

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2012
7:00 AM
JORDAN ROOM, MATTHEWS TOWN HALL

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

ABSENT: Mike Simons

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jamison called the meeting to order at 7:00 am.

INVOCATION

Mr. Martin rendered the invocation.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: SEPTEMBER 20, 2012

Vice Chairman Jones made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 20, 2012 minutes. Mr. Martin seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Strengthen Relationship with the Real Estate Community

Chairman Jamison reviewed the plan to make connections with the real estate community and advise them on town events and information. The breakfast meeting is tentatively scheduled for February 14 or 15, 2013. Ms. Whitley said an informational pamphlet should be made available with basic information on resources, town ordinances, licenses, explanations on signage and things of that nature so it can be offered to potential or actual new businesses. She is working on putting a pamphlet together before the meeting with the real estate community.

*Mr. McGuire arrived.

APPROVED 1/17/2013

Four Towns (Matthews, Mint Hill, Stallings, Indian Trail) Economic Development Partnership

Mr. Justice explained the four town's Boards of Commissioners have agreed the idea of a partnership is worth exploring. Each Board appointed team members and the Union County Economic Development Interim Director has volunteered to act as facilitator. Commissioner Paul Bailey, with Commissioner John Urban as alternate, and Town Manager Hazen Blodgett will represent Matthews. The intent is to keep the group small at first and pull other staff and/or community people in later as necessary. Chairman Jamison said it would be good to have the business community represented by businesspeople as well as commissioners. Mr. Justice agreed but said the timing is an issue.

Fall Business Summit

Mr. McGuire reviewed the plan for the summit to be held on November 30. This will be the first summit with a single speaker. Jim Dunn will speak on how businesses can have their best year ever by making a strategic plan. He will have audience participation and activities to be done during the summit and will educate them on how to measure success and set goals. The intent is for the audience to take the information and use it in their businesses. A Town of Matthews update will be given by either Mayor Taylor or Commissioner Bailey and a question and answer session will be held at the end.

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion of Rock Hill's Downtown Rent Subsidy Incentive Program

Mr. Justice asked for the committee's opinion on the recent news article about rent subsidies offered by Rock Hill, South Carolina to businesses in targeted areas. He noted this was a radical plan and asked if there was any interest in using a similar tool in Matthews in the future.

Ms. Whitley said the property owners would have to be rallied. She knows of one major property owner who already offers something like this. Chairman Jamison noted that there is already an annual sales tax holiday. If the intent is to stimulate Matthews retail some programs that already exist can help. He does believe the Rock Hill plan is bold but doesn't know that Matthews has the ability to do something similar. Building more retail adds more people which adds more density. Mr. Justice clarified that the town can't offer its own sales tax holiday but can offer grants or something similar.

Mr. Klein said this could be a huge opportunity to create the businesses the town wants, like shops and restaurants that would keep people walking around downtown. Vice Chairman Jones said it needs to start with a vision of what downtown should be, and the town needs to determine what businesses should be in that area. Mr. Urban noted that the Land Use Plan sets policies and visions for the town and the Downtown Master Plan encourages development. It seems that the direction for downtown seems to be leaning toward a preponderance of restaurants. That's the first phase to bring people to Matthews. Then other shops should/will open to serve those patrons.

He said he has been asked about rent subsidies, something like one percent for the first year, as a way to help get businesses up and running. It's something to think about. Mr. Thomson said if a one percent subsidy is the

difference between a business making it in the first year or not then that's not a good business plan. The town needs businesses that will work long term. He believes businesses that offer an entertainment factor will do very well.

Mr. Urban noted the town is pretty lively on weekends, but that needs to be stretched out to the workweek. Matthews is about ten to twelve years behind other area towns in that regard.

Consensus was that this is something to think about for the future. Creativity will be necessary.

Discount Card Program

Mr. Martin brought this program to the committee's attention. This Ballantyne program offers a card with a minimum 15% discount to those who work in the area. This draws people to area businesses and creates synergy. A similar program might dovetail with Matthews' incentive program. The town wouldn't have to pay for it – the businesses involved would share in the costs.

