

FINAL

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION &
DOWNTOWN TIF ADVISORY BOARD
JOINT MEETING
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2022 – 4:00PM
City Hall – Council Chambers
51 North Park Street, Lebanon**

MINUTES

EDC MEMBERS PRESENT: William Dunn (Chair), Dan Nash, Andrew Key, Chip Brown, Johanna Cicotte, Councilor Karen Liot Hill (Vice Chair)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Kevin Purcell, Councilor Doug Whittlesey, Tracy Hutchins (Upper Valley Business Alliance), David Newlove

TIF MEMBERS PRESENT: Barry Schuster (Chair), Peter Owens (Vice Chair), Victoria Smith

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

1. CALL TO ORDER:

- The February 16, 2022 Economic Development Commission meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM
- The February 16, 2022 Downtown TIF Advisory Board meeting was called to order at 4:01 PM

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. January 26, 2022

Motion by Dan Nash to approve the EDC minutes of January 26, 2022, as presented.

Second by Andrew Key.

** The Vote on the MOTION was approved (4-0-0).*

Motion by to Victoria Smith approve the TIF minutes of January 26, 2022, as presented.

Second by Peter Owens.

** The Vote on the MOTION was approved (3-0-0).*

Chip Brown arrived at 4:02pm.

Chair Dunn asked for an update on the Spencer Street project. City Manager Mulholland explained that the project is in the third excavation phase. This is a testing phase after the removal of new material. Equipment is staged on site; in case more is found. Ken Braverman is prepared to go through the Planning Board process. Mr. Brooks stated that the application from Braverman could be ready within 45-60 days; it may take approximately 3 months to complete the Planning Board process. This would lead to a start toward the end of the summer.

3. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Discussion: Redevelopment of the lower parking lots –

Chair Dunn explained that the group's role is to come up with concepts to then advise the City Council. The project does not need to be viewed as just one lot, and a number of items could be considered for the area.

Mr. Mulholland explained that there are processes to change the current road configuration and pole placement in the future if necessary. Mr. Key stated that there could be an issue due to an AT&T fiberoptic line in that area.

Mr. Brooks explained that the groups can discuss any of the area around the lower parking lot, depending on what the committees would like to see. He stated that the stakeholder/public engagement piece of this project can likely be held off on until it is clearer what will be moved forward.

Mr. Brown noted that the area closest to the river lends itself toward a park, and behind it could be an area for development, due to the existing floodplain and gradient of the area.

Mr. Brooks explained that Public Works is working on an asset management system to collect more information for this area. He noted that, while improvements to pull back any development of the site from the river are most favorable for Shoreland Protection regulations, this does not necessarily need to happen if there is consensus.

Councilor Karen Liot Hill entered at approximately 4:10pm.

Mr. Brooks stated that the groups previously reviewed the 2016 Visioning Study and Master Plan Chapters 1, 2, and 3. Chapter 6 – Economic Development encourages mixed uses of structures in both Central Business Districts (CBDs). It also encourages the City government to take a more active role in promoting sustainable economic development. Chapter 7 – Housing notes that economic vitality is dependent on the availability of affordable housing for the City's workforce. The City has an opportunity to influence what happens on this property, due to the fact that it's City-owned. Chapter 7 also encourages mixed use development.

Mr. Brooks explained that smart growth was discussed approximately one year ago. Most of the basic principles, such as mixed land uses, fostering distinctive attractive communities with a strong sense of place, and providing a variety of housing and transportation choices, could influence this project. A recent presentation by the Urban3 explained that the highest property values per acre tend to occur in downtown. A community's downtown land is a finite resource, so redevelopment of the downtown parking lots is a form of smart growth. It would allow for residential/mixed uses downtown, at the core area that would have the most impact on vitality to the City. The value per acre of a single-family unit is \$0.56M, a multi-family unit is \$1.2M, a mixed-use structure is \$6.2M, and the Court Street property is approximately \$14.4M.

Mr. Brooks explained that this parking lot does not appear to be located within the floodplain based on FEMA mapping. However, the 577 flood elevation line runs through the middle of the parking lot, so a good portion of the site below the wall is technically within the floodplain. He stated that the site would need to be surveyed for more accurate information.

