

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD-HOC COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, December 18, 2018

1:00 PM

Conference Room 2nd Floor

Members Present:

Mitchell Greenwald, Chair
Bill Hutwelker, Swanzey Selectman
Keith Thibault, SCS
George Hansel, Councilor
George Foskett, BHG Masiello Real Estate
Joseph Walier, Walier Chevrolet
Jordan Benik, People's Linen
Phil Suter, Chamber of Commerce
Kendall Lane, Mayor
Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager
Jack Dugan, MEDC
Timothy Murphy, SWRPC

Staff Present:

Med Kopczynski, Economic Development,
Initiatives, and Special Projects Director

Members Not Present:

Dominic Perkins, Savings Bank of Walpole
Chris McIntosh, Clark-Mortenson
Gary Lamoureux, City Councilor

1. Call to Order- Roll Call

Chair Greenwald called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM and welcomed everyone to the meeting. Chair Greenwald read the Charter for the new members present.

Guests included Michael Bachelor, Director of Planning Town of Swanzey, Michael Brantley, the Town of Swanzey Administrator, Steve Bitel, the Chairman of Swanzey Economic Development Advisory Committee and Chris Coates, the County Administrator.

2. Approval of Minutes- November 20, 2019

Councilor Hansel made a motion to approve the minutes of November 20, 2018. Mayor Lane seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

3. Specific Topic-County Economic Development Efforts

Chair Greenwald stated the topic of this meeting is to discuss the County's economic development efforts and how all of these efforts are going to interplay with each other.

a. b. Tri-Town-Steven Bitel, Chairman of Swanzey Economic Development Advisory Committee

Chair Greenwald recognized Steve Bitel, Chairman of Swanzey Economic Development Advisory Board. Mr. Bitel stated that he will speak to two topics. The first is what the Town of Swanzey is doing and the other topic is what Tri-Town is doing.

Mr. Bitel stated that Tri-Town decided earlier this year, that they had to go through each town's budget cycle for grant process. He explained this was in order to raise the necessary funds to actually start doing things as opposed to talking about things. He noted that Swanzey is on a calendar year. The town of Swanzey is well into the budget process and has requested robust funding for the economic efforts within Swanzey. Mr. Bitel explained this would fund their share and contribution into Tri-Town and also fund efforts within the town in the two primary focused areas. The two areas are Safford Drive by the Keene Dillant-Hopkins Airport and the other work is undertaking a study on the Route 10 corridor in Swanzey heading towards Winchester. He stated the the first phase is water and sewer, which West Swanzey has both in limited quantities and to try and get more of a robust effort on Route 10. He noted this area is Route 10 south of Market Basket and Cheshire Horse.

Mr. Bitel then stated the Tri-Town effort is comprised of raising the funds, which they are well on their way of doing and is a line item in their budget for 2019. Mr. Bitel stated that Winchester has pursued various grants and waiting on final word. Winchester has an area to develop much like the airport area on Safford Drive but is actually bigger and better. Mr. Bitel noted this area was a gravel pit. He then stated that Winchester wished to have plans similar to what Swanzey did with Safford Drive.

Mr. Bitel reported that Hinsdale has the funding for Tri-Town on hold through their economic development corporation. Hinsdale is look to get everything funded after their town meeting and will move forward at that point.

Mr. Bitel stated the town of Swanzey's initial focus will be on Safford Drive and perhaps some with the airport which will include working with the City of Keene. The town of Winchester will focus on the new area known as Stone Mountain. The town of Hinsdale is concentrating on Route 119. He noted Hinsdale is a little in the holding pattern until the new bridge becomes real, which is three years out. Mr. Bitel noted that all of this will be the focus of the Tri-Town marketing efforts for the towns.

Chair Greenwald asked Mr. Bitel to explain the marketing efforts. Mr. Bitel responded they are thinking about hiring a part-time person to go out and actively market. He said they have spoken to a number of companies that offer this service. He said they have had a lot of talk and it has evolved into some sort of a budget. However, they cannot come up with any true plan. Mr. Bitel reported they have worked on a website but will need to be refined.

In addition, Mr. Bitel stated that they want to directly market these properties. He noted that having the proper zoning is the key.

Mayor Lane asked if all three towns are putting in similar amounts of money. Mr. Bitel responded it is based on each town's population. He noted the formula was replicated from Windham County in VT.

Chair Greenwald asked if the amount of funding for each town is public. Mr. Bitel responded it will start off at about \$40-50K per town. He noted there have been conversations with Chris Coates about bringing in other towns. Mr. Bitel stated that he saw this as a possibility as long as Swanzey has those services coming in and has their sites actively pushed.

Chair Greenwald thanked Mr. Bitel for his comments.

The City Manager commented that she has been fortunate to have worked with Mr. Bitel on economic development at the airport. She stated that she appreciates their Committee's work and their continued conversations about the TIF District. The City Manager stated as they move forward in working together it will include talk about ways to partner. Mr. Bitel reported that he has had conversation with Mr. Wozmak and he has come up with interesting grid that is a marketing tool. He noted that this marketing tool will be very positive for the airport. Mr. Bitel added that it makes having a larger hangar much more viable.

Mayor Lane added that the airport being where it is, as far as Swanzey is concerned is an asset that could be an attraction to businesses. He said Tri-Town has an advantage over Keene due to the amount of empty land that is flat and could be developed. Mayor Lane added that the difficulty is the infrastructure but simply having the land area gives something start working with.

b. Chris Coates-County Administrator

Chair Greenwald recognized the County Administrator, Chris Coates. Mr. Coates stated that shortly after he came into the position as County Administrator towns came to the County to ask how the County can best support them when it came to economic and community development. He noted the County did not have the expertise and still does not at this time for a couple of reasons. Mr. Coates explained they are looking for others to support the County in this endeavor. In addition, they do not have the expertise and are not into building bigger. Instead they are able to help make the situation dealt with in a way that makes the most sense across the board.

Mr. Coates reported there is an ambulance crisis in the County where services are not being met where every second counts. There needs to be a conversation with the surrounding communities and Keene to see how to best support that conversation moving forward.

Mr. Coates reported the County started with a conversation with towns such as Harrisville, Hinsdale, Winchester, Swanzey. He stated there are also citizens coming in from other towns such as Gilsum and Keene. The County moved forward and developed the Rural Development Alliance (RDA) that consists of Mr. Kopczyński, Mr. Dugan, Mr. Suter, Mr. Coates, Mr. Murphy and The City Manager. Mr. Coates reported they started to take a look at grants to try to

development an overall plan to strategize in dealing with the community. He stated that it is his belief that a healthy main street is a healthy Keene and a healthy Keene is a healthy County and vice versa. Mr. Coates noted the need to support the surrounding towns in order to move things forward.

Mr. Coates then referred back to the grants and reported that they did not receive the grants. However, they were able to become part of the Northern Border Regional Commission. He said that is something that is going to open up some opportunity for them to get grants. Mr. Coates noted that by looking at the economic indicators in different regions, the County is not too different from Sullivan County or Coos County. He noted these counties do have a community economic development person. Mr. Coates stated that Cheshire County needs to start organizing and move forward with working on supporting the surrounding towns. Mr. Coates reported with the Commissioner's support they went out and had a conversation with the UNH cooperative extension and Charlie French from the office spoke about what they are doing and what they could do. He said the Commissioner's took a look at that and they asked Mr. Coates to look at some other opportunities. Mr. Coates reported that he reached out to Mr. Dugan. Mr. Dugan will discuss what was said later on in the meeting.

Mr. Coates reported that Commissioner's decided to move forward with them putting monies in the budget to start developing a position for an economic development coordinator. He stated there is a job description but is a working document. The new hire will supplement existing development initiatives, MEDC and Tri-Town.

Mr. Coates stated the need for someone to be active in representing Cheshire County as a whole as well as the available parcels of land. The position will be a 6 month position. He noted projects such as the bridge in Hinsdale that will be completed in 2022 will open up opportunity to build out through Winchester. The budget for the new position will still need to be reviewed by the Cheshire County Delegation, a process that will take place in early 2019.

Mr. Dugan stated this is another example of local people stepping up to help move things forward. He stated that at MEDC they have had money set aside towards funding a regional position for several years. He said every time they reached outside the region to try to leverage it into larger commitments they were turned away. The USDA grant was turned down; the CDFR grant was turned down as well as the American Promise Grant.

Mr. Dugan complimented the local folks who have stepped up with money that is located in the tristate and surrounding counties.

Mr. Dugan noted that the person in this new position would be visiting local businesses and working closely with municipalities. In addition, they would be doing outreach and marketing to recruit businesses to region.

Mr. Murphy stated that he was very pleased that the County Commissioner's is backing this proposal because there is a need to get as much help as possible. He noted that one of the missing pieces is another planning initiative called the Comprehensive Economic Development for Southwest New Hampshire. He said this is an important document that aligns particular

projects and programs. If the program or project is included in the document it serves as a priority for certain federal funds that may not be eligible.

Mr. Coates added that any the partners of the RDA know in each town there are individuals in that know the story of the town and how they envision it moving forward. He said that everyone needs to understand those stories too because it cannot be a cookie cutter situation. Mr. Coates added that each community must be heard in order to help them grow.

Chair Greenwald stated that it seems like a lot of efforts are going out looking for money and sounds like a lot of overlap. He asked what the unifier is. Mr. Dugan responded that MEDC has a staff of two and they have very large and small projects. He explained that they do not have the infrastructure to go out and visit with businesses in the region or the budget to create marketing plans. Mr. Dugan explained that what they are trying to do is bring staff on and creative leverage to get those positions filled. He stated that with partnering with the County to do that and he does not think the money Tri-Town raised is wasted. Mr. Dugan noted that with all of the efforts a lot of good things can be accomplished. He said it is not much overlap and is a creative way for the Monadnock region to partner with entities in in order to pull funds and not add different services.

Mr. Coates stated that he thinks it will create a stronger coordinated effort and be in clear communication with one another. Mr. Bitel added that when he mentioned Tri-Town it became a realization to want to have action and to do things and not make big plans. He noted they are much more focused on the sell.

Mr. Coates added that one of the things the Commissioner's outlined was the need to have action and to market the County.

The City Manager asked if Mr. Coates envisioned developing an economic development action plan similar to the one Keene had in 2017. Mr. Coates responded in the affirmative.

Mr. Suter stated that from a Chamber of Commerce perspective there are three words to offer. He stated these are collaborating, coordinating and communication. Mr. Suter noted that communication means communication within the group as well as the need to communicate outward.

Mr. Suter stated the number one fact is that everyone is faced with is changes in demographics. He said in talking with the City Manager the Chamber of Commerce is trying to take ownership is in the communication part by branding and marketing of the region.

Mr. Suter reported that they are putting together a task force on regional branding and marketing. Jamie Trowbridge, the CEO of Yankee Publishing will be heading that effort in the next month or two.

Mr. Suter stated that another function in regards to marketing the region for recent college graduates. He stated that graduates need be aware the City exists which starts with marketing the region.

Mayor Lane stated that if the businesses cannot get the workforce they are not going to stay. He stated that it really is a balancing act right now in how to create a workforce and go forward. The Mayor stated that if a workforce is not created there could start to be a decline in businesses in the City. He noted there are a half dozen business that need to expand or will leave to go somewhere else where they can expand and have the workforce.

Mr. Suter stated that along with their efforts they want to tie together, regional marketing for student enrollment, tourism and workforce. He noted these are parallel tracks that are interrelated.

Mr. Kopczynski asked when looking at the economic development position if this person will be doing outreach branding. Mr. Coates responded that he does not want to be held to anything. However, they do want this person to get out there and put something together to represent on a national basis.

Councilor Hansel stated that it makes a lot of sense to have someone forcing interaction in all local communities. He said he sees the downtown coordinator position for Keene sort of forcing personal interaction, meeting businesses, filling a space and bringing people together. He said at the same time the Tri-Town person seems to be doing the same things for their industrial park. He noted there is a need to be a connection to a higher branding and that it is good idea to have MEDC and county oversee the overall branding.

Mr. Benik stated that at People's he has contacted these schools to get access to job fairs and related conferences. He believes the main issue is that there not enough people coming out of these schools. In addition, he noted that if a place is an appealing place to live that is where they are going to live.

Mayor Lane added that all of these efforts are not all doing the same thing and have different financial supports. In addition, he stated everyone needs to collaborate on the final product and not just the City of Keene.

With no further comment, Chair Greenwald thanked the guest speakers for their time and comments.

**4. Future Topics-
January 15th 2019**

- 1. Current and Future Airport Economic Efforts-Jack Wozmak**
- 2. Current and Future MEDC Economic Development Efforts-Jack Dugan, President**

February 19, 2019

- 1. Workforce Development-Dr. Melinda Treadwell, President Keene State College**

5. Next Meeting Date – January 15, 2019

AHCED Committee Minutes
December 18, 2018

6. Adjournment

There being no further business Chair Greenwald adjourned the meeting at 1:57 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Jennifer Clark, Minute Taker

Edited by:
MK Kopczynski 01/03/2018