

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, JULY 15, 2010
7:00 AM
JORDAN ROOM, MATTHEWS TOWN HALL

PRESENT: Chairman Paul Jamison; Vice Chairman Jim Johnson; Members Paul Babinski, Rachel Garcia, Tim Jones, Greg Klein, Bev Martin, Jerry McGuire, John Urban, Tina Whitley; Assistant Town Manager Jamie Justice; Deputy Town Clerk Lori Canapinno

ABSENT: Jennefer Garrity, Bill Rhyne

ALSO PRESENT: Communications Director/Assistant to the Manager Annette Privette-Keller

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Jamison called the meeting to order at 7:07 am.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES: Ms. Whitley motioned to approve the minutes of the May 20, 2010 meeting. Vice Chairman Johnson seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Business Incubator

Chairman Jamison discussed the recent joint meeting held with the Town Board of Commissioners during which both Boards heard the results of the business incubator study and discussed possible next steps. The next step would be a gathering of some EDAC members and Commissioners to visit the Ben Craig Center. Chairman Jamison said he does not believe that the town is ready to make a decision on the secondary part of the study, so the natural next step would be to tour the Center for more information. The group consensus was to coordinate a visit of the Ben Craig Center for EDAC members and Commissioners, probably in late August.

NEW BUSINESS

Fall Summit

Mr. McGuire discussed the inclusion of certain people in the next summit - Richard Vitolo, Executive Director of the Centralina Development Corporation, Scott Daugherty, Small Business Commissioner in the NC Department of Commerce, and Garrett Alexander, Director of Property Assessment for Mecklenburg County.

There was some discussion about the inclusion of another panel discussion similar to the one in the previous summit. Ms. Whitley said she likes the idea of having them there and possibly having them give short presentations but she said town businesspeople really need to know what the town is doing for them. They need to learn about the website, the product inventory and other such items in detail. They also need to learn more about why EDAC exists and what it does for the town. She said all of this comes directly from comments made after the last summit.

Ms. Martin said people do need to hear about grants and other county and/or state programs. There was some discussion about having the speakers tailor their comments to specific local

information. Mr. McGuire broached the possibility of having just one or two speakers with focused information. He said feedback from the last summit indicated that much of the information discussed last time was information that people could have read about in the newspaper - the information wasn't focused enough and there was no great takeaway.

Mr. Urban suggested spinning it with a focus on the downtown merchants. It would be helpful to build a consensus about what their issues are and what kind of help they're looking for. Issues like the parking, speed humps and signage could be discussed in a forum that would allow for extended discussion. There are projects going on that are not fully communicated outside of the town hall. There was discussion about the newsletter and how it could be used to ask questions and request information for possible topics.

The idea of themes for the forum was brought up. One theme could be used for the entire forum or a general overview with specific sub-topics could be developed. Mr. McGuire said feedback after the last forum indicated that a lot of general information was offered but town-specific information was not. People want to know what the town is doing to address their problems. There was discussion about methods in which the town can get input about issues that need to be addressed. This forum could be used to gather that information and the following forum could include discussion on what the town is doing to respond to those concerns.

Ms. Whitley said town businesspeople really need to be told how and where they can access more information about town projects, something like a master information sheet. Mr. Urban suggested using the Chamber as a point of information but he also indicated the need to have a point person to funnel information through and receive feedback. Ms. Whitley noted that not all Matthews businesses are involved with the Chamber, so information needs to be available through multiple sources.

Chairman Jamison said they needed to decide if this summit was going to be focused on information going out from the town or if it would be an exchange of information between the town and businesses. The summit needs to be defined first. Mr. Justice suggested *resources* or *resource information* that is localized to Matthews. Information on resources and services could be highlighted as well as timely topics of discussion such as revaluation and grants.

The next EDAC meeting will be held in September and the summit will occur in October or early November. Plans will need to be made and meetings will have to begin in the next few weeks. Ms. Whitley noted that the Chamber of Commerce Planning Conference is scheduled for October 22. She suggested incorporating into the Planning Conference a breakout session of town issues, which could then be brought back to the summit for discussion.

Mr. Urban suggested asking for comments on the UDO sections as they come out and are posted to the town website. Ms. Whitley suggested having Ms. Privette-Keller write up an article about it for inclusion in the Chamber newsletter and website. Mr. Urban suggested inclusion of information about the summit with an indication that more discussion will occur there.

Subcommittee membership procedure

Vice Chairman Johnson discussed a potential process for bringing non-EDAC members onto its subcommittees. Applicants who interviewed for vacancies on EDAC in the past were offered the chance to join subcommittees and other people might want to lend their assistance in the future. There was discussion about having the chairperson of each subcommittee find volunteers and inform the rest of the EDAC members who they have chosen versus having the chairperson bring potential subcommittee members to the rest of the EDAC members for approval.

Vice Chairman Johnson discussed the need for a new committee dedicated to marketing and communications for EDAC. He mentioned that current EDAC members could be involved with

more than one subcommittee. This subcommittee could manage the newsletter as well as other marketing materials. Mr. Justice said the current plan is to send the newsletter out quarterly and see how it is received. Ms. Privette-Keller said the intention is for the first two editions to be printed and for the remainder to be distributed electronically. The town is currently gathering emails from interested parties and already has several hundred gleaned from the privilege license list. Ms. Whitley said those could be cross-referenced with the Chamber email list. He said it would be great to have two or three subcommittee members brainstorming on newsletter content. Vice Chairman Johnson said it would be good to get outsiders involved, not only to have new thoughts on content but also to see if the subcommittee could get assistance from designers, copy writers and the like. Ms. Whitley said she would not like to chair but would like to help that subcommittee.

Vice Chairman Johnson motioned thusly: when non-EDAC members wish to join an EDAC subcommittee, the subcommittee chairperson will bring those names to the full EDAC membership for approval. Mr. McGuire seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Group consensus was to start a Marketing/Communications subcommittee. Ms. Martin and Ms. Whitley both volunteered to be part of the committee. Any other interested parties should email Ms. Martin, Ms. Whitley or Ms. Privette-Keller.

Report on PCA facility

Chairman Jamison opened discussion on the former PCA facility. Grace Academy has proposed to convert the 130,000 square foot facility into a school. The rezoning application is working through the process now. There has been a lot of discussion about the economic impact of losing that facility because the school won't pay as much tax or provide as many jobs as an industrial facility would. There is also concern about the amount of traffic that would be generated. Chairman Jamison asked for input from the EDAC members related to this project.

Mr. Urban explained some of the concerns people have had. The project doesn't fit in with the Land Use Plan - the parcel sits in the middle of the I-1 district. It's the second-largest area of industrial property in town, and if that gets rezoned it would cut the available industrial zoning in half. The Planning Board could see it as a disproportionate use and recommend denial, but others might say that any use of that space is acceptable. Mr. Urban said he asked Grace Academy representatives if they would be willing to offset the tax loss that the town would experience – approximately \$28,000 per year. He said he feels they could make an offer like that as the rezoning process continues. He noted that Grace is currently a large renter of the town's Crews Road recreation facility and Community Center, and if they get this property rezoned then they will relocate their recreation activities to their own property and the town will lose those funds as well.

Vice Chairman Johnson noted that a business park sits on one side of this parcel already. The rezoning would basically just expand the business park towards Conbraco. Mr. Urban said he had no problem with a mix of differently zoned parcels in a location – in fact, a better mix of zones encourages better use of property. Chairman Jamison noted that the school would not provide more families with an opportunity to live and work in Matthews. The staff would be relatively small and parents and students would not really stay in Matthews. Also there would be a lot of children located in a pretty busy area – it would change the dynamic of that entire street. Mr. Urban noted the expectation is for about four hundred students to start with, which would rise to nine hundred in time. Chairman Jamison said he would love to see the building filled but is not certain that Grace Academy is the best fit. Vice Chairman Johnson said there should be a limit on how much interference the town gives on matters between private entities like this. He said he does like the idea of having them offset the cost of the tax losses to the town. Mr. Urban pointed out that the rezoning request would be downgrading the property – the school wouldn't be the highest and best use of that property.

There was discussion over the fact that the property has been on the market for about three years and the likelihood of another industrial use coming in. Mr. Urban noted that previous seminars and speakers indicated that shovel-ready manufacturing facilities were needed to attract business. Ms. Martin said that the property was vacant long before it went on the market, and no manufacturer has expressed interest in it. She said the school would add vibrancy to the area and said that parents would spend money in town and experience all that Matthews has to offer. She noted that John Poore, owner of adjacent property, spoke in favor of this rezoning request at the public hearing and he is excited to see the school project come to fruition. Mr. Klein said it is likely that the building will sit for years and continue to deteriorate if Grace Academy is not allowed to relocate there. He said he was also uncomfortable with the idea of the town denying a rezoning because of possible money loss. He said that property is not a big draw for manufacturers anyway – there are plenty of vacancies already so there are other industrial options if there is future interest. Mr. Urban said the economic reality needs to be addressed – the town is financially stable but it also has to remain aware of all income and tax possibilities. Ms. Martin said Grace representatives have stated that they are looking at multiple locations – if they don't get this site in Matthews they will go outside the town, so Matthews would lose that revenue no matter what. Mr. Urban said it is unlikely they would be able to find a similar parcel outside of Matthews for the same price.

There was further discussion of zoning and the Land Use Plan. Mr. Urban noted that both of those exist for a reason and wanted to be sure everyone understood that.

Consensus was that EDAC members were all generally supportive of the idea that having an occupant in that building would be a good thing.

Chairman Jamison noted that they might be a heavy user of town services, so he agrees with Mr. Urban that the town should ask for some monetary concessions.

It was agreed that the EDAC members were not in consensus as it related to Grace Academy.

