

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
MINUTES
JANUARY 8, 2009**

MEMBERS PRESENT: G. Jeffrey Keith, Margaret Jacobson, Thomas Deffenbaugh,
Barry Cyr

ALSO PRESENT: Sue O'Connor, Ex-officio
Mark Pellegrini, Director of Neighborhood Services
and Economic Development

Adoption of Minutes of November 20, 2008

Mr. Deffenbaugh moved to approve the minutes as drafted. Ms. Jacobson seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

Ms. Jacobson did request that the title for Doug Smith be changed from mister to doctor.

Election of Officers

Commissioners agreed to table this item until more members were present and a quorum sufficient for electing officers was available.

Report of the Planning Director

Mr. Pellegrini reported the following items:

Mr. Pellegrini said the Redevelopment Agency (Agency) had recently been expanded from five to twelve members, and the Board of Directors gave the Agency the charge of preparing a redevelopment or urban renewal plan for the Broad Street commercial area between Center Street and Middle Turnpike for the municipal parking lots on Main Street. Mr. Pellegrini noted that since this responsibility was given to the Agency, the EDC members who volunteered to serve on a special subcommittee on the Downtown Parking Lot Conversion Project no longer have that assignment.

There was some general discussion about the Agency's powers and authority to adopt redevelopment or urban renewal plans and borrow funds and acquire property, including the use of eminent domain.

Mr. Pellegrini said the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) was considering a moratorium on all multi-family housing development for a six-month period in order to allow the Commission time to review the zoning regulations as they apply to multi-family housing, and to consider broadly the rental vs. owner housing supply in Manchester. He said the item was considered at a recent public hearing and the hearing was closed, but a legal question received during the testimony caused the PZC to table the item and request an opinion from the Town Attorney's office.

Several Commission members said they felt the December 6, 2008 economic team meeting was a well-run and worthwhile effort. Mr. Pellegrini said the planning department had recently compiled the flip chart information and will distribute it to the participants at the session. He said there is also ongoing discussion on how best to follow-up on that session.

In response to a question from Ms. Jacobson, Mr. Pellegrini said the staff has not completed its review of whether a greenway designation would affect development options or private property rights at the Manchester Parkade. Mr. Deffenbaugh noted that the EDC heard a presentation from Dr. Smith at the November meeting on his ideas for a greenway along Bigelow Brook. He said the EDC generally supported the concept, but before it would endorse a greenway designation members wanted to be sure that there would be no restrictive impact on development as a result of that designation.

Mr. Pellegrini reported that the property at 822 Main Street (the former Chinese restaurant) had been purchased by a local real estate agent near the end of 2008. A building permit application has been filed to repair and restore the façade of the building to create room for two or three establishments on the ground floor and to build apartments on the second floor. In response to questions from Mr. Keith, Mr. Pellegrini said because of its downtown location, property owners in the Central Business District are able to use any municipal parking to meet their parking demands. He said this was necessary because most of the buildings in the historic downtown are built to the property lines and there is very little, if any, open land on those sites.

Mr. Deffenbaugh commented on the extent of tree removal associated with the Manchester Memorial Hospital's parking lot improvement plans. He felt it was excessive and that some of the larger trees could have been retained. Ms. Jacobson said this could be considered an over-regulation of private property which could increase the cost of or limit the ability to develop or redevelop properties. She suggested tree preservation should have strong environmental reasons for justification. Mr. Pellegrini said the hospital project included parking lot improvements and the construction of a new oncology center and medical offices, which was important for the hospital's retention and expansion plans. He said there are landscaping requirements in the zoning regulations that will be adhered to, and he felt after these plantings were established it would once again be an attractive site.

Report of the Chamber of Commerce

Chamber President Sue O'Connor said Chamber members are beginning to feel the effects of the economic downturn and some are beginning to lay off employees. She said the Chamber has formed a manufacturer's group to assist them with workforce development and recruiting and related issues of mutual concern and interest. She said the Chamber is considering creating a similar working group for medical and dental practices.

Other Business

Board of Directors member Michael Farina requested permission to address to the Commission. He said the Board of Directors, at their January 13, 2009 meeting, will discuss preparing a five-

year strategic economic development plan. This item was put on the agenda at his request. He said it was his belief that a five-year plan should have specific goals and benchmark for measuring whether or not the town is achieving those goals. He said if he received the support of the Board he would like to have the Economic Development Commission take the lead in advising the Board on how best to proceed to develop a five-year strategic plan. He said it may be necessary to hire outside consults or bring in other expertise for the strategic planning effort. He also felt it was important the Board receive specific recommendations on what is needed to advance an economic development agenda.

Mr. Cyr suggested promoting Manchester as a good place to do business. He said encouraging Manchester businesses to participate in the display of a "Proud to be a Manchester Business" decal, would be one way to promote the Town. He also felt small business assistance was important.

Mr. Farina said that is one of the ideas that could be further explored. He also wanted to ensure that the Town was not missing opportunities or was providing the necessary tools to help businesses expand. For instance, he said some municipalities have their own financing or development organization. Mr. Deffenbaugh suggested providing a health insurance pool so small business people could provide health benefits to their employees would be a very significant way to encourage business in Manchester.

Mr. Pellegrini said the Town has an economic plan in its Plan of Conservation and Development, which outlines broad goals and recommendations. He noted the February 2007 Economic Summit sponsored by the Town of Manchester provided suggestions and insight that led in part to the major categories of economic development activity discussed at the December 6, 2008 economic development team meeting. Mr. Pellegrini felt reconvening the economic development team around the subjects discussed in December (workforce development, business clusters, small business assistance and marketing and branding), would be a logical next step. He said these subcommittees should have representatives of all the various boards and commissions and perhaps other interested parties from outside the Town structure take the results of the December 6 session and refine it, pursue the next steps, and make specific recommendations to the Board. He also suggested the Board consider providing money in a line item that these working groups could request if they needed consultants, research, or other expertise to pursue their issue. Ms. Jacobson said she favored continuing the task force work and providing money to provide technical assistance for those working groups.

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned.