

MINUTES of the ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
March 4, 2024 @ 6:00 p.m.

Committee Members present: Councilor Paul Goodwin, Chairman
Councilor Robert Gibson, Vice Chair
Councilor Richard R. Michaud
Councilor Crystal Paradis-Catanzaro

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 Goodwin at 6:00 p.m.

APPROVE PAST MEETING MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 5, 2024

Councilor Michaud made a motion to accept the February 5, 2024 minutes as submitted. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gibson and passed 4-0.

REVIEW DRAFT ZONING AMENDMENTS

Councilor Goodwin began by reviewing the provided memorandum and the proposed draft Zoning amendments which would revise the motor vehicle service-related uses within the Residential and Commercial District along High Street and Route 108. The amendments affect Auto Convenience Market, Motor Vehicle Repair Garage/Station, Automobile Sales and Motor Vehicle Services from Special Exceptions to Prohibited within the Table of Uses, Table 4.A.5. Additionally, the memorandum provided by City staff stated that a large buffer would be created regarding auto related services next to Residential Zoning Districts and that automated bay doors be required as part of the Site Plan review approval process.

Councilor Goodwin stated that the amendments were exactly what he was wanting to see, he added that during his time on the Planning Board, he heard complaints from residents of loud noises from repair shops working on vehicles and them not closing their bay doors.

Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro stated that she is in favor of the Zoning amendments as there seems to be an increase in the number of motor vehicle related businesses coming to the area and she worries about environmental issues. Councilor Goodwin agreed, he added that those parcels of land can be more difficult to redevelop due to the potential of ground contaminates. He would encourage the City Council to adopt the Zoning amendments and he hopes that the City Master Plan Housing Chapter can be revisited to expand to build more housing in that area.

Councilor Gibson made a motion to support an Ordinance to amend Chapter 19 Zoning Ordinance Table of Uses, Table 4.A.5 regarding Motor Vehicle Service-Related uses within the Residential/Commercial District. The motion was seconded by Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro and passed 4-0.

DISCUSS COMMUNITY MEETING REGARDING CITY LOT AT 1 WINTER STREET

Councilor Goodwin recalled that the City Council had previously discussed the reuse of 1 Winter Street including ideas of parking, green space or food truck stalls. After further consideration, it was determined that, for a number of reasons, those ideas may not be what is best for that property. During the last Committee meeting, the Economic Development Committee introduced the idea of hosting a community meeting to solicit abutters and other interested residents by engaging them in what they envision for development at 1 Winter Street. Councilor Goodwin suggested that, in lieu of this Committee's next scheduled meeting in April, that it instead host the Community Meeting for public input regarding 1 Winter Street. He confirmed that he would want to begin the meeting by being clear of the site limitations due to the sewer line that runs through the center of the property, the granite retaining wall, and the monitoring wells as well as previous ideas brought forward by Committee and Council.

The Committee agreed to schedule the Community Meeting for public input on Thursday, April 11th at 7:00 p.m.

PRIORITIZATION OF GOALS AND ASSIGNMENT OF NEXT STEPS

Councilor Goodwin reviewed the list of goals identified at the previous Economic Development Committee meeting on February 5th. He asked that the Committee determine priority levels for each goal using low, medium or high grading. Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro noted that some of the goals have dependance on other things, for example, the parking assessment goal should wait for the results of the Strafford Regional Planning Commission's upcoming parking study results of the City's downtown area. The Committee agreed.

Councilor Goodwin and the Committee determined that *the revision of the Chapter 31, Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive and NH RSA 79-E* is high priority and could be coordinated with the City's Master Plan Housing Chapter. Director Mears confirmed that a draft of the Housing Chapter is available on the City's website and includes the provisions of the updates to NH RSA 79-E.

Councilor Goodwin grouped *researching a land bank and Industrial Development Authority (IDA)* in one goal. He suggested grading it as low due to the fact that this is a long-term goal that is not expected to be quick or cheap. Councilor Gibson inquired about the IDA. Councilor Goodwin stated that from his understanding, the City of Somersworth has the authority to create one per City Charter, however, it was never created within the City. City Manager Belmore clarified that the City's IDA may have existed for a short period of time and then the Strafford Economic Development Corporation (SEDC) took its place here in Somersworth and later morphed into covering the entire Strafford Region and moved their offices to Dover. He also stated that the City of Somersworth has a Board of Director memberships with the Great Falls Development Corporation; and he and Director Mears sit on the Board. Director Mears mentioned that she has been in contact with a representative of SEDC who is open to attending a future Committee meeting to share what they do.

The Committee discussed *housing conversations* related to zoning of modular housing and other general housing and listed this goal as high priority. Director Mears stated that the City has a grant that will fund the Strafford Regional Planning Commission to conduct an audit of the City's Zoning Ordinance and to provide amendment recommendations. Councilor Goodwin commented that it would be ideal for the Zoning Ordinance audit to coordinate with the City's Master Plan and the Mayor's Housing Task Force.

Councilor Goodwin suggested that the Committee list *re-branding and signage* as high priority, he suggested grouping *wayfinding* with this goal. He acknowledged the Historic District Commission working on the beautification of the City's Historic District and adding signage, he added that he believes that it should be an ongoing process of improving and reinventing Somersworth. Councilor Goodwin talked about continuing to update the City website, increasing the City's online and social media presence and engagement, and recommended codifying the look and

feel of the City's signage and logo. He stated that he is not in favor of the current vibe and he mentioned that some businesses use graphic designers to assist in creation of logos and signs depending what is wanted. Councilor Gibson suggested engaging with the Community by requesting public design submissions. The Committee agreed that the idea could be a fun way to engage the residents and there was some discussion of reasons for concern of public submissions. Councilor Goodwin noted that the Committee could determine a number of wayfinding signage to make it more manageable such as 5 signs per year.

Councilor Goodwin moved on to discuss a *part-time economic development position* and added *parking enforcement* with the possibility of sharing those positions with a neighboring community such as Berwick, Rochester or Dover. At this time, the Committee agreed to grade the needs for a part-time economic position as low priority due to the tax cap constraints. Councilor Michaud suggested leaving this goal as an item on the agenda to be discussed in the future. Councilor Gibson asked that the Committee revisit parking on High Street in front of Fold'd Community Diner because he has had conversations with the owner regarding lack of parking on weekends for their patrons. Councilor Goodwin stated that the City doesn't have a full-time parking enforcement officer, but he would consider increasing more parking enforcement funding in needed areas. He also added that the parking stalls could also be shortened allowing more spaces for cars to park.

Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro inquired about parking enforcement during the weekends and if the City has tried to look for someone to cover those hours when businesses are at their busiest. City Manager Belmore stated that the Parking Enforcement Officer is a relatively new position having been around approximately five years and has been budgeted as a part-time position since its inception. He added that, in his experience, it can be difficult to hire people to work part-time, especially nights and weekends. Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro questioned if it is possible for current patrol officers to monitor the parking. City Manager Belmore stated that it may be possible, however, Police Department staff are busy and with no parking meters, officers would need to use the method of chalking tires making the monitoring take more of their time. There was additional discussion regarding the use of parking meters and mobile applications that may be low cost in assisting with the parking process.

City Manager Belmore suggested adding a map detailing available parking on the City's Website and providing it to local businesses who can also add it to their websites or social media. He added that, for example, when he visits a City like Portsmouth, he may need to park blocks away from his destination and walk to it. Councilor Goodwin agreed and he added that no parking is a perception and there needs to be an educational component and signage component for the public. Director Mears mentioned the parking study that the Strafford Regional Planning Commission will be conducting as well as updating the City's GSI maps.

After further discussion regarding the need for additional parking enforcement and the process, the Committee agreed to list parking enforcement as a high priority pending the results of the Strafford Regional Planning Commission parking study. Councilor Gibson commented that we need to work on enticing driver-by-shoppers to stop at local business. Councilor Goodwin agreed and suggested the addition of public parking signs along drivers' routes.

Regarding the goal of *looking into what type of businesses we have and what we could use*, he suggested rewording the goal as *business clusters or targeting assessment* and giving it a low priority because it is beyond this Committees ability at this time. Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro commented that she would like to see the City have a downtown grocer, she also added that she was made aware of a catering company looking to move into the Somersworth Plaza but they decide to backout due to the condition of the back of the building. There was discussion regarding the City owning the Plaza's façade and parking lot but having no say over the leasing of businesses within the building.

Councilor Goodwin listed *biking/general mobility* as medium priority and expressed interest in digging into this goal and its potential. He hopes that the Master Plan will have an update relating to this goal.

Councilor Goodwin commented on *developers invited to meetings* and his interest in obtaining feedback from developers regarding their experience with the City and its processes. He stated that he wants to be strategic with requesting feedback and the Committee briefly discussed options such as an exit survey after they been through the Planning process for example.

Councilor Goodwin suggested listing *one-way traffic pattern for downtown* as low priority given the other more pressing priorities identified by the Committee at the moment.

Councilor Goodwin requested a future workshop with Great Falls Development Corporation (GFDC) and Strafford Economic Development Corporation (SEDC) to learn more about what they do and have to offer to the City.

MISCELLANEOUS

Councilor Goodwin notified the Committee that Chinburg Builders is planning to submit a site plan to develop apartments at 200 Main Street and the plan is expected to be submitted in April. He added that Chinburg Builders expects to also submit a request for Chapter 31, Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive (RSA 79-E).

ADJOURN

Councilor Paradis-Catanzaro made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gibson and passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 6:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen LaPanne City Clerk

GOALS AND PRIORITIZATION:

In Process

- Updating the Zoning Ordinance – Limiting car-oriented businesses

High Priority

- Revision of Chapter 31, Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive, which adopts the provisions of NH RSA 79-E
- Housing Conversations
- Re-branding/Signage & Wayfinding
- Parking Assessment and Enforcement

Medium Priority

- Biking/general mobility

Low Priority

- Researching land bank & Industrial Development Authority
- Part-time economic position
- Types of businesses the City has and what we could use

- One-way traffic pattern for Downtown