Report on Royal Park Rehabilitation & Nursing Center

Mr. Babinski is VP of Operations of Liberty Healthcare, which is primarily a post-acute/post-hospitalization healthcare services provider. The rezoning process is currently underway for a rehabilitation and nursing facility on Moore Road and he described the project for EDAC members. Phase one will involve four different sections of senior independent campuses and phase two will include commercial development. The location includes the historic Moore farmhouse and their intention is to move it slightly from its current location and create a preserved farmstead setting. The building would be used as supportive office space.

REPORTS FROM SUBCOMMITTEES

Downtown

Vice Chairman Johnson explained that Planner Jay Camp is currently revising the Downtown Master Plan. A steering committee will review this over the next six months or so. He is one of the members of that committee and said they are open to questions and ideas from the public. Some items to be discussed are the downtown overlay, streets, connectivity, farmer's market and the like. He asked EDAC members to contact him if they have any issues for discussion.

Vice Chairman Johnson also opened discussion about a possible façade grant program. The Economic Development Department does have money in its budget that could be used for

something like this – something that would improve the town, help businesses and allow for some public notoriety for EDAC. It would be a great marketing opportunity.

There was discussion about the budget and possible procedures. This could be open to all businesses or limited to just the downtown to start with. It could be a matching grant program. Various limits were discussed. Mr. Justice said the money would come from the Economic Development budget, which has to accommodate things like summit expenses, the newsletter, marketing, and a potential Economic Director salary or contract position as well as any potential grant expenditures. Chairman Jamison suggested starting with five one-thousand dollar matching grants.

Consensus was that a matching grant system would be best. Some research will have to be done about limits and procedures.

There was further discussion of possible issues. Mr. McGuire said there may be objections if the grants were limited only to downtown merchants. Ms. Whitley suggested limiting the program to downtown merchants just in the first year then opening it up to all businesses in subsequent years. Mr. Urban said Charlotte does something similar and doesn't believe there would be a problem in limiting it solely to the downtown area.

Mr. Justice noted that the Board of Commissioners would ultimately have to approve the grant program and any potential grant. EDAC would serve in an advisory capacity and offer recommendations about the applications. Chairman Jamison said EDAC could ask the Board for the ability to make the individual decisions at the committee level rather than by the Board.

Ms. Whitley said she hears constant complaints about the properties on Monroe Road and around I-485. Future improvement grants could be directed at places like that. Mr. Urban said the Charlotte program offers funds for more than just facades – they include landscaping, signage, lighting and other things of that nature.

Ms. Garcia asked about grant opportunities from Mecklenburg County. Ms. Privette-Keller said generally only the Crestdale community receives grants from the county. Mr. Justice said he will explore the possibility of a Small Business Strategic Plan similar to what Charlotte is doing with the county.

Consensus was to have the Downtown subcommittee compose parameters via email and get back to the group.

Business Development

Tim Jones is now the Business Development subcommittee chairman. The first meeting will take place in the town hall on August 5th and he would like subsequent meetings to take place in various town restaurants.

Mr. Jones introduced the idea of holding Mayor's Breakfasts. He wondered if Mayor Taylor would be willing to hold such a meeting, possibly quarterly, as an informal way for people to hold discussions and offer feedback. It could be breakfast or lunch. It would allow the town to maintain a relationship with existing businesses and maintain a venue that allows for a free exchange of ideas.

Consensus was that this is a good idea and breakfast was the better choice. Funding and locations would have to be decided upon. Mr. Jones will bring the idea to Mayor Taylor.

There was discussion about having EDAC members attend area grand openings and business events. Members could wear EDAC name tags. This would show area businesses that EDAC and the town supports them.

Development Process/Planning Advisory

Mr. Urban said this subcommittee has not met yet. The UDO process is slowly ongoing. One of the biggest things will be getting to developers for feedback about the development process – that will really help in understanding if Matthews is truly “open for business” or if there are areas of improvement the town can work on. He said the town really needs to focus on developers from a growth standpoint.

STAFF REPORT

Action Plan update/town projects

Mr. Justice gave an update on several town projects. The available property project is ongoing and has already been useful. The Board of Commissioners decided to have the speed humps on North Trade Street re-worked to lessen the impact of the slope. The Matthews Station parking analysis is now available on the website under “ongoing projects.” A three-prong approach has been recommended – more two hour parking, additional signs and pavement marking, and the inception of a valet parking ordinance. Marketing is also addressed. The Downtown Merchants Group will look at it and it will go back to the Board of Commissioners at the end of August.

The sportsplex legislation that would allow the town to enter into a public/private partnership was approved by the legislature in the short session. The next steps will be to pull all the pieces together with Mecklenburg County and release an RFP.

The recent School of Government webinar addressed growth sectors and confirmed that the findings of the Warren Report are still valid. Education, healthcare, professional and scientific sectors were all high on the list.

Ms. Privette-Keller discussed the Matthews branch library. The town negotiated to help save the branch by agreeing to defer this year’s library lease payment. The library system is currently seeking volunteers with the hope of getting enough to keep the library open an extra day per week.

ADJOURNMENT: Mr. Babinski motioned to adjourn. Vice Chairman Johnson seconded and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:40 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Canapinno
Deputy Town Clerk