FINAL

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION &
DOWNTOWN TIF ADVISORY BOARD
JOINT MEETING
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2022 – 4:00PM
City Hall – Council Chambers
51 North Park Street, Lebanon

MINUTES

EDC MEMBERS PRESENT: William Dunn (Chair), Dan Nash, Andrew Key, David Newlove, Kevin Purcell Councilor Karen Liot Hill (Vice Chair) (remote) [4:05 PM], Councilor Doug Whittlesey (remote), Tracy Hutchins (Upper Valley Business Alliance), Chip Brown [4:05 PM]

MEMBERS ABSENT: Johanna Cicotte

TIF MEMBERS PRESENT: Barry Schuster (Chair), Peter Owens (Vice Chair), George Sykes, Victoria Smith, and Rajesh Arora

STAFF PRESENT: City Manager Shaun Mulholland, Planning and Development Director David Brooks

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1. CALL TO ORDER:

- The January 26, 2022 joint Economic Development Commission meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM
- The January 26, 2022 joint TIF Advisory Board meeting was called to order at 4:01 PM

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. December 8, 2021

Amendments: Page 2, Line 12: change Mr. Dunn, to Mr. Brooks.

Motion by Dan Nash to approve the minutes of December 8, 2021, as presented.
Second by Andrew Key.
**** The Vote on the MOTION was approved (4-0-1, Newlove abstaining).***

EDC Chair Dunn reminded everyone present that the City Council will be meeting at 6 PM this evening regarding the City's role in housing. He invited all to attend.

EDC Chair Dunn also noted that the RFP for the redevelopment of the lower parking lots may require increased joint meeting times. He proposed that the EDC add an additional meeting on the 3rd Wednesday of each month. The 3rd Wednesday would be mostly for redevelopment discussion, while the 4th Wednesday would allow for discussion of redevelopment and regular EDC business. Chair Schuster agreed with this proposal.

Councilor Hill (remote) and Chip Brown entered the meeting at 4:05 PM.

Both groups agreed to meet on the 3rd and 4th Wednesdays of the month (February 16, 2022, and February 23, 2022) with a 4:00 PM start time, and meetings expected to last likely 1.5 hours.

3. NEW BUSINESS:

C. <u>Discussion: Downtown Landscaping requirements</u> – (*the EDC first took up this item*)

Chair Dunn noted that the EDC last discussed lot setbacks regarding landscaping not matching up between districts. Mr. Brooks stated that there is some conflict between site plan review regulations and zoning. Zoning allows building right to the property line, where site plan requirements specify a 15' buffer around the lot. There is an exception in the site plan regulations currently, but this isn't particularly clear. The amendments look to clarify that the landscape requirements are not to unduly limit the use of town parcels. Instead of having a fixed dimension to landscape, applicants should speak to the purpose statements of the landscape requirements.

Mr. Nash stated that the amendments seem to be too restrictive versus allowing people in the CBD and LD to use their properties without too many landscape requirements.

Mr. Key agreed with Mr. Nash that there will need to be review as to how the requirements are implemented.

Chair Dunn explained that the amendments are changes being recommended to the Planning Board for potential adoption.

Motion by Dan Nash to recommend the potential amendments to Site Plan Review Regulations regarding Downtown Landscaping Requirements to the Planning Board.
Second by Chip Brown.
**** The Vote on the MOTION was approved (8-0)***

A. Discussion: Redevelopment of the lower parking lots –

Mr. Brooks explained that the two committees agreed last September to work together regarding the opportunity brought forth from a 2016 Downtown Visioning Study to potentially redevelop the lower parking lots behind City Hall. The Planning Department created a list of reports and information for review. The groups are striving to complete this process by June 30, 2022.

Mr. Brooks reviewed the 2016 Downtown Visioning Study. He explained that it found that the tunnel was in poor condition and instead of simply fixing it, the City Manager at the time suggested a more holistic study of the downtown area. The study looked at a range of alternatives to re-envision downtown. He outlined a number of items that have come to fruition from the 2016 Study. There were six key concepts from the Study, including creating the downtown arts walk; seeking mixed use and infill development that enhances the vibrancy of Downtown; completing the Mascoma River Greenway with new riverfront and tunnel segments; welcoming people Downtown with an attractive Hanover Street Gateway; connecting Downtown, neighborhoods, and recreation with a more walkable, bikeable street and path network; and creating organizational capacity. Redeveloping the lower parking lots fits in with the mixed use and infill department category.

Mr. Brooks explained that a market analysis was completed to examine the Downtown's ability to capture some of the anticipated development. A fair amount of mixed-use development was originally proposed. More of it would likely bring additional structured parking into need.

Mr. Purcell expressed concerns regarding the Housing Needs Analysis, which showed that by 2030 Lebanon will need 534 rental units and 630 homes. The entire 68 town region showed a need for a total number of 1,854 rental units and 8,417 homes. Currently, Lebanon has approximately 800-1,000 units currently proposed. Lebanon seems to be taking up all the needed units for the entire Upper Valley. He asked what the impact of this will be.

In response to a question from Mr. Purcell regarding the school district capturing any of the taxable money created through growth added within the TIF District, Mr. Brooks stated that the City captures 100% of this currently. Mr. Mulholland explained that a portion of the TIF funds could be given to the school district to offset certain costs.

Mr. Purcell expressed concern that the projected growth does not correlate with what is currently occurring in Lebanon. He would like to see public investment from the TIF and amenities to pair with the projected growth. Chair Dunn stated that he believes much of this discussion will be brought forth during the City Council meeting later this evening.

Mr. Newlove explained that the average cost to maintain parking garages in Hanover is approximately $161,000/year. As a taxpayer, he is concerned with the potential cost.

Ms. Smith noted the value of the riverfront regarding the attractiveness of Lebanon. She believes that this area needs to be maintained as a recreation area and for people to use.

Chair Dunn stated that, if there is a housing component, he would like to see it be workforce housing, closer to the core, to benefit businesses Downtown. This could include increased walkability.

Mr. Owens stated that the key to a downtown's success is housing. He has seen a study that the most successful downtowns have the least amount of parking. Parking is not necessarily the penultimate of development Downtown.

He has had a number of rental units Downtown that move very quickly, showing that the demand is there. He believes it would be a positive impact to have people living and walking Downtown, instead of having to drive in.

Chair Schuster stated that many people like the green areas of Downtown. The amount of development that has already occurred Downtown was likely not envisioned in 2016. He would like to continue the art walks and rediscover the waterfront. He would like to see more robust access to the river. He noted that prices tend to go up near rail trails. Constructive reuse should be encouraged, while using the resources at hand.

Mr. Nash asked why this is being pushed for the next six months. There are other housing projects that are filling the need for housing Downtown already. The City should not exclude/deny private entities the ability to thrive in this environment.

Chair Dunn explained that this development could be retail, office, recreation, etc. This is not necessarily a push to put housing on these two lots.

Mr. Key agreed that the riverfront area should be expanded. He has concerns regarding the cost of a potential parking garage. He would prefer if a private developer created this infrastructure instead. There seems to be a lot of apartments being built, but he asked about single-family starter homes. The inventory for this type of home is currently not available in Lebanon.

Mr. Sykes stated that the redevelopment is not limited to public/private/mixed, but he would like to see the City be supportive of any development within the existing infrastructure. Housing is a benefit to existing employers. There are many job openings currently, but many do not want to commute and cannot afford housing in Town. He agreed with looking at amenities and hopes that the TIF Districts will help support amenities.

Councilor Liot Hill stated that the parking area behind City Hall is underutilized. She believes there are a lot of ideas in the Visioning Study, but it is unclear if these are the correct ideas. The right ideas will likely be mixed use development of some sort. A proposal needs to pencil out for taxpayers. The riverfront is an important area, and she would like to see it as a featured amenity.

Councilor Whittlesey explained that he would like to weigh the cost of a potential parking garage against the additional revenues. He believes that the Downtown needs to be examined as a core district that can be built and planned out from. There appears to be a need to consider community-based development that can be affordable/workforce. He also agreed with scaling up on existing infrastructure.

Mr. Brown stated that this appears to be a big opportunity to highlight the riverfront area, creating value to everything around it. He believes this could be the starting point. The Downtown’s vibrancy is about people.

Bob Moses stated that Downtown Lebanon is a gem. He cannot understand how the notion of placing a parking structure in front of the river would enhance the area. He believes there should be more greenway connecting the entire area. He is concerned regarding the balance of affordable single-family housing in Lebanon.

Mayor Tim McNamara stated that he is an advocate of balanced housing in the right places. It has been six years since the Visioning Study was completed. He explained that a number of proposed projects could bring several hundred apartment units Downtown. From the early 2000’s to 2017, 800 new units, mostly multifamily, were constructed in Lebanon. There are currently an additional 1,300 units underway, with another 1,200 approved. The current population in Lebanon is just over 13,000, and this type of growth is equivalent to a newly constructed apartment for every 10 residents of the City. The other mayors in the State are shocked at the amount of new residential construction in Lebanon. He does not believe there is another municipality in the State with the number of units proposed/approved/constructed on a per capita basis. The “Missing Middle” is housing that is in-between single-family and large block of multi-family housing. Downtown is one of the last places in the City with city-controlled river frontage. This is currently a blank slate, but once it is built on, other options are lost. He does not believe there is a pressing need to build on this site, particularly for housing because the market is taking care of the type of housing that would be built here. He does not believe it makes sense to push an RFP forward in the next six months, but that this discussion should be continued.

Chair Dunn explained that the conversation will continue to occur, and that decisions will not be made from inaction but from active planning.

Mr. Brooks spoke to items from the Master Plan in regard to the Visioning Study. Chair Dunn encouraged the group to reread some of the Master Plan chapters, as highlighted in the packet.

B. Discussion: Reinitiate Business Listening Tours –

Ms. Hutchins explained that planning is still occurring for this item.

4. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

A. Inventory Opportunities/Determine What's Missing
B. Apply Success of Lebanon Downtown District Elsewhere
C. Think Regionally
D. Creation of Subcommittees

5. NEXT MEETING DATE: February 16, 2022 (joint with TIF), and February 23, 2022

6. OTHER BUSINESS

7. ADJOURNMENT.

Both Chairs agreed to adjourn the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 5:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude