

MINUTES OF ECONOMIC & DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, January 16, 2013

Draft Subject to Review, Correction and Approval at Following Meeting

Members Present: Kevin Shelton, Connie Smith, Dick Guy, Howard Hatch, Rick Ladd, Brad Allen-Associate Professor, Plymouth State University, Dr. Thad Buldrandsen-Vice Provost Plymouth State University and Jo Lacaillade.

Call Meeting to Order: Kevin Shelton called the meeting to order at 6:37 pm

Connie Smith made a motion to approve the minutes from the previous month; Kevin Shelton seconded them and they carried unanimously.

Chairman Shelton asked all those at the table to introduce themselves and give a brief background.

Business Survey: Chairman Shelton welcomed Dr. Thad Buldrandsen and Associate Professor Brad Allen from Plymouth State University. Chairman Shelton said that the mission of the survey that they were challenged to do is to determine the business climate of Haverhill. They have looked at infrastructure, including electricity, water, cell phone, and sewer. The Business Park was discussed and the 2 businesses that are currently there were reviewed. Kevin said that what they are really looking to get is an honest barometer of what the challenges are, both large and small business. They also are looking at the Central Street business district with its aging, empty buildings. The Town of Haverhill is 5 different communities that form one. They are hoping that at the end of all of this, they will be able to charge the Selectboard to create some policies that help direct the business climate to a better one. Rick Ladd said that he felt the Selectboard was equally concerned about Central Street, which is basically the main street through Woodsville. There are some major players in Town such as Cottage Hospital, Grafton County Complex and a number of established retailers, and there is some activity going on that is not really encouraging, we are losing some business in town. Morrill Construction who is a large employer is gone when the jobs they have going are done. He said that they had discussed at their Selectboard meeting just the other night about the increasing cost of welfare. (Selectboard Chair Wayne Fortier stopped in briefly to meet Thad and Brad before heading to another meeting). Kevin said that education is an issue for employers; finding applicants that can pass a basic math test is challenging. Rick Ladd said that the Chamber puts on an annual dinner across the river at the tech center and the Superintendent spoke at that and he would welcome how business perceives and make recommendations in terms of how we can have our graduates more career and college ready. The aspiration in this community is not as high as it is in other areas and we do have some issues and we have one of 8 schools that were marked as non proficient in the state. (Howard Hatch arrived at the meeting.) Thad Buldrandsen explained how they became part of the project. He said that the committee had done some strategic planning and felt that they needed to produce this survey; Andy Smith at UNH had been contacted as well as President Steen at PSU who brought him into the conversation. He had given the Selectboard and this committee, 3 viable options to get the survey done and he gave an overview of each of those options. The Selectboard had selected the one involving the PSU student involvement. Kevin Shelton said that this committee supported the Board in that decision. Thad made it clear that there are some costs associated with the method that had been selected and Rick Ladd assured him the Selectboard was in full support of the project and have budgeted money to proceed. The Selectboard was encouraged that PSU has done work in the North Country and have staff to continue work even after the survey is done. The follow up potential that PSU has to offer was seen as a plus, an opportunity beyond the initial survey. Brad gave an overview of his love of research and his experience in this area. He said he lives in Center Harbor so he would be available during the summer and if the project went into the fall, he would have a fresh batch of students to work with. Brad wanted to know what the committee saw as an exit; what does a successful project look like to you? A year from today when they sit here and look back; do they have any quantitative of specific goals that they can strive for? Connie

said that originally when they started this it was because many businesses felt a disconnect from the Town. The driving factor was to get a true feeling of what businesses are dealing with every day so that the Selectboard could make decisions that took that into consideration; whether it is not getting qualified help, the cost of electricity, the lack of traffic on main street; so many different things it could be and no one really knew what each individual business was facing. Brad summed it up as an awareness campaign between the governmental leadership and business leadership; that the businesses are not being clearly heard when government makes decisions. Connie said that they also focused on the Business Park, which at that time was not getting a lot of focus and movement. They were trying to bring awareness of that but at the same time not ignore the existing businesses that have been in the community for many years. Howard said that, at the Town level, we need a conductor that connects the businesses with everyone else, that is what is missing in this Town. Rick Ladd spoke of the new campground in town, River Meadow Campground, and his desire to ascertain what the offshoot economic gain is to the community by having it here. He is a firm believer that education grows, everything grows, as a result of business. He can get some information from State websites but he wants more than just State statistics, he wants local. There was discussion around the number and types of businesses that will be surveyed and the types of questions that could be asked and the ability to quantify them after the surveys are compiled. Brad explained how, by not asking open ended questions, the results can be a better tool for future use. You can have an area for comments and concerns but the questions should have more specific answers so that they can be quantified in many ways. Howard said that different businesses will face different challenges depending on type and size and what Brad is saying about not using open ended questions will work better. Brad wanted to know how tolerant the business community will be to answering a moderately engaging survey, a 30-40 question survey. How much detail can we ask before they just won't respond; 110 is not a large sample so the more that will respond the better. When the results come out the business community will feel good because they have been listened to, the Town leadership will feel good because now they have a more accurate handle, but if there is a low participation rate it is just going to be dismissed. Kevin said that this group will work to promote it through the Chamber, they 3 Rivers Business Association, radio, advertising; they will do all that they can to present it and help with helping businesses understand the importance of it. He wanted to know "what the second bite of the apple" will be to get those that don't respond to respond. Thad said the goal is to get as much information as you can but not to cross the threshold of tolerance so that the business ignores the survey. Howard said that the threshold is whether it amounts to something. He dislikes the ones he has to do online; he likes the one on one approach. He would be tickled if 20-25 businesses filled this out, and did a good job of it and said it the way it is. Connie asked what method they planned on using for the survey. After a brief discussion it was decided it would be a face to face and that a 30-40 question survey would provide better detail. Dick said that a survey that catches him at a good time is more likely to get done than one at an inconvenient time so if he was given options he might be more likely to complete it. If people do not feel imposed upon, they will probably complete the survey. Thad said that another thing that will help is if there is a trusted member of the business community endorsing it. Connie said that is why the committee plans on advertising the survey and talking about it on the radio, to help the business community understand this will benefit them. Howard asked if that meant leaving the Selectboard out of it. Thad said that it depends on the community and what they will trust but a person in the business community asking another to do this might get a better response. Rick said that he agreed 100%; the last survey that was done in this down was the Master Plan update, they sent out 2156 surveys and received back 531 and UNH said that was a respectable return. Rick reviewed the core survey. Kevin felt that businesses are more vested in the community than a lot of the residents; when you go to a Town Meeting there is a fair turnout, when you go to a school meeting there is 1/10th of that. If people don't have an immediate interest, you don't hear from them. He thinks the business response will be a lot better than the 25% for the master plan. Thad would hope that they do. Kevin said that they want more "on the record" not "off the record". They need to have a place for comments, if there is some area that the survey didn't cover that a business feels is important, they need to be able to put in somewhere. Dick said that if there is an open ended question at the end, people who

have just responded to 40 questions may not be able to think of something right then to add so there needs to be a mechanism to do a follow-up, if necessary, later. There was discussion as to what information will be needed for the business list to assist PSU and what the follow-up will be for those that don't respond. Brad explained how their data base will be developed to aid in reviewing the data and start the analysis. He will come up on Friday, January 25th to get a feel of the Town; to pick up any information that can be gathered to help them with their understanding of the community (ie. Master plan, traffic studies, Walmart study) and meet with some of the committee members to visit a few businesses and get a feel for the Town. Howard talked about the differences in the areas of Town; Woodsville was a railroad town, Mountain Lakes a resort community, and Haverhill who had more cows than any other town in the state. He said in the last 4 years the area has gone from 42 farms to 8 and there was a brief discussion as to why that may have happened. Howard said this Town is in transition and it does not know where it is going. High speed internet and cell service were the next topic of discussion and Connie explained what has been done to try to bring in cell service to no avail. It was the consensus of the group that 70% of the Town now has high speed internet already available to them. There was more discussion about the type of survey to be done and timeline to have it completed along with the preparation documents to get the survey ready. Howard asked if the survey would include anything to do with Grafton County. Kevin felt they needed to stay in the private business sector. Howard said that the reason he mentioned them is because they are a burden on the private business community because they are unable to compete with the wages and benefit packages that are offered by the county. Connie said that would be a comment area that people could use to state that is one of the struggles that they face. Thad said that they don't think they should "seed" those questions; but they could ask what the challenges are. Connie said that with Cottage Hospital, Grafton County and the banks it is hard for manufacturing to compete. Rick felt that they need to visit some of the small businesses in Town also. The committee reviewed again what should be gathered for next weeks' meeting with Brad. Brad talked about one of the first things PSU could do was to create a moodle page which is an education portal that they use at the University and it would be a page that includes all of the common documents and contact information; perhaps build a Facebook page as well. Rick relayed a story about PT Farms reaching out for help from State and Federal representatives to help them deal with a inspection they were having. Howard wanted to know how much the results will be edited. Brad said that he won't edit it but he will simply organize it and track it. The survey will be structured so that it is very quantitative by minimizing the open ended questions and if they do, then responses will be provided to you in terms of quotations or excerpts that will not become part of the data so that there is no biased. Any open ended questions will be presented in a separate section and you will be able to interpret that. Howard said that the interpretation of that part was going to be the most important part. Rick Ladd said that the Master Plan survey was done the same way; at the back you will find a section that lists the comments made on the surveys and then the statistical data from the 24 questions shows in a different section. Brad said that when he comes back next week he will bring his laptop and show them some of his previous surveys. He stated that the goal for compiling the data is to be able to sort in many ways and they would not be able to do that with open ended questions. They had further discussion about the businesses that need to be included. Rick wondered how much revenue information businesses would be willing to share. Brad said that some information they can obtain from other resources but that information is important to make some determinations regarding the challenges facing them. Thad referred back to the comment Howard made that the Town is in transition and hasn't really decided what direction they want to go; whether it be service, manufacturing etc. Is there a cluster emerging here? Rick told of his experience when he relocated to the area in 1994; he was told he was moving into a community that had a lot of services available, but there people went elsewhere to work. Kevin believes that about 65% of the people that live in Town commute for work. There was a reference to a recently done Grafton County Economic assessment that looked at the four core labor markets in Grafton County of Hanover/Lebanon, Haverhill, Plymouth and Littleton so some of the work has been done in the past few years. There was a brief discussion about the use of Craig's List and services like that and the impact on local business.

Brad thanked the committee for the opportunity to involve PSU in this project. Brad and Thad departed the meeting.

Kevin asked if there was any other business. Rick Ladd commended Kevin for his good job tonight. There was a brief discussion as to where they will tour with Brad next week. There was further discussion about Morrill leaving the community. Dick pointed out that he did not believe it was an issue with the Town of Haverhill. Connie stated that it may not be but they are moving and it might be good to talk to them as to why. Dick said that his point is that they aren't leaving because of anything the Town does or doesn't do. Howard said that Morrill is frustrated with the bid process.

Kevin said that with regard to the next meeting, he thinks they will wait and see what comes but will plan on keeping to the 4th Wednesday of the month at 6:30 when they start meeting again.

Adjourn Meeting: Chairman adjourned the meeting at 8:00 pm.

Minutes transcribed by Jo Lacaillade