

MINUTES of the ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
February 15, 2023 @ 5:00 p.m.

Committee Members present:

Councilor Donald Austin, Chairman
Councilor Robert Gibson, Vice Chair
Councilor Richard R. Michaud
Councilor Matt Gerding

Staff Members present:

City Manager Bob Belmore
Finance Director Scott Smith
Director of Planning & Community Development
Michelle Mears
City Clerk Kristen LaPanne

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Austin at 5:09 p.m.

APPROVE MINUTES OF JANUARY 17, 2023

Councilor Gerding made a motion to accept the January 17, 2023 minutes as submitted. The motion was seconded by Councilor Michaud and passed 4-0.

CITY OWNED PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT

Chairman Austin reported that during the City Council Goal Setting Session held on January 30, 2023, the Council agreed to move the former Breton's Cleaners property and Somersworth Plaza's parking lot to the Economic Development Committee to discuss and bring back ideas for the properties.

a. 1 Winter Street, former Breton's Cleaners Site

Chairman Austin summarized the recent interest in development of the former Breton's Cleaners property, stating that the Council rejected the proposal from Boston Pie Company to develop a Domino's Restaurant on the property and in more recent conversations with ZCapital Investments, it has been confirmed that the developer is not willing to move forward unless the City agrees to fund the moving of the sewer line that runs through the middle of the property. Chairman Austin mentioned the alternatives that were discussed during the Goal Setting Session including the addition of parking with the possibility of metering or permit parking, creating green space with a sitting area or renting the space to food trucks.

Councilor Gibson asked that the Committee revisit the option to sell the property to the Boston Pie Company to present to the full Council, adding that there is mention of developing a Domino's just over the bridge in Berwick, Maine. He added that moving forward with parking or green space would have a minimal budget impact to the City but he liked the potential to earn revenue from a Domino's development. City Manager Belmore offered to confirm with the Town of Berwick or the Boston Pie Company regarding the potential development of Domino's in Berwick. During the Goal Setting Workshop, Councilors questioned if there would be an issue with the potential to utilize the space as green space or parking after having received the Brownfields Grant, Manager Belmore confirmed with the State & EPA that there is no issue.

Councilor Gerding commented that he was glad that Manager Belmore contacted NH DES and is in favor of the alternatives, adding that he would not vote in favor of reconsidering Domino's for that space. Councilor Michaud is also in favor of the alternatives and likes the idea of keeping the property as City owned.

Chairman Austin commented that financially, Domino's was the best option at the time for the City and the developer was willing to provide residential units above the first floor commercial space and the developer expressed a willingness to take over the monitoring wells. Chairman Austin stated that he is not fully in favor of Domino's in that space, but does agree that it is an option that should be considered and brought back to full Council if it is still available. He commented that the alternatives discussed do not offer much of a financial incentive but may be more fitting for what the Council would want.

Councilor Gibson commented that he understands the Council was not in favor of Domino's developing on the property due to local feedback, however, with the potential for them to develop in Berwick they will attract Somersworth residents and he feels it should be brought to the Council for consideration as it could provide a financial benefit to the City. Councilor Gerding stated that he would prefer not to go against the feedback from local residents and business owners and would like to give them something that is needed such as parking over the development of a Domino's.

Discussion continued with the possibility of other small development opportunities and putting out an RFP/RFQ that specifies the City is not willing to move the sewer lines to see what type of development comes about, the Committee agreed and will wait to confirm the status from the Boston Pie Company and Z Capital before moving forward.

b. Somersworth Plaza

City Manager Belmore asked the Committee if they had a specific direction, they would like the City to move towards with the property and what type of information City staff could gather pertaining to the Plaza property. Councilor Gibson asked if there were any restrictions on the property and Manager Belmore confirmed that the Wentworth Douglas Hilltop Family Practice building has a certain number of designated parking spaces per their lease agreement with the City. Manager Belmore explained that the City owns the parking lot, the back of the building and the façade. Chairman Austin requested that the City Manager provide the Committee with a copy of the Charrette that was completed a few years back for the property.

Councilor Gerding stated that he sat on the past Plaza Commission and would like to review previous meeting minutes to review past discussions and ideas for future discussion of the Plaza property.

SIGNAGE: WAYFINDING/HDC

City Manager Belmore reported that the City had budgeted \$15,000 for wayfinding signage for Downtown Somersworth. Director Mears provided the Committee with a memorandum that included examples of vehicular directional and Historic District signage. There was discussion pertaining to having vehicular and walking signs downtown identifying the direction to find City Hall, Library, Noble Pines Park, Post Office, etc. and potential locations of where to hang the signs. Director Mears mentioned that she is waiting for a quote from Sundance Sign and noted that there is a 12-week lead time to install the signs; the signs are planned to be installed on the current standing light posts in the downtown area.

Councilor Gerding asked if the City should consider budgeting for a future study pertaining to driving signage. Manager Belmore suggested that SRPC may be able to do it for little to no cost, he will get back to the Committee with more information.

MISCELLANEOUS

City Manager Belmore reported that the bid draft regarding the former Police Station has been prepared and asked the Committee if there were any specifications or requirements they might wish to add. There was discussion about adding language that would require development within a specified time, the Committee opted to leave that sort of requirement out and agreed that the risk of the building sitting for an extended period of time without being developed after purchased is not likely. The Committee agreed not to add specifications or requirements.

ADJOURN

Councilor Michaud made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gerding and passed 4-0. Meeting adjourned at 6:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen LaPanne, City Clerk