

FINAL

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION &
DOWNTOWN TIF ADVISORY BOARD
JOINT MEETING
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2022 – 4:00PM
City Hall – Council Chambers
51 North Park Street, Lebanon**

MINUTES

EDC MEMBERS PRESENT: William Dunn (Chair), Kevin Purcell, David Newlove, Dan Nash, Chip Brown, Tracy Hutchins (Upper Valley Business Alliance)

EDC MEMBERS ABSENT: Councilor Doug Whittlesey, Councilor Karen Liot Hill (Vice Chair), Andrew Key

TIF MEMBERS PRESENT: Barry Schuster (Chair), Victoria Smith, Peter Owens, George Sykes [4:20pm]

TIF MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT: Deputy City Manager David Brooks

1. CALL TO ORDER:

- The November 30, 2022 Economic Development Commission meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM. The Downtown TIF Advisory Board was also called to order.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. October 26, 2022

*Motion by Dan Nash to approve the minutes of October 26, 2022, as presented.
Second by David Newlove.*

** The Vote on the MOTION was approved (5-0).*

3. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Review of Responses to Downtown Redevelopment Request for Interest (RFI)

Chair Dunn explained that approximately a year ago the City Council asked for development opportunities regarding the upper and lower parking lots. A series of meetings has since occurred which discussed opportunities, mixed use, housing, parking, river access, and other items. Feedback from other committees and the public was also received. This information was compared against the Master Plan and Downtown Revisioning Plan and an RFI was put out. Three responses were received. The EDC and TIF groups will only be making an analysis of the data and a recommendation to other committees/boards in the City.

Mr. Nash stated that the concepts should be reviewed for desirable/undesirable features. In concert with the Planning Board, a ranking system can then be formed.

Mr. Newlove stated that he was surprised by the amount of housing included in the RFIs.

Chair Schuster stated that he believes many of the desirables were outlined by Mr. Brooks and could be used as a baseline.

Ms. Smith agreed with looking at what was asked for from the RFIs and comparing that against what was received.

Chair Schuster stated that the RFI request highlighted a number of desirables. The RFI proposal mentioned that this is a significant development opportunity for the City. It is a chance to rediscover the Mascoma River with enhanced access and restoration of the river frontage area. The project will allow for critical pedestrian and bicyclists

connections between the Northern Rail Trail and the Mascoma Greenway. The RFI speaks to the LD District and high-density units or others that contribute to the vibrancy of downtown Lebanon. He stated that there is a lot of language in the RI regarding examining the river, open space, and connectivity.

Mr. Brooks suggested meeting with each respondent to hear their RFI suggestions.

Regarding the Mascoma Yards plan, Mr. Nash stated that this proposal looks to save some of the green space by the river. Parking would need to be provided. He did not have much he did not like about this plan.

Mr. Newlove echoed Mr. Nash's comments and agreed that this plan seemed to be the one which most protected green space by the river.

Mr. Owens stated that he is unsure if any of the proposals get at the big picture, in terms of making the river the focal point. The Mascoma Yards plan possibly does it better than others. The connection from City Hall to the river needs to be strong and take precedence.

Chair Dunn stated that all three RFIs received were artistically interesting but maybe did not meet all of the groups' desires.

Mr. Purcell stated that there will hopefully be more responses to an RFP. He stated that scale seems to be a concern, along with parking. Access to the river needs to be a focus. He was expecting to see more commercial and retail use, instead of residential as was proposed.

Ms. Smith agreed that she was hoping for more emphasis on the green space but noted that the plans also need to be economically feasible for the developer. The riverfront needs to be emphasized, and this was the only point of agreement between the groups and stakeholders. The Mascoma Yards presentation comes the closest, but still does not quite seem to be exactly the vision.

It was noted that the groups could consider what has been done well based on what was initially requested and desired by other towns. The initial request seemed to prioritize access to green space and water, instead of simply more building.

Ms. Hutchins stated that she believes the Mascoma Yards rendering was attractive, based on building design.

Mr. Owens stated that the public space should be primary, and the buildings should propose edges to this. He proposed a greater archway to the river, or to eliminate it and fill it with green space.

Chair Dunn stated that he does like that the Mascoma Yards plan provides for pieces for the artistic community.

Mr. Sykes stated that he does not want to worry too much about parking. Parking spaces do not generate tax revenue and take away from green space. The group could consider how the proposal will bring in revenue for the City.

Mr. Owens stated that the RODE proposal looks to sit above the River and is cut off from direct access.

Mr. Brown agreed that the RODE proposal seems to place more emphasis on build space than green space.

Chair Schuster stated that all three projects include a lot of green space that belongs to the Carter Community Building Association (CCBA). Small towns generally include elbow room for strolling with park space on either side of the bikeway. He would prefer not to include the CCBA greenspace. He would include an inviting area between Colburn Park and the River.

Mr. Purcell asked how the City knows what it wants from this project, in terms of all of the other development being considered at this time. 215 parking spaces are being proposed as part of this project, and some parking will be lost behind City Hall. He asked how parking will be included for the units that need it.

Ms. Smith stated that she does not like the access between the buildings to get to the riverfront as shown on the RODE plan. She agreed that there is a parking issue as part of these plans.

A question was considered as to how City activities, such as certain events and parades, will be continued if the space behind the buildings is eliminated.

Ms. Hutchins agreed that the orientation of the buildings in the RODE plan does not create easy access to the riverfront.

Mr. Sykes agreed that parking need to be included but should not be the primary focus. The downtown parking issue could be aided by providing bus service on the weekends and at night. Parking and transportation and interconnected.

Mr. Nash expressed a concern regarding public safety as part of the RODE proposal. There needs to be a balance between housing, commercial, and retail.

Mr. Newlove stated that the liked the softening of the buildings, terracing, and bridges across the river, proposed in the third plan.

Mr. Owens stated that the third proposal is the one which most blocks the river.

Mr. Brown stated that he is not sure that the architecture proposed in the third proposal would benefit Lebanon. He enjoyed the bridges proposed but found the buildings to be quite blocking.

Chair Dunn stated that the bridging of the river concept is a great idea. The scale of some of the buildings seems to be too large.

Chair Schuster stated that there were initial conversations between the groups about bridging the river, as seen in the third proposal. The groups should consider what they want the design and architectural style of this area to look like.

Mr. Purcell stated that he likes how the third proposal connects Hanover Street with the bridges. He agreed that he wishes for more openness to the River. He suggested an architectural design that runs throughout downtown. He mentioned again that the City needs to decide what it wants to be, as part of this project.

Ms. Smith agreed that this proposal is not tenable because it does not meet what the groups discussed, but she did like the example of bridging.

It was noted that if the City wants someone to go someplace, it needs to at least somewhat resemble where they have been.

Mr. Sykes stated that this third proposal made him take a closer look at the building and design. He echoed the preference to the bridges. He also liked that the proposal included steps down to the River.

4. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

A. Review and Update of Master Plan Chapter 6: Economic Development

Mr. Brooks explained that the plan is to work on a few chapters at a time to bring the Master Plan current. Next year, the Economic Development and Housing chapters will be considered. He would like the groups to consider a standing agenda item starting in January regarding the Economic Development chapter review.

The groups agreed to ask the RFI proponents to further discuss their plans at the January 25, 2023 meeting.

Ms. Hutchins stated that she participated in a meeting with other chambers of commerce throughout the State. The guest speaker, the Director of NH Employment and Labor Market Information Bureau, stated that he does not see a recession coming at this time. Employment and spending are still strong. New Hampshire currently has the lowest unemployment levels that it has had since 1987. The age 20-39 demographic has not yet returned to work, as steadily as other age groups. Economists see 85% employment as full employment and New Hampshire is at 83%. The meeting was overly optimistic.

5. NEXT MEETING DATE: January 25, 2023

6. OTHER BUSINESS

None at this time.

7. ADJOURNMENT.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:04 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude