

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS TEAM

February 9, 2010 7:30 PM
Old Library, 7 Fairbank St., Harvard, MA

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Bill Johnson, Chairman, Michelle Catalina, Vice Chairman, Rick Maiore, Elaine Lazarus, Brian Smith

Joe Sudol, Peter Warren, Joe Hutchinson

The Minutes of the meeting on January 26, 2010 were approved by unanimous vote.

The Team reviewed a draft letter prepared by Bill to North Harvard residents, in order to update them on the progress to date and the next steps. Bill stated that EDAT should keep people involved and engaged in the process. He stated the Team should also discuss making a report to the Board of Selectmen. He recommended sending out the letter to residents and the press this week, and asked for feedback on the draft.

Joe stated that the letter implies that EDAT is done with the data collection phase, but it isn't as there is still more cost/benefit analysis and review of information needed. He recommended that EDAT look at the Master Plan to see what was recommended, and if the EDAT recommendations are not aligned with those, be prepared to explain why. He stated that EDAT should look at revenue that the Town receives now versus what it can expect in the future. He noted that the draft letter identifies certain properties by owner name, and recommended not including the names. He stated he is concerned that those owners will take this as a promise that the Town is going to approve plans and help them develop, and it could lead to litigation. He recommended that the Team not make zoning recommendations, as that would be the purview of the Planning Board. He noted that the EDAT needs to discuss the market as it relates to the available land. A discussion of obstacles to certain kinds of development ensued. Bill stated that the four areas identified with potential for future development should be listed in the letter, as it reflects what has been learned and discussed at public meetings. Rick stated there is a critical mass based on the parcel's location, size and characteristics, and capacity for creating the vision there because of those attributes. It was suggested that the addresses of the properties should also be included, so people could easily identify them. Elaine noted that if planning for the future of the area means that these parcels/areas have opportunities, they should be identified. It was noted that the letter makes no promises, only provides information. Some properties not listed were discussed. Brian noted that the EDAT may want to identify the nature of the current properties and their specific potential as well. Modifications to the letter were made, with the final wording to be developed by Michelle and Bill.

Bill stated he would like to improve the web site by posting this letter and the powerpoint presentation that was made to the Board of Selectmen, with a few edits. All were in agreement that it would be a good idea.

Bill stated he would like to engage with the public interactively to learn more relative to the look and feel of future development. He noted that if people feel that the Town can adequately control and achieve attractive development, it might help to lessen fears. He noted that it might be good to have possible looks for office parks, shopping plazas, assisted living, etc. The Team discussed the idea further, and it was felt that such an event/process would be beneficial. Brian will look at how other communities have done this successfully, Rick will talk to local architects Brent Mangel and Ron Ostberg for suggestions, and Bill will talk to local architect Wendy Magan for suggestions as well.

Members reported on action items from the last meeting. Michelle distributed a summary of findings from a meeting with Chris Ashley regarding sewer systems, looking at two alternatives for connecting a portion of Ayer Rd. to the sewer system at Devens: 1) a sewer line running through back land; and 2) a sewer line in Old Mill Rd. It was noted that cost estimates are incomplete because certain costs are unknown, such as what Devens would charge for the connection and certain equipment/facilities.

Rick stated he spoke to two property owners, both of whom have had plans prepared for new development. He stated that one said he would be willing to put toward a municipal sewer system the same amount he would have to spend on a new sewage disposal system. He stated it appears as though a bare minimum of 15 to 20 acres is needed for a shopping center with a 40,000 sq. ft. grocery store and satellite stores, for a total square footage of 80,000 to 100,000 sq. ft. He stated that the impetus for new development is coming from the landowners, not users or specific stores at this point. He noted that with respect to pharmacies, mail order prescriptions are becoming more common and pharmacies are becoming more like a convenience store, and this trend is likely to continue. He questioned where pharmacies will be 10 years from now. He noted that the same is true with respect to banks and on-line banking. He noted there is also a trend to include these services inside grocery stores. He stated he asked the owners what the major obstacles are to development at their location, and they cited the town's ratio of open space to lot size that is required in the zoning. He noted that if they were able to develop, their timeline would be 3 to 5 years optimistically, 5 to 7 years realistically. He noted that the Town could expect \$150,000 to \$200,000 in additional revenue from a shopping center, with additional revenue from secondary development.

Bill stated that he is still working with Eric O'Brien on looking at office parks and medical offices, and will report at the next meeting.

Elaine distributed information gathered on assisted living facilities, which have a wide size range and can include several use components. She noted that the municipal costs for police, fire and ambulance could be a concern, as well as the possibility that a facility could be non-profit and therefore tax exempt. A discussion of how such facilities are assessed was held. Elaine will gather additional information on the assessment model, specific facilities, water, sewer and parking demand, and whether/how such facilities can help or hurt the Town's 40B percentage.

A brief discussion was held with respect to state programs the Town could participate in, including joining an Economic Target Area and approving Tax Increment Financing agreements, in order to have access to state economic development resources.

Bill asked the Team to think about what kind of vision the EDAT will develop and whether it should include the recommendation that the Town will create a Development Authority or similar entity. It was noted that Brian will continue to investigate this area and will report on it at the next meeting.

Adjourned: 10:00 PM

Approved: February 23, 2010