

# ASHLAND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

## MEETING MINUTES August 31, 2015 6:30 pm Ashland Fire Station

### **Steering Committee Members Present**

Susan MacLeod, Cheryl Cox (Planning Board ex-officio), Steve Felton (BOS ex-officio), Benoit Lamontagne,

### **Absent without Notice**

Lee Nichols, Superintendent (Ashland Electric Department)

### **Ad Hoc Committee Members Present**

Scott Stephens (Central NH Chamber of Commerce), Jae Demers, Eli Badger (Housing Standards Board), David Toth (Water & Sewer Commissioner), Kathleen DeWolfe (Conservation Commission)

### **Others present**

Fran Newton, Norm DeWolfe

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 pm by Chairperson MacLeod.

A motion was made by Beno Lamontagne and seconded by Steve Felton to approve the minutes from the July 27, 2015 meeting.

Sub-committee updates were provided prior to the meeting and are summarized below.

### **GIS Sub-committee Update**

Members: Steve Felton, Michelle Roberts, Norm DeWolfe, Eli Badger

Steve Felton provided the following updates on GIS steering committee and Grant pursuit options:

- **GIS Steering Committee**
- Recent conversations with Michelle Roberts has her progressing well on GIS tax mapping project
- Michelle will meet with the GIS steering committee the week of 9/7 to review progress and offer input on examples of different layers of info to benefit other town departments.
- We will pursue select board approval of a presentation to department heads and other groups such as conservation committee prior to the 9/21 select board meeting start.
- Presentation will focus on presenting key points of current status of GIS, practical uses of the system in laymen terms, and next steps and timelines
- **Grants**

- Need to form a subcommittee to have access to more resources to pursue grants in a timelier manner.
- Still need to pursue cost estimates from engineering consulting groups
- Should consider inviting Glenn and George Hunton /CDFA to upcoming subcommittee or AECD meeting
- Recent feedback from Glenn Coppelman (NCC Senior Economic Planner) relative to EDA planning grant:
  - We must come up with at least 50% of the project cost from non-federal sources (CDBG is OK).
  - We cannot count any money spent, or work done, prior to an EDA grant award.
  - Once an award is made, any contracted services must be put out to bid per federal guidelines.
  - Town employee work on the project can be considered cash match, at their fully burdened pay rate.
  - Time spent by community volunteers on the project can be counted at the rates of \$50/hour for professional individuals and \$35/hour those performing administrative work. We would have to estimate this up front at time of application, and then document it as the project proceeds.

It was recommended that a grant sub-committee be established. The following people agreed to participate: Beno Lamontagne agreed to participate to the extent his position will allow, Mardean Badger was nominated, the new town administrator when hired will be asked to participate, and others to be determined.

### **Marketing Sub-committee Update**

Members: Cheryl Cox, Jae Demers, Fran Newton, Lee Nichols

Cheryl Cox provided the following updates:

- It was decided the invitation will go out to all Ashland businesses and has been modified accordingly. Jae will format it to look like an invitation. It will go out via the AEDC town email after final review at the next meeting. We will ask for RSVP from attendees by Sept. 15 and will use the AEDC mailbox to have them reply. Cheryl will monitor the replies.
- Fran wrote a draft agenda. Norm will be invited to the next meeting to discuss how we will structure the meeting.
- We agreed to provide name tags for participants. There won't be enough time to have everyone introduce themselves. We will provide index cards/paper for participants to write down questions and a comment box. Jae will provide the paper and comment box. We should provide a handout about the AEDC at the meeting, Whitten Woods and other positive things happening in Ashland.
- Dunkin Donuts, Bob's Surefine and Common Man will provide refreshments and water.

As discussed during this meeting, we have about forty people who have verbally agreed to attend, including town representatives. The comment box will be used to follow up with attendees on any questions. Cheryl created an "Ashland Businesses" address book in the town e-mail to be used to send invitations.

