FINAL

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION &
DOWNTOWN TIF ADVISORY BOARD
JOINT MEETING
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26, 2023 – 4:00PM
Council Chambers – City Hall – or remote via Microsoft Teams
MINUTES

EDC MEMBERS PRESENT: William Dunn (Chair), Councilor Karen Liot Hill (Vice Chair), Dan Nash, Andrew Key, David Newlove, Kevin Purcell, Tracy Hutchins (Upper Valley Business Alliance), Chip Brown

EDC MEMBERS ABSENT: Councilor Doug Whittlesey

TIF MEMBERS PRESENT: Victoria Smith, Christina Haidari, Peter Owens, George Sykes

TIF MEMBERS ABSENT: Barry Schuster (Chair)

STAFF PRESENT: Deputy City Manager David Brooks

---

1. CALL TO ORDER:

- The April 26, 2023 Economic Development Commission meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM. The Downtown TIF Advisory Board meeting was also called to order.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. March 22, 2023

Motion by Mr. Nash to approve the minutes of March 22, 2023, as presented.
Second by Mr. Newlove.

Ms. Haidari suggested adding a statement on Page 1, Lines 33-34 about providing for clear access from Colburn Park to the Mascoma River through any development that would occur.

**** The Vote on the MOTION was approved by the EDC (6-0-1), and the TIF (3-0-1).***

3. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Review Final Report of Upper Valley Business Retention and Engagement Program

Ms. Hutchins stated that the Upper Valley Business Alliance worked with UNH Cooperative Extension to hold three in-person roundtable meetings with business leaders. A follow-up survey was also completed. The data was summarized. Some of the strengths of the Upper Valley mentioned during the roundtable discussions included a high quality of life, accessibility to natural resources, high quality urban areas, good transportation, a strong economy, and resilience. Some weaknesses included housing, workforce, childcare, a need to cultivate a sense of belonging, recruitment for companies, worker retention, lack of regional collaboration, and regulatory barriers for municipalities to work together. Interesting items from the follow-up survey include that 90% of those who answered indicated that energy costs are important to businesses, 95% stated that telecommunications and broadband are important, 100% felt that community attitudes towards businesses are important, and 90+% of those people expressed that they were very or moderately satisfied with local business support.

Chair Dunn asked for more information about the reported lack of regional collaboration. Ms. Hutchins explained that there is a regional economy. Workers are brought from a wide area into these towns and issues such as housing and childcare effect all of these communities. No one town can handle all of the housing needs. Municipalities have regulatory barriers that affect some of these issues. Municipalities in the Upper Valley have been discussing how to attack these items.

There was discussion regarding collaborating more with Claremont.

Mr. Sykes noted that New Hampshire is a Dylan's Rule state, in which any power the cities and towns have comes from the State. They cannot create power on their own. This can be a double-edged sword.

Chair Dunn noted that the Arts & Culture Commission is trying to find ways to increase audiences. Further promoting these events to young professionals who may be leaving the area due to lack of similar events could be pursued. Mr. Brown suggested regular email blasts or similar educational efforts to illustrate such events to young professionals. Ms. Smith suggested also using the Library to educate young professionals about amenities and events in the area. Ms. Hutchins stated that she would drop off brochures that can be handed out at the Library. Councilor Liot Hill suggested a welcome wagon type of a program for new young professionals to the area.

Ms. Haidari asked how large of an issue retention is. Ms. Hutchinson stated that the three-year mark appears to be an important time marker for retention. Mr. Purcell stated that he deals with housed and employed people in the area. Turnover usually is reported due to lack of social interaction or lack of ability to find a spouse.

Mr. Brooks noted that there is a current application before the Planning Board which potentially involves something for young people to do. The EDC could decide to advocate for such projects, if it sees fit, in terms of the results from this report. Chair Dunn stated that he would like the EDC to be able to get ahead of Planning Board applications in order to make recommendations for projects of this type.

B. Review and Discussion of Responses to Downtown Redevelopment Request for Expressions of Interest (RFI)

The EDC and TIF discussed the materials/look and feel of any building that may be considered for the downtown redevelopment. Mr. Brown stated that the project should feel a part of Lebanon and/or northern New England mill town. Councilor Liot Hill agreed that she would favor a building that feels consistent with the existing downtown area, such as brick materials. The project can still have modern efficiencies but should be rooted in New England. Mr. Key agreed with a more traditional building look that can last into the future. Mr. Nash suggested that the building could include brick, along with more modern materials. Mr. Sykes stated that it may be time to create a building that could be a destination point on its own. He would like to look at this project with a wider lens. Mr. Newlove agreed with Councilor Liot Hill. Mr. Owens stated that he is a bit concerned with everything being brick downtown, especially when discussing retaining new young professionals. This building could be contextual while also being modern. Height, scaling, and mass will be important for this project, but detailed architectural language could bog down this project. Ms. Smith agreed that the massing and height will be important for this project. Regarding materials, there could be a mixture. Ms. Haidari stated that she does not usually like stark differences, but this could be used as a transitional building in order to appeal to different groups. It will be important for this building to attract instead of to offend. Ms. Hutchins noted that building costs may need to be considered in terms of materials. She suggested that standards could be created, which also leave the door open for future development. Mr. Purcell stated that he would prefer to see a traditional building. Chair Dunn stated that he is open to potential ideas.

Mr. Purcell exited the meeting at 5:00pm.

There was discussion regarding potential maximum height and footprint of a building for this space. Councilor Liot Hill stated that a building not larger than City Hall might be a good starting point. She suggested that the footprint be similar to surrounding buildings, tapering off toward the open river space. Mr. Key agreed that the footprint needs to fit with existing buildings. It is unclear if the height should be guided by existing building. This may be determined by use and ownership of the building. Mr. Nash stated that a visual study will be needed for this project. A maximum use of the land will be needed to make this project economically viable. Mr. Sykes stated that, from a taxpayer's point of view, density of the property will be important. Density where infrastructure already exists will be better for taxpayers. Mr. Newlove stated that scalability will be important. Mr. Owens agreed that density should be clustered on the site toward Colburn Park to allow for significant open space near the river. Mr. Brown agreed that he would like to see the building at full zoning height. There is great value in creating a full park, instead of a smaller pocket park. He would like to see the lower parking area become fully park space. Ms. Smith noted that, if all parking is removed from the site, this will make things difficult for other local businesses. Ms. Haidari stated that any building should not detract from the open space created by the river. Ms. Hutchins stated that clustered development with access to the river is important, along with meeting zoning requirements for height. Chair Dunn stated that strategically locating any building is critical.

It was noted that there will be further discussion on this topic at a future meeting.

The TIF meeting was adjourned at 5:15pm, and TIF members exited the meeting.

C. Review and Discussion of Master Plan Update Process for Chapter 6: Economic Development

Mr. Brooks explained that the first step is to identify if the Vision Statement in this Chapter of the Master Plan is still the way that the EDC wants to go. Housing and childcare are more recent items that could be included more explicitly in the Economic Development Chapter even though housing also has its own chapter.

Mr. Newlove suggested considering adding information about owned housing for professionals in the Chapter. Mr. Nash stated that support for business ventures could potentially be included. There was discussion regarding including information about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for new young professionals in the Upper Valley. Councilor Liot Hill stated that the City has not previously been proactive in inviting in new businesses. There could be a consideration about engaging additional businesses. The EDC could have a role in checking in with the greater business community in the City, such as analyzing the business mix and having a plan to recruit in some fashion.

D. Appointment of EDC representative to West Lebanon Revitalization Advisory Committee

Chair Dunn noted that the West Lebanon Revitalization Advisory Committee has requested an EDC representative. He suggested finding a candidate for the EDC who is West Lebanon focused. This can be a future agenda item.

4. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:
As previously discussed during the meeting.

5. NEXT MEETING DATE: May 24, 2023

6. OTHER BUSINESS
None at this time.

7. ADJOURNMENT.
The EDC meeting was adjourned at 5:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude