

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL
MINUTES
MARCH 8, 2013
7:30 A.M.**

The meeting convened at 7:30 a.m., at Merrimack County Savings Bank Business Center, 190 North Main Street, Concord, NH. Refreshments were provided courtesy of Claudia Walker.

PRESENT: Tim Bernier, Christopher Carley, Byron Champlin, Mark Coen, Peter Cook, Larry Gloekler, Brad Hosmer, Jan McClure, Claudia Walker, and Jim Bouley

ABSENT: Allen Bennett, Walter Chapin, Stephen Heavener, John Hoyt, William Norton, Keith Nyhan, Connie Rosemont, and Dan St. Hilaire

STAFF: Carlos P. Baía, Deputy City Manager – Development
Matt Walsh, Assistant for Special Projects
Donna Muir, Administrative Assistant

1. Minutes of the February 1, 2013, EDAC meeting

Mr. Carley suggested postponing the approval of the minutes until the end of the meeting, as a quorum was not yet present.

2. Economic Strategy Revisited

Mr. Baía suggested that EDAC review the Economic Development Master Plan on an annual basis to recommend changes in economic policy direction—if needed—to City Council.

Mr. Carley said that there has been a heavy emphasis placed on the Garvins Falls area in the plan. Mr. Baía responded that there have been a number of proposals in the past three years for projects at the upper end of Garvins Falls on Integra Drive, and that while the Garvins Falls area is a great resource, he feels that other areas, such as Whitney Road which already has public infrastructure, should be of greater focus.

Mr. Carley said the topic of boosting small businesses have been reviewed thoroughly and asked if anyone had anything to add. Mr. Carley asked if the Concord Housing and Redevelopment (CH&R) Authority planned any developments within the Opportunity Corridor. Mr. Walsh responded that he wasn't aware of CH&R planning any development in the Opportunity Corridor.

Ms. Walker mentioned that she had heard that the City was proposing a "change in occupancy" fee. Mr. Baía explained that he was unaware of a new fee being proposed. He stated that, to the contrary, the City is moving forward to rewrite the impact fee ordinance for the Central Business Performance District to largely eliminate the change of use fee. Mr. Baía stated that he would investigate the matter and share his findings.

Mr. Carley explained it was important for the City to look at broadband capability. Mr. Baía responded that this is a big issue across the state; while Concord has broadband, places in the Upper Valley and the North Country face challenges. Mayor Bouley explained that the Council feels that the City is well wired, although without free wi-fi access. He posed the question of who is responsible, government or private industry, for creating wi-fi hotspots. Mr. Coen said that the capacity may be there but not all of it is being utilized. Mr.

Cook suggested that the infrastructure could be in place in anticipation of future needs. Mr. Carley noted that there may be more infrastructure than currently needed and wondered who would know what the capacity is. Mr. Champlin explained that he was interested in information regarding free wi-fi and whether it could be folded into the Downtown Complete Streets project. Mayor Bouley provided Mr. Baía a name to contact to obtain this information and Mr. Baía will report back to EDAC.

Mr. Bernier stated that Concord is really a “small business” city and should not be focused on attracting large companies. Mr. Champlin reported on some newly created incubator space within the City and new opportunities for additional incubator space. Mr. Hosmer stated that the Capital Regional Development Council (CRDC) has funding to invest in incubator space. Mr. Carley reported that at a previous EDAC meeting, Mr. Heavener volunteered to make a presentation to EDAC and suggested that EDAC take him up on his offer.

Ms. McClure explained that she was concerned with the imbalance between workforce housing and market rate housing in the downtown area, specifically that there is not enough market rate housing. Mr. Baía reported that there are approximately 300 subsidized units in the area and only a dozen to two dozen market rate units. He also noted that while Concord makes up 29 percent of the county’s population, 50 percent of the county’s subsidized housing is located in Concord. He stated that the City is trying to encourage market rate housing through incentives such as RSA-79E, building code and zoning changes and through the issuance of requests for proposals (RFPs), etc., to create more of a balance. Ms. Walker explained that housing is market driven and feels that the trend toward market rate housing may be increasing. She pointed to CATCH’s Endicott Hotel project. Mr. Walsh stated that the request for proposals for the NH Employment Security site includes market rate housing as part of the project. Mayor Bouley stated that this is more than a housing issue, in that the social services offered in Concord as compared to the surrounding towns is what drives individuals to the City increasing the demand for subsidized housing.

Mr. Baía summarized that he would report to Council that EDAC reviewed the Economic Development Master Plan and that it would like the City to encourage incubator space, focus on market rate housing and improve broadband capabilities if needed. EDAC concurred.

3. Downtown Complete Streets Update

Mr. Baía stated there was a public hearing held at last month’s Council meeting regarding the design for the Downtown Complete Streets project and on March 12th a Section 106 Review public hearing would be held, which would focus on the cultural and historical resources within the project area. He stated that there will be changes in the right-of-way to improve accessibility, which may change the historic look of some of the downtown buildings.

Mr. Carley asked where in the design process the project was, as a downtown property owner was concerned about the location of the planters and wanted to know when that information would be available. Mr. Baía suggested that the Main Street Project website would have the details about the numerous public hearings that have been held. He stated that the design issues should be resolved prior to construction with only minimal tweaking taking place during the construction phase, and that the City would continue to hold public meetings. He also explained that the drawings are updated and available at the meetings. Mayor Bouley stated that he was also concerned about being able to see the detail and provided as an example the White Park parking lot, and how he never imagined looking at the drawings how large the parking lot would be.

Mayor Bouley explained that he is often asked about Concord Steam in regards to the heated sidewalks on Main Street. Mr. Baía reported that Concord Steam continues to put together their financing package. Mr. Baía said that he has been told by engineers that the Main Street sidewalks can be heated by either using steam or gas.

Mr. Champlin stated that the Chamber is moving forward to purchase CDFA tax credits. Ms. Walker explained that many EDAC members would be receiving invitations to the March 21st meeting to discuss these tax credits.

Mayor Bouley stated that he has had discussions with downtown business owners, who are concerned about the parking situation during construction for the project. Ms. McClure added that it is clear that downtown businesses are hurting and she would not want to see the Downtown Complete Streets project causing more issues. Mr. Baía explained that the City has put out a request for qualifications (RFQ) for a public relations/marketing firm to assist the City with these types of concerns and that submittals are due on March 15th. He stated that the RFQ is available on the City's website.

4. Whitney Road – Economic Revitalization Zone

Mr. Baía reported that the City applied to create an Economic Revitalization Zone (ERZ) along the Whitney Road corridor and was notified by the State that the ERZ was approved. He explained that businesses which make a certain level of capital investment and create new jobs can apply for the ERZ tax credits, which can be used to offset tax liabilities against NH business profits and enterprise taxes.

Ms. McClure asked what would be done to encourage traffic to use Hoit Road instead of Sewalls Falls Road once development increases in the Whitney Road area. Mr. Baía stated that the City's Master Plan contemplated the extension of Whitney Road connecting Hoit to Sewall's Falls. Although he recognized the concerns by the residents on Sewall's Falls Road, he noted that the proposed Whitney Road connection would make connectivity much better for large swaths of Concord. Mr. Coen suggested that trucking access could be limited and the road could be posted. Mr. Baía expected that the Planning Board would be very sensitive to traffic issues when future development proposals that are tied into the extension of the new road come before them.

5. Other Business

Mr. Carley asked that the minutes be reviewed for approval at this time. Mr. Champlin moved to approve the minutes as written and Mr. Hosmer seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

6. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 a.m. Mr. Coen and Ms. McClure offered to host the April 4th meeting at the Beaver Meadow Golf Course, with breakfast being served at 7:15 a.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Donna Muir*