that the Selectmen keep appointing the same people.

Mr. Grott observed that one Planning Board can process applications quickly and another can take five times as long. Mr. Sullivan said the same board approved some projects quickly and others slowly, even when both met all requirements. Mr. Triolo described his application for Wickers Sportswear as trouble-free. Several other members argued that it went through easily because of unusually favorable circumstances.

Several members commented that if the perception of the Wolfeboro Planning Board as an obstacle to business is accurate, the Town is in trouble. Erik Piper said he had run into a delay of six months in another town. Mr. MMayberry added that all towns have regulations.

Mrs. Ganem said that when she came to Wolfeboro 31 years ago there were 3,500 people. Now there are 4,500 year-round.

Mr. Grott said that although the number of buildings downtown had not changed much in 31 years, the services available had increased--longer

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hours over a longer season.

Mr. Murphy said that in the past six months he has seen a change in attitude toward business in Wolfeboro. The townspeople and the Planning Board are generally in favor of economic development, he said, and have put only minor restrictions on the Committee. We are at an opportune time to do something and it's just a question of what.

Mr. Mayberry said developing a set of goals is the purpose of the Master Plan and he wants to develop them. He gave Mrs. Ganem a list of his objectives in revising the Master Plan.

Mr. Triolo described his view of what is needed: an industrial park and active recruiting of businesses outside this area as tenants. He mentioned some of the incentives that already exist and others that could be provided by the Town.

Mr. Murphy offered a marketing suggestion: add another sign at the Southern entrance to Wolfeboro that says something like: "Enjoy Wolfeboro all year, move your business here." Put such a sign at the junction of 109 and 28. The EDC could have an insert in the Chamber of Commerce packets that invites queries, he added. The Chamber sends out 2,000 packets a year. For existing businesses, the EDC could mount a Walking Tour map on a kiosk in the dock area, Mr. Murphy suggested, identifying businesses. It could be electronic, requiring only the pressing of a button to light up types of businesses like restaurants.

Mr. Triolo suggested the Chamber of Commerce could do this, but Mr. Murphy said that since the dock was public property the Town should do it.

Mr. Murphy also suggested the Information Booth opposite the Center Street-South Main Street intersection should provide more information.

A discussion followed on the timing of promotion. Mr. Kimball favored waiting until we have "more product on the shelf" to promote. Mr. Murphy wanted to start now, with the tourist season about to start.

Mrs. Ganem pointed out that Mr. Mayberry was there for only an hour and they should make maximum use of his services, leaving discussions among themselves for later.

Mr. Mayberry asked if there was a business directory available giving major companies in Town, number of employees, and their type of activity. The Chamber of Commerce and N.H. Department of Unemployment Security could supply this, several members responded. Mrs. Ganem suggested the school system be included as the largest employer in Town.

Mr. Mayberry also asked for an inventory of developable land zoned for commercial-industrial use. Several members offered to provide such information from different sources.

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Along with the inventory Mr. Mayberry wanted acreage, road frontage, water, sewer, electric availability. Most of this appeared in tax records, he said. Mrs. Ganem said the Town was preparing an updated map, based on the latest re-evaluation, that would provide such information.

Mr. Mayberry said he'd like to see how much commercial development has taken place in Wolfeboro over the past 10 years, using building permits. From this he could project future development, and gauge how much more could be supported by the land that's still available. This would allow the Committee to say whether there is enough land available to meet the need.

The major question for the Master Plan is what kind of businesses you want to promote. People want environmental quality, which suggests service-type businesses, Mr. Mayberry said.

This led to a general discussion of jobs and the local economy.

Mr. Mayberry said that the survey indicated second-home owners preferred promoting tourism. Year-round people preferred expanding businesses. Mr. Sullivan responded to the tourism preference that there weren't enough places to sleep.

Members discussed the history and present status of vacationers in Town, as well as their impact if more were encouraged to come here during the summer. Beach use was also discussed.

Seasonal people, Mr. Mayberry said, expressed the feeling that they were disenfranchised. Taxes are going up without any additional services.

People are concerned about taxes, Mr. Kimball said. And they don't want more expensive government.

Mrs. Jackson questioned the effect of revaluation on taxes in Wolfeboro. Mr. Mayberry explained how the State adjusts taxes each year by setting an equalization rate--a percentage of market value. Wolfeboro falls about midway in the list of waterfront communities, he said, and in his opinion compares favorably with them considering the services we enjoy.

