

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, JANUARY 17, 2013
7:00 AM
JORDAN ROOM, MATTHEWS TOWN HALL

PRESENT: Chairman Paul Jamison, Vice Chairman Tim Jones; Mark Harrison, Greg Klein, Roger Martin, Bev Martin, Jerry McGuire*, Crystal Provance, Steve Thomson, Commissioner John Urban (appointed member), Chamber Executive Director Tina Whitley (ex-officio); Assistant Town Manager Jamie Justice; Town Clerk Lori Canapinno

ABSENT: Paul Babinski

ALSO PRESENT: Communications Director Annette Privette Keller*

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jamison called the meeting to order at 7:05 am.

INVOCATION

Ms. Martin rendered the invocation.

Chairman Jamison recognized and welcomed two new members – Mark Harrison and Crystal Provance.

*Mr. McGuire arrived.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: NOVEMBER 15, 2012

Motion to approve the minutes of the November 15, 2012 by Mr. Martin. Seconded by Ms. Martin and unanimously approved.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Coffee with Real Estate Community

Mr. Justice noted the coffee meeting is set for 8:30 – 9:30 am on February 14. The goal is to inform them about Matthews and help them sell the town to their clients. Marketing is being pushed through multiple sources,

including the Chamber business directory, town privilege license list and the REBIC contact list. The planning group will continue to meet to refine ideas. An informational brochure is being worked on which will be distributed to multiple locations. It will help people understand how to start a new business and where to go with their questions.

Four Towns Economic Development Partnership Update

Mr. Urban explained representatives from the four towns - Matthews, Mint Hill, Stallings and Indian Trail - have been meeting since December, assisted by Melanie O'Connell Underwood of the Union County Economic Development Agency. The towns are still deciding if they want to move forward, and if so, how. Possibilities could include joint branding initiatives, a business park, even a shared economic development director. There are many questions still to be answered.

Vice Chairman Jones asked about potential problems due to the two different counties involved. Mr., Urban said that has been discussed. They do not wish to have an adversarial relationship with either county.

Fall Business Summit Review

Mr. McGuire noted the fall summit went very well overall with about 60 attendees, many of which were new faces. There wasn't much feedback regarding future presentations. The town has received consistently good scores for all of the summits.

The group thanked Mr. McGuire for all his efforts with the business summits.

NEW BUSINESS

Appointments – Chair and Vice Chair

There was some discussion of the need for term limits. By consensus it was determined that term limits were not necessary.

Mr. Jones nominated Paul Jamison for Chair. Mr. McGuire nominated Tim Jones for Vice Chair. By unanimous vote, Mr. Jamison was elected Chair and Mr. Jones was elected Vice Chair for 2013.

Discussion of “Matthews Experience” and How to Benefit Businesses

Mr. Justice noted that most of EDAC met last November to discuss ways to help businesses in the community. The idea of discount cards was explored but was ultimately determined to be unfeasible. There may be other ideas that should be investigated.

Chairman Jamison said the group discussed many ideas. There could be a semi-regular special events – maybe quarterly or twice a year – wherein focus is placed on a particular special interest. This could be something like a restaurant week, with a week of promotions at local restaurants culminating in a grand finale event. A week of health and safety awareness could focus on the hospital, fitness centers, massage therapy clinics and similar businesses. This would probably be a trial with one done just to see what the response would be, with expansion if it was successful.

*Ms. Privette Keller arrived.

Ms. Whitley said several groups in town already do things like this and asked who would run these new programs. Chairman Jamison said he envisioned them being driven by EDAC with the involvement of the Chamber and other organizations as well. He doesn't envision doing something like this without the alliances of certain groups. He would not want to hurt any feelings but thinks there needs to be a driving force and someone to organize everything. Ms. Whitley volunteered to lead the coordination of the various groups involved. Mr. Justice said the town does not necessarily need to take the lead role someone else could lead and the town could coordinate.

Mr. Thomson said a restaurant week seems obvious but questioned other genres. He raised the question of the town making a product that businesses didn't want – would the restaurants or other businesses even want to be included? Also, EDAC has limited financial resources. Perhaps EDAC could set up a framework then throw that out to the businesses and have the businesses decide if the idea is worth pursuing.

Ms. Whitley suggested that a restaurant week would need to be coordinated with something else like a play or a concert – something to get people out of the house. Chairman Jamison noted that the event doesn't necessarily need to be a week long – a weekend or one day could work too. Maybe a Matthews cook-off would work. Mr. Thomson said the Town could take on the broad marketing concept but allow the individual participant businesses to market it too. It would be in their best interest to do so. There was some discussion of the likelihood of local business participation and willingness to pay for marketing materials. It was determined that the best thing to do would be to approach the various resources and see what they say.

Ms. Provance suggested an "Alive after 5" type event, or a series of entertainment on certain nights. There was some discussion of similar activities in uptown Charlotte and the University area. Ms. Whitley noted that the inability to drink alcohol on public streets might curtail some of that type of activity. It was noted that these events don't have to be alcohol-driven.

The group was asked several questions: 1) is the idea worth doing? 2) does EDAC want to try one and see how it goes? 3) if so, who would like to join a committee to develop a topic and work on the project? Ms. Whitley asked if it could be tied into BeachFest, an event that is already scheduled for a Friday and Saturday in late April. It could be marketed to all businesses and they could be requested to keep their businesses open later, have sidewalk sales and things of that nature. Mr. McGuire liked that idea but said it would be very downtown-focused and wouldn't do much for the businesses in other areas. He said it would take time and resources to get buy-in. Ms. Martin noted that BeachFest has food vendors, so that could be a potential conflict.

Chairman Jamison said one idea that stuck out to him was that of a "Taste of Matthews" type event, where people can sample different things and it would be easy to coordinate.

Mr. Klein suggested an idea he saw in South Carolina – businesses had a sign advertising a percent discount to customers who brought in a receipt from another local business. It's a very simple concept.

Mr. Justice said an EDAC subcommittee could get together with Communications Director Annette Privette Keller and Special Events Coordinator Leigh Ann Moore to brainstorm ideas. Mr. Thomson noted the need for high-level discussion without getting bogged down in details.

By consensus it was determined that the new subgroup will flesh out the idea. Chairman Jamison, Vice Chairman Jones, Mr. Martin, Mr. Thomson and Ms. Whitley were in the original group and Ms. Martin and Ms. Provance were asked to join as well. Mr. Justice will call the next meeting.

New Ideas from EDAC for 2013

Members were asked to suggest new ideas for discussion. Ms. Whitley noted that the Chamber will be running the Go2Matthews promotion again. EDAC helped with the promotion of the initial event and could possibly help again. The dates have not yet been determined.

Chairman Jamison said he liked the discount with receipt idea mentioned by Mr. Klein earlier.

Vice Chairman Jones asked about the checklist or directory for startup businesses, which will be fulfilled by the new business brochure mentioned earlier. Vice Chairman Jones clarified that the initial discussion was for more than just a checklist but that the brochure would be good.

Mr. Urban said discussion needed to move back to a higher level. There are a lot of projects being discussed at the local level but the four town economic development partnership is still being discussed. \$125,000 won't get a highly qualified economic development director, so how do we reposition some things? Maybe we need to shoot for \$250,000 for a director or have a discussion internally regarding whether or not the partnership would actually be valuable. An internal SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) may need to be performed, since Matthews is the only one of the four towns to have an organized economic development group.

Another area of discussion relates to the downtown merchant group. It may be time for the Town to take a leadership role. The downtown is not only the 100 block of Trade Street – some effort should be put to reach others. There have been some contentious issues in the past but the Town has to make a concerted, full-force effort to get a group going again. If it falls apart so be it, but the attempt needs to be made. Ms. Whitley said there would need to be a very strong leader to deal with everyone. She suggested asking Town Manager Hazen Blodgett to chair the group, since the members want to hear from leaders at the top over any other staffers. Maybe Mayor Taylor could lead the first meeting and explain that the meeting is intended to be productive and not just a gripe session. Ms. Martin agreed and said a strong leader would be needed – Hazen or Assistant Town Manager Jamie Justice. Mr. Urban said if that is what it takes initially then that might be okay, but there are other businesses in town and those strong willed folks need to realize that. Things will start working out if the right people get involved.

Mr. Justice noted that the Downtown Master Plan was just approved and one of its recommendations is to establish an active downtown organization. The time is right to get it going. Mr. Urban suggested getting one staff member from various departments – Planning, Public Works, Parks and Rec, Police – to create a framework. He noted that the various Town departments all need to get on the same page too – right now each deals with its own downtown issues in a vacuum. Ms. Whitley suggested holding one meeting per quarter with a single staffer attending one meeting to represent a single department at a time.

There was some discussion of the existing merchants group. Mr. Thomson noted that the commercial center of Matthews is shifting and the relevance of that existing Downtown Matthews Group is shrinking. Chairman Jamison asked if Mr. Thomson was suggesting having a Matthews Merchants Group without a downtown focus. There was general agreement with that concept. Ms. Privette Keller explained that the Town cannot support only the downtown businesses so any group that was Town-driven needed to be inclusive of all businesses. Mr., Justice said there is a broad need to help all business but at the same time there is only one downtown Matthews. Communities support their downtowns and we can help promote downtown as a whole. The Downtown Master Plan looks at the downtown as a whole and the Town will work to advance that bigger vision. The Town can support all of its businesses. Mr. Urban said the downtown core needs to be strengthened. A strong core will help all businesses in Matthews.

Mr. Justice said staff will weigh in on the plan of attack and then it will be brought back to EDAC. Mr. Urban suggested including EDAC merchants and some related merchants as part of an early taskforce for high level discussion.

Tax Revenue Analysis Proposal

Mr. Justice explained that Joe Minacozzi is a planner who looks at land use and development through an economic lens. He looks at properties on a per acre basis and examines development patterns to give an idea of what could be generated if the property was developed in different ways. The Town has the opportunity to tap into his work. The cost would be around \$10,000. This would include a complete report on his analysis of the existing parcels, complete town-wide set of maps, a complete presentation and training so staff can update that information in the future.

Mr. Urban noted that one issue the Town Board struggles with is emotions with no numbers to support discussion points. Minicozzi brings those hard numbers to the table and shows how to improve the quality of life of a town. Some other communities run these numbers on every rezoning case. It adds a level of detail to discussions that can't be achieved by any of our existing tools in the toolbox. Frank Warren's information is just words on paper about general recommendations but Minicozzi can add real facts and figures with specificity to each parcel.

Mr. Thomson noted that this information could help inform the decisions related to the joint economic development discussions with the four towns. The data might uncover compatibilities or incompatibilities with the other towns.

Motion by Ms. Martin to support the proposal. Seconded by Mr. Martin and unanimously approved.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Business Development

Vice Chairman Jones noted the next Breakfast with Mayor Taylor is scheduled for February 22. There have been five so far and they're a success each time so they're worth continuing as long as the Mayor wishes to do so.

Development Process/Planning Advisory

Mr. Urban reported that the Downtown Master Plan was unanimously approved this week. It's a nice compendium piece to the Land Use Plan. Senior Planner Jay Camp is now working on the downtown design guidelines, which will serve as an appendix to the plan. Mr. Urban is pleased with the inclusion of topics such as mixed use development, higher density and best uses for property. He believes this is a great turnaround and will do much to help improve the town.

STAFF REPORT/ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Mr. Justice said the Charlotte Regional Partnership has been asked to attend a future EDAC meeting to exchange information on each group.

The wayfinding project is moving forward. The next phase includes median plantings at the major gateways into

town. The planting materials will coordinate with each other and the existing signs and will make people aware they're in Matthews.

No new façade grant applications have been received. EDAC members were asked to promote the program.

MISCELLANEOUS

The Business Expo is scheduled for March 26th. EDAC has had a table in the past and the consensus is to have one again this year. Mr. Martin volunteered to help.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn by Mr. Martin. Seconded by Mr. Thomson and unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned at 8:24 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Canapinno
Town Clerk