The invitation will include several questions that are offered to begin the conversation. Every effort will be made to focus attention on positive outlooks for the future. Obvious topics that could take up a lot of time and could not begin to be solved at this meeting, such as taxes and parking, will be addressed at the beginning of the meeting.

Some discussion took place about business tax credits, how they work and how they can benefit town projects. There are local businesses currently purchasing tax credits from the state. Beno agreed to make a brief presentation at the meet and greet about the availability of tax credits.

### **Land Available (Asset Mapping) Sub-committee Update**

Members: Susan MacLeod, Eli Badger, Lee Nichols

Susan MacLeod provided the following updates:

- A set of full size maps of the commercial and industrial zones have been obtained from LRPC. There are a few corrections to be made on the boundary lines of zones, but all the lots are clearly identified, and GIS data files for the lots were also sent.
- The subject of empty storefronts was brought up at the end of the previous meeting. My personal opinion on how this fits into economic development:
  1. This is a matter of private owners, some of whom have shown no inclination to sell or lease their properties; some have overvalued them which discourages potential buyers/leasers; some have been difficult to contact; some of the properties are in poor shape and the investment in them would be greater than the return at this point in time. For example, I have spoken with 3 people who have been interested in the Mr. Chucks building. All 3 said the owner (phone number posted in window and in Jae's brochure) was unresponsive, or slow to respond (call in April, tour of building in June). Matt stated that the price was considerably higher than other similar properties he has looked at, especially given the condition of the building. A number of people have also been interested in the old bike shop on Rte. 3, but have been unsuccessful (including one who came before the Planning Board ready to start a business). If you check the real estate listings for commercial properties online, only one is listed (the Leyton building).
  2. AEDC is focusing on the marketing of existing assets and the enhancement of opportunities for current businesses to remain and/or expand, and for new businesses to locate here; a goal is to increase the valuation and appeal of the town overall. Other community assets should be included, such as greater recreational opportunities and amenities – Whitten Woods (very likely to happen), an improved Booster Club with well-managed ball fields and a revived Memorial Park for example. The school's award of excellence is another asset to be promoted.
  3. This situation is not unique to Ashland. Seven stores on Main St. in Meredith closed this past winter – not a good enough summer to get them through the winter months was reason stated. One interviewee for the TA position when asked his impression of Ashland, noted some empty storefronts, also saying it was something that he saw everywhere he traveled in the country. The regional Chamber of Commerce (Scott) was also confirmed it is everywhere in the region. Even with the big projects in Bristol, there are empty storefronts on the rebuilt square and Main St.

As discussed during the meeting, the role of the AEDC is not to be brokers for un-occupied properties in town.

## **General Discussion**

Lee Nichols and Norm DeWolfe meet with Beno Lamontagne and representatives from Honeywell recently. They visited several sites in town. Beno shared that he received very positive feedback related to Lee's extensive knowledge and the fact Norm, as a member of the town's board of selectmen met with the group.

The deed restrictions on the Tri-County CAP building, which is for sale, will be discussed at the next School Board meeting. All interested parties are encouraged to attend.

On the topic of committee budgets: There was some discussion about the best way to share documents, utilizing SharePoint, Google Drive, Dropbox or some other service and the need for the AEDC to have it's own laptop. There are some questions and concerns related to cost and budget concerns. Scott Stephens stated the Central NH Chamber of Commerce uses Dropbox and recommended it as far as the amount of information that can be stored, and the cost and security functions. Further research and discussion is needed. The AEDC will again request a minimal of \$500 for a budget amount.

An invitation to a meeting hosted by the NCIC, Northern Community Investment Corporation ([www.ncic.org](http://www.ncic.org)) was received through the Town Administrator's email. It is scheduled for Oct. 8 and several people are expected to attend.

Beno recommended the AEDC consider looking into applying for 501c status. The benefits would be allowing the group to apply for additional types of grants, raising funds and other benefits.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:47 pm.

The next meeting will be held on Monday, **Sept. 28, 2015 at 6:30 pm** at the Ashland Fire Station, ***unless notified otherwise.***

*Minutes submitted by Cheryl Cox*