

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2010
7:00 AM
JORDAN ROOM, MATTHEWS TOWN HALL

PRESENT: Chairman Paul Jamison; Vice Chairman Jim Johnson; Members Paul Babinski, Rachel Garcia, Jennefer Garrity, Tim Jones, Greg Klein, Bev Martin, Jerry McGuire, Bill Rhyne, John Urban, Tina Whitley; Assistant Town Manager Jamie Justice

CALL TO ORDER & DECLARE QUORUM: Chairman Jamison called the meeting to order at 7:00 am and rendered the invocation.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES: Mr. Jones motioned to approve the minutes of the July 15, 2010 meeting. Ms. Martin seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Business Incubator – site visit

Mr. Justice said the next step is to schedule a site visit to the Ben Craig Center in Charlotte. Mr. Justice will explore possible dates and contact EDAC members with those dates.

Fall Summit

Mr. McGuire explained that he, Chairman Jamison, Vice Chairman Johnson and Mr. Justice met to discuss preparations for the November 19, 2010 business summit. Lunch will be available at 11:30 and the program will run from 12 to 2 in the Hood Room. The focus will be narrow – one panel will talk about financing options for small businesses, another about health care changes and a third about town projects. The goal is to give people specific useful information. Mr. McGuire suggested including an evaluation form for attendees to offer suggestions for future summits and feedback on what they just heard.

Mr. Justice confirmed that Wingate University is willing to sponsor the summit again. They have also committed to supplying at least one panel member for the health care discussion. Mr. Babinski offered someone from his organization to speak as a potential panel member.

Consensus was that the focus on Matthews-specific topics was good. Feedback from the last summit indicated that this is what businesspeople really want to learn about.

Notice will go out to privilege license holders as well as Chamber members. A notice will be placed on the town website and in the Charlotte Observer and Matthews-Mint Hill Weekly newspapers. Mr. McGuire will write the press release.

Mr. Babinski asked if there was any interest in allowing vendor tables to be set up. Consensus was that vendor tables would not be allowed but it would be possible to allow summit panelists to lay out their own materials.

Mr. Justice explained that the summit is going to be the lead item in the Economic Development newsletter. The newsletter will serve as the main invitation to the summit instead of letters that were used last time.

NEW BUSINESS

Downtown Façade Grant Program

Vice Chairman Johnson explained that the goal is to get buy-in from Commissioners. Once that occurs, work will progress on the language of the program and the application itself.

Mr. Jones said he likes the program but asked about the Town's role in subsidizing this type of work. There was some discussion about the town looking fresh and inviting at all times. Vice Chairman Johnson pointed out that these grants would be for relatively small amounts of money – maybe a thousand dollars here or there – and its impact would be immediately visible to everyone. The program would help focus the attention of property owners towards their buildings. He said it was more of a mindset issue than a budget issue.

Chairman Jamison said he would like to see if it is possible to define three things: one: should the program proceed and be made official; two: is the money enough and does EDAC want to institute parameters for it; and three: can EDAC confirm the boundaries of participant eligibility? If EDAC members wish to continue then Vice Chairman Johnson can continue to work on the details so that the program is worked on before EDAC meets again.

Commissioner Urban said there should be a sunset provision on the program of perhaps one or two years. Looking at the dollar amounts, it may be more worthwhile to improve signage and things in public areas that benefit the entire community. He said he does believe the grant program is a valid idea and suggested testing it out first with a two year limit, then possibly spending town money on public improvements after that.

Mr. Justice said there is a policy implication here – the town has never done this type of program before. Most other municipalities that have similar programs have created a special tax district which allows for a lot of flexibility. Matthews doesn't have that but the town could use a community development statute that uses the definition "older neighborhoods and properties." Mr. Justice is trying to get a better definition of "older." There was some discussion of the downtown boundaries and special tax districts. Mr. Justice said the eligibility guidelines need to be defined before taking the proposal to the Town Board. There was additional discussion about final authority being held by either the Commissioners or EDAC members. Consensus was that EDAC would prefer to have final decision-making authority. If that does not occur then EDAC would be the recommending body with the Town Board making the final decisions.

There was additional discussion about the boundaries of the program. Mr. Jones noted that the downtown boundaries might be questioned and asked about opening the program up to other areas of town. Mr. Justice said that if other areas were allowed to participate the town would have to first create special districts. Mr. Jones said there may be a visibility factor to consider as well – would improvements that are not actually visible to the public be eligible? Vice Chairman Johnson noted that the group would still have discretion when determining which businesses would receive a grant.

Consensus was to spell out the criteria with the assistance of Town Attorney Charlie Buckley. The parameters would limit the first recipients to downtown locations initially with the potential to expand to other areas in later years.

Vice Chairman Johnson motioned to allow him to move forward with the grant program by investigating the legal issues with the Town Attorney and then recommend to the Board to institute a two year program that can later be extended. Research will be done to find out if the program can apply to all areas of Matthews or if it needs to be focused to the downtown area. Mr. Jones seconded.

Additional discussion ensued related to grant values. Mr. Justice suggested allowing for flexibility in funding limits. Consensus was to cap the amount granted in total to five thousand dollars per year but to have no limit on each individual grant.

Vice Chairman Johnson amended his motion to include a maximum program cap of five thousand dollars per fiscal year and to request that EDAC be the deciding board for grant applications, with all applications to be submitted by a certain date. The motion was approved unanimously.

REPORTS FROM SUBCOMMITTEES

Business Development: Mayor's Breakfast

Mr. Jones discussed the two different groups that need to be addressed by this subcommittee: current businesses and potential new businesses. The Mayor's Breakfast is a good way to meet with existing businesses and listen to their concerns.

The Mayor's Breakfast is basically a mini-summit. The Mayor will get the chance to talk informally to a small segment of local business leaders. These breakfasts will be held quarterly. The idea is mostly to listen to business people and foster communication. The program should be ongoing on a quarterly basis for as long as the Mayor can do it. Mr. Jones said that town staff is also welcome, so Mr. Blodgett and Mr. Justice are welcome to attend if they wish. Ms. Whitley suggested limiting it to just the Mayor and invited businesspeople, since businesspeople are sometimes less open when town staff is involved in the discussion.

The selection process needs to be figured out. The business license list can be used – it could be divided it into four parts - possibly into geographic areas so discussion about problems common to a specific area can be heard. There was discussion about having an open invitation without segmenting the invitees by geographic location. Mr. Jones said that was possible but then it would be more like an open summit.

The first breakfast or first few breakfasts should be held at the Town Hall. Other accommodations may be used in the future. There should be a small reasonable charge to attend – perhaps ten dollars.

There was some discussion about the number of invitees. Mr., Jones suggested fifty. Vice Chairman Johnson noted that a smaller number would allow for more intimate discussion. There was some discussion that a dozen people in the Jordan Room would be a good fit.

Mr. Jones said the first breakfast will occur in the first quarter of 2011.

Mr. Urban said that the first come-first served method of choosing attendees would be best since it would be helpful for people of different areas to hear about issues from a variety of regions. He also suggested occasionally adding a commissioner to the event so that they can also hear business concerns firsthand, since various commissioners have different business backgrounds and may interpret things differently than others. Mr. Justice said the Mayor would have to decide if he would like to invite other people. Vice Chairman Johnson noted that any one particular mayor or commissioner may not hold office from year to year. He suggested inviting the town manager to ensure continuity of the information discussed.

There was further discussion of the sign up procedure. Mr. Jones noted that one breakfast per year could be open to anyone in town and the remaining three breakfasts that year could be limited to businesspeople in specific geographic areas. A first-come first-served setup might wind up with the same first responders coming to each event and not allowing for the inclusion of other interested parties. Vice Chairman Johnson suggested having a waiting list in case of overwhelming response. Mr. Justice noted the town needs to be sensitive to the appearance of exclusivity and as such should work out the geographic boundaries and then allow people from those areas to respond on a first-come first-served basis. The other way to do it would be to keep it wide open to all

businesspeople. Ms. Garrity suggested targeting the meeting itself as being focused on a specific area and then letting people self-select the meeting they would be interested in attending. Chairman Jamison said another alternative is to see how many people sign up as interested parties, figuring out if there is a majority from any given area and then sending out invitations based on that information. Mr. Justice said that could seem like the town was picking and choosing.

Chairman Jamison said it would be good to include information in the economic development newsletter so people know these breakfasts are starting. There was some discussion over open notice versus targeted mailings.

General consensus was to keep things simple by opening up the first breakfast to the first twenty people to sign up. A waiting list for future breakfasts can be used if there is a high response rate. There will be no targeted discussion points. The group will discuss how to handle future breakfasts after the first has occurred.

Mr. Justice will discuss possible dates with Mayor Taylor and Mr. Jones will work on logistics.

Development Process/Planning Advisory: UDO report

Mr. Urban explained that the Commissioners have been reviewing sections of the UDO. They have worked through the majority of the chapters. All of this work must work in conjunction with the Land Use Plan and Downtown Master Plan so things are taking time.

STAFF REPORT/ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Mr. Justice said that Annette Privette-Keller is working on the economic development newsletter.

Name badges will be issued for committee members for use at ribbon-cuttings and business site visits. Photographs will be taken at the next EDAC meeting on November 18th. Ms. Whitley said she could forward to staff the ribbon-cutting and grand opening announcements. Staff could then share that information with EDAC members.

Town Projects

Decisions on the Grace Academy and Home Depot rezoning applications have been deferred to October 11. The Windsor Square application has been approved with conditions. Several other applications have been received and details are available on the town website.

ADJOURNMENT: Ms. Martin motioned to adjourn. Mr. Johnson seconded and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:22 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Canapinno
Deputy Town Clerk