Mrs. Jackson asked what Mr. Mayberry thought of a shopping center coming to Wolfeboro, having watched such development in Laconia. He answered that not much happened in his eight years in Laconia--the development took place outside in Belmont, and Gilford. It drained downtown Laconia, but part of this might be due to letting downtown go uncared for.

In Wolfeboro, Mr. Mayberry added, the survey showed 68% of residents bought groceries out of town and 70 % bought clothing elsewhere. Several members thought these percentages would be higher if more younger people

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had answered the survey.

Mr. Mayberry volunteered that he was doing an impact study of a Wal-Mart store on Hudson, N.H. Their strategy is to locate in suburban and rural areas, attracting customers from a wide area.

Mr. Kimball asked what Mr. Mayberry needed from the committee and when. He answered: population, housing, and economic development information in that order. The first draft of the population section should be ready at the end of May, he said. He would like the Committee to review anything he does, helping him form a consensus on the big picture of what's wanted. He enumerated some of the information he will collect.

Mr. Murphy asked what other towns Wolfeboro's size, with similar characteristics, have done. Mr. Mayberry said they were doing about what Wolfeboro was going--there are a lot of economic development committees out there. The poor economy seems to have stimulated concern over lack of growth. Towns ahead of Wolfeboro may have established a development corporation that can borrow and receive money, become a developer on its own terms, sets conditions, and sells to other developers or businesses. It helps incoming businesses get going and promotes growth through literature and listings in the State's data bank.

Mr. Mayberry responded to a question that his function was to analyze and describe what was wanted for the Master Plan. The Town, he believed, wanted to go from there. He would only make some general recommendations.

If the committee is looking for direction, Mr. Mayberry said, there are many models out there. He mentioned Somersworth as an example: They have an industrial park in which every building falls under some architectural covenant. They sell below market prices as an incentive.

Mr. Grott raised the question of a labor supply. The census is coming out with this kind of data shortly, including figures on Wolfeboro. There are also State, County, and Town data, Mr. Mayberry answered.

Robert Garland asked Mr. Mayberry: At what speed should the Committee move. The response was "cautiously." Short-term, promote what you have. Long-term, collect the facts carefully and make conscious decisions.

Mr. Murphy asked if Mr. Mayberry could later provide the Committee with any documentation on Wolfeboro's characteristics that could be used for promotional purposes. The answer was that his work on the Master Plan would not be directly usable for promotion. The Town would need to take off from the Master Plan.

What Mr. Mayberry said he needed from the Committee was an indication of which direction it wanted the Town to go. They could use past goals from the previous Master Plan as a starting point. They could also use the Locational Assessment Matrix forms, copies of which he handed out. Mr.

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Mayberry left at 8:27 p.m.

Mrs. Ganem asked who would attend the UNH Symposium on Rural Commercial Development at Pease, with Rick Chellman as a speaker. Mrs. Jackson and Mr. Kimball will be going.

Mrs. Ganem mentioned another at the Center of NH, titled Energizing Economic Development, on May 5th. It deals more with energy.

Mrs. Ganem reported complaints about the Committee's 7 p.m. meeting time. A discussion followed. It was moved and seconded to hold future meetings on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month at 7:30 a.m., preferably in the First N.H. Bank. In May this would be May 13 and 27.

Mr. Sullivan suggested the committee have an agenda for each meeting. Mrs. Ganem responded that the agenda for the next one would be Committee Reports.

Mrs. Jackson questioned whether the Committee's allowance for secretarial reporting would last very long with two meetings per month. The recording secretary said that with the Route 28 Committee meeting weekly and this committee meeting twice monthly he would be overloaded.

Mr. Sullivan said he thought the Committee should proceed slowly to avoid making mistakes. With the economy in a valley now, this is the time to plan for future growth. Right now we have no place to put new businesses. He expressed concern about putting signs at the North and South entrances to the Town, as proposed earlier.

Mr. Triolo supported the sign idea as a starting point and urged a marketing effort now. The EDC, Mr. Triolo said, is procrastinating.

A general discussion followed on the pace of promoting new industrial and commercial development.

Mrs. Ganem adjourned the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Erik H. Arctander  
Recording Secretary