Mr. Nash explained that he believes the area on the City Hall side of the river could be removed from the floodplain using a barrier along the river and an installed drain line along the railroad. The Corp of Engineers studied the cost of a pump station, which was cost-ineffective, however a drain line would have no real cost. Mr. Brooks explained that the floodplain requirements do not strictly prohibit building within the 100-year floodplain. There are simply extra requirements for design and construction.

Mr. Brooks stated that the Planning Department is working on a request for a Shoreland Protection Urban Exemption, per RSA 483-B:12, as all of the lower parking lot and some of the upper parking lot are located within the 250' buffer. This request must be authorized by the City Council. Based on conversations with NHDES, he believes that portions of the site along with other nearby properties will likely qualify for this exemption.

Mr. Brooks explained that the City could sponsor a request on non-City land for this exemption as well. There are a number of properties along the Mascoma River that may also meet the requirements for the exemption. Some areas in West Lebanon may also qualify. Mr. Brooks stated that he is not sure if there is any downside to removing properties from Shoreland Protection with this exemption since other regulations would remain in place to protect the river.

Mr. Brooks stated that there are currently more than 550 public parking spaces behind City Hall and around the perimeter of Hanover Street Mall and along Taylor Street. There are 100 more public spaces located around Colburn Park. Even at the highest usage demand, a 2017 report found that only 67% of the spaces below the retaining wall were used. In other words, there were still about 75 parking spaces available behind City Hall and more available in other nearby areas. There appears to be ample parking in the downtown area, even on Farmer's Market and special event evenings. Another study will be completed in 2022. The utilization of this area needs to be studied to make sure it meets the need.

Mr. Owens stated that there is a strong case to have a mixed-use environment, with green space along the river and extending housing/parking/community uses toward the tunnel. An RFP may want to include the broad goals for this area, and then allow the designers to come back with idea proposals.

Ms. Smith agreed with asking developers or consultants to create a few plans for the Committees to choose from.

Mr. Schuster stated that it would be nice for the river to be a focal point of the area. An open space downtown may increase development pressure in the surrounding area. To connect the area to the Greenway and Rail Trail would be wonderful for the community.

Mr. Key stated that there needs to be a balance between creating tax revenue downtown, allowing a place for the community and parking areas. He questioned what the future of the parking needs will be if mixed use development is added into this area.

Ms. Cicotte agreed with Mr. Schuster regarding creating another park area in this location. She stated that she believes a contractor/developer could be used to create ideas to achieve the goal. She also noted that it needs to be clear what the goal is for this project.

Mr. Nash stated that he believes any loss of parking will need to be revisited in a different area, as it will likely be necessary in the future.

Mr. Brown asked about how much parking will be necessary, depending on the plan for the space. There appears to be enough elevation to complete under-building parking areas.

Clifton Below noted that he has been examining these parking lots since the 1990's. There is a busy street in this area that is often used. There was a time when all of these lots did fill up with parking, however, there seems to be an opportunity now do to other things with this area. Part of the important piece of this project should be connecting the Greenway to the Rail Trail. This could also be designed for mixed level income housing units.

Councilor Liot Hill explained that the parking lots are never at max capacity, and there's also a road running through them. There is no sense of predictability and continuity for pedestrians and others. The area is not currently generating any revenue for the City. The river should become a feature, but there should also be a buffer around the river. An appropriately scaled development could lead for there to be a park-like feeling to the area. The project could extend the green space around the river, to an area of small development behind City Hall. It would be a major improvement, even if only the roads in this area were redesigned. Doing this piece might then buy time to explore other ideas with a developer/contractor.

Chair Dunn stated that he believes the project will need to be phased for different uses in different areas. The river could be used as not only a downtown feature, but a feature for the whole City. This concept could be brought to a professional for concrete ideas to choose from. This project could also bring in a cultural vibrancy. This process has led to discussions that show consensus that the river is important, and that the layout could be better.

Mr. Schuster explained that future cars will likely be self-driven and electric. Thus, parking will likely be needed, but it may not be heavily necessary right in this space.

Sarah Riley expressed her hope that a significant green space be included in the design of this project. There is an opportunity for an ecological celebration of the river. A bike/ped connector crossing the river could allow for connection to a green space. She believes residents and visitors will seek this area out. She would like for the project to start at the river and work outwards. There are other City organizations/stakeholders that would happily help with this project.

4. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

5. NEXT MEETING DATE: February 23, 2022

6. OTHER BUSINESS

7. ADJOURNMENT.

Both Chairs agreed to adjourn the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 5:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristan Patenaude