Ms. Whitley said a similar idea had been discussed for years for Chamber members, but that could be expanded to Matthews residents. Mr. McGuire said a downside to offering that to a larger audience is that the businesses would have to give a fifteen percent discount to everyone every day and that may be too much.

Discussion of technology ensued. A website would be required but consensus was that it would not work as an off-shoot of the official town website. The card itself could be a physical object like a grocery store discount card and/or it could exist electronically as a QR code or application accessed via smart phone. The physical cards are fairly costly.

The group then discussed to whom the cards should be marketed. Suggestions included just Matthews business people, Matthews property owners, all Matthews residents and all interested parties with no limit.

There was some discussion of costs and logistics involved in running this type of program. Mr. Thomson noted that the marketing value of the data obtained from such a program is high – names and contact information of cardholders is the valuable information. You would want as high a number of cardholders as possible and charge the businesses to participate. Marketing information can be displayed online for businesses to draw customer attention. Vice Chairman Jones agreed and said marketing and data from program signups would be a huge draw for the businesses. That's what drives the value and is what will sell the program to the businesses.

Ms. Whitley noted the Chamber has a database associated with their Hot Deals program that might be useful. She will research that and bring information back to the committee.

Mr. Urban noted the difficulties that have occurred in attempting to maintain a viable group of downtown merchants. This may be an opportunity to form a more workable group with merchants from all areas of town.

Chairman Jamison noted the dichotomy between the previous discussion of the four towns (Matthews, Mint Hill, Stallings, Indian Trail) joining forces for economic development while this program would pertain only to Matthews. Mr. Urban noted that each community has its own strengths and weaknesses. Each can perform its own SWOT analysis and run with its own strengths.

By consensus it was determined that the idea is worth exploring. A subcommittee should be formed – Mr. Justice will email the group and interested parties can meet soon. Ms. Whitley said she can bring it to the Chamber Board meeting on the 29th. The EDAC group will coordinate with Ms. Whitley to develop an outline then bring it to the Chamber Board.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Development Process/Planning Advisory

Mr. Urban explained work on the Unified Development Ordinance UDO has been temporarily shelved in order to focus attention on the Land Use Plan (LUP) and Downtown Master Plan (DMP). December 10 is the date for the public hearing on the DMP and the final vote on the LUP. Once finalized, these policy documents will allow work to continue on the UDO in 2013.

There has been some discussion of changing the perceived boundaries of the downtown area. Redefining those boundaries could bring a new network of entities such as Presbyterian Hospital into the downtown area. Developers should see that as Matthews being open to smart, positive growth.

Business Development

Vice Chairman Jones explained they've reached out to David Swinson of the Charlotte Regional Partnership and some other organizations to try to raise EDAC exposure. The intent is to invite him or other individuals to upcoming EDAC meetings so they can see what the committee does.

STAFF REPORT/ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Mr. Justice noted Small Business Saturday will be held on November 24. This is an effort to promote local businesses during the busy holiday shopping season.

EDAC had recently discussed problems relating to the reflectivity of the new wayfinding signs at night. Those signs are in the process of being improved with more reflective red lettering and positive feedback has already been received.

The PowerPoint presented by Mary Newsom at the recent *Changing Demographics* forum is now available online at the towns' website.

The new flyer for the Façade Grant Program is available online. EDAC members are encouraged to educate potential applicants about the program.

Mr. Justice met with Mark Moore of MANA Nutritive Aid Products Inc. who is working on a private sector business incubator. He asked if EDAC would like to invite him to a future meeting to hear details about his plan but no consensus was reached.

Mike Simons and Rachael Garcia will be rotating off the committee in January. Crystal Provance of Southern Gourmet will assume the Chamber President position and applications will be accepted through November 26 for the other position. The intent is to bring a nominee before the Board of Commissioners for approval at their December 10 meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Klein made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Martin seconded at the motion was unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned at 8:18 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Canapinno
Deputy Town Clerk