



Warner Economic Development Committee

Unapproved

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, August 3, 2016

Note: Recording of this meeting had no opening time stated and it was assumed it started at 7:00 p.m.

In attendance: Charlie Albano Chairman, Ginger Marsh, Christine Frost, Joe Mendola, Peter Anderson, Darryl Parker

Absent: Aedan Sherman, Mike Amaral

Others in attendance: Ed Mical

- 1. Discussion of Agenda** – Charlie Albano asked committee member to email him ideas for the agenda and if any members want to add a document to the agenda, he will get copies of them made. He asked members to identify themselves when they are speaking and to bring the minutes from the previous meeting so they can review them.
- 2. Review of minutes from 6/29/16** - Charlie noted the assignments made at this meeting might have been confusing as far as what was said at the meeting and what was transcribed as it would have been hard to do that so they may not be correct. He advised members to report tonight on what they have researched.
- 3. Meeting Scheduling** – They have been asked not to schedule meetings on the first Monday or Wednesday of the month as they may conflict with regularly scheduled meetings. After discussion the committee decided to meet on September 9th and October 14th at 7:00 p.m.
- 4. Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED)** – Charlie stated he had called them and spoken to a woman in charge of community support for economic development. They will come out and do "Economic Development 101" for any meeting. He told her he didn't think they were ready yet but the earlier the better. There is also another person who will meet with the committee and do Business Replacement. His understanding is that if a business leaves the community, they will provide a team to help find another business to come in.
- 5. Central and Southern Regional Planning Commission** – Christine Frost reported they have a regional strategy that they do together which has an economic development component. She printed that out for the committee which has strategies and information on data which is helpful to keep in perspective as far as where Warner is in comparison to other areas. Charlie asked for clarification on the comparison. Christine said they have employment statistics, population, etc. which we can manipulate in whatever way we want and they will help us with that. If there was more data we wanted from them, we could get into more of a contractual relationship as far as them writing a particular plan for us.

Charlie asked if we currently have a contract with Central NH Regional Planning and Christine said we do not. The Committee discussed what they will do for free, what would be a cost to the town which would need to be discussed and negotiated, and that it might be something that the committee will have a need for later on.

Christine said she has two extreme strategies as examples as she feels the community is visual and would like to see what might be done for Warner. CNHRPC has a list of strategies and the projects that might be implemented. The committee discussed funding sources and the potential of finding them. It was decided the Christine would send committee members a link to access the documents she had presented tonight.

- 6. Tax Impact on Communities** – Joe Mendola said it took a while to compile this information and he had talked to Bruce Cranner on the Municipal Services Committee who used to be the Town Manager in Sanbornton but now heads up the committee on setting rates.

Joe passed out a document and noted the most important thing is at the top of the page which is what he tried to have come as close to Warner as possible. He explained the sample net valuation is close to Warners, which in 2015 was \$281,406,495.00. The committee continued discussion of the document and Joe explained it shows how the tax rate would be impacted if, for example, the town bought an expensive piece of highway equipment.

He continued the committees charge is macroeconomics which is what he tried to show and broke down numbers relative to the town's rate. Joe explained he used the figure of \$1,000,000.00 to add to the net evaluation to show how that would impact the town's tax rate and that it would reduce it by .04/per \$1,000. Christine said that is good to know so we can manage expectations. The committee continued the discussion on how potential businesses would impact the town tax rate, that the type of business is going to be really important as costs associated with certain businesses, i.e. fire protection, would negate some of the tax benefits and that there should be some guidance for any new business coming into town and extra costs to them.

Peter Anderson noted that the Planning Board had voted against imposing exaction fees last year because it is a very small amount of money. Joe added that it would be more business friendly not to have exaction fees. Darryl asked what percentage of the town's income is the property tax. Joe said it is buried in the annual report and Darryl said we could define other sources of revenue for the town such as meals and rooms tax.

Joe said had read over the DRED reports and manual and said they are really interested in employment with a large scale business and when we look at the survey that was done, there is a very different picture. Joe said cities are getting more proactive, for example Concord just came out with something like \$156,000 to hire an economic development director. Their charge is to bring in more tax ratables into the town which is the same as what we are doing.

Christine said the thing to do is keep an eye on what DRED will be doing over the next three years. They are getting funds to do the first state economic development plan and if we are informed and involved in that we can make sure the plan has an eye on the small rural communities.

Darryl said that USDA Rural Development recognizes the town of Warner as a zone so you get home buyers with an incentive of zero down on a home and asked if there were any commercial incentives? Christine said they have lots of business development programs but no federal dollars can go directly to a private business but get funneled through guarantees and grants. Their big dollars are in the infrastructure.

Charlie referred to the Windham Economic Development document and read as follows: "*The idea is not to double the focus so that the activity is ratcheted up; we're not looking to take lands and rezone them for commercial use. What we want to do is focus on areas that have already been identified in the Master Plan as commercial space like the Market Square Overlay District that was approved this March, professional business and technology zones, and the gateway area for the interchanges.*" That is what they are looking at, to work within their zoning.

- 7. Survey Results** – Darryl Parker handed out a copy to the committee members, noted the last question number 20 is not tallied yet and that it is his understanding that the results are usually published in the town report. They have included all of the comments that were made and if an answer was outside the parameters, for example a maybe, it was put down as a no. He did everything in question order and then in priority based on response.

90% of the population thinks there should be more small retail in the town. That is an obvious place to go and look and ask how we can encourage small business owners to come in. He said he has spoken with Artisans in New London to see how to get something like that in Warner. Darryl continued, if you look at what is going on in Contoocook right now it's being driven by small retail, not by food or restaurants. They have created the Explore Contoocook concept and the First Thursday concept and the partnerships with the small retailers are helping to drive up interest in the downtown area.

Darryl said he found it interesting that agricultural and tree opportunities stayed high and was number three on the list. The new legislature that's coming down from the legislature on Agritourism could potentially affect our ability to do more things here. We have a good farm community and we should be engaging them to see how we can make them a part of our economic development.

Charlie said we look at the tax base and bringing in new business and it would take a big business or many of them to affect the tax rate. But we look at improving agritourism and does that affect the tax rate at all or does it affect personal income and jobs? It was agreed that would raise incomes of families. Darryl said these types of businesses are typically run by local small business owners. If we can create jobs in Warner, it brings more economic drivers to Warner. Christine said it's helpful to keep in mind that those sorts of things are seen as nice but ultimately those businesses come here because of the local vitality so it's important to convey that to the public.

Darryl noted number 4 on the list was medical and dental. At one point earlier this winter the scuttlebutt was that Concord Hospital was considering a move but he thinks they have an incentive to be here in the form of a Medicare/Medicaid Rural incentive against their fees. The owner of the building spoke to them and they said they would keep their options open. It highlighted the fact we don't know what will happen and what are we doing to retain the businesses that we have? One of our core items should be what we are doing about retention which is about relationships. The Committee discussed businesses in the town, what business owners live in Warner and how to build relationships with them.

Charlie asked what businesses we should ask to meet with us and Joe mentioned Norm Carlson of MadgeTech, Tom Brayshaw, the owner of Warner Power and Concord Hospital. Darryl said Bob Egan spent a year trying to get a dentist to move to Warner because it is needed. Medical is an opportunity for us, the town supports it and 73% voted yes for that so it is a category we should be looking at. The committee discussed hotels that have existed in Warner and that more of that type of business is needed. Darryl said he is calling the survey a rough draft as they don't have all the information at this point and that he will confirm whether or not it will be a component of the town report.

8. **Live Free and Start** – Charlie noted he wasn't sure where he got this document and mentioned the Business Finance Authority and Department of Resources Economic Development are creating jobs to make NH a better place. This is another thing the committee should look into and could be another potential tool.
9. **Property tax cards** - Ginger Marsh passed out document packages of tax cards for all the commercial properties in town and mentioned some of the commercially zoned lots have homes on them and some are open land. Charlie asked Peter (who had provided maps of commercial properties at the last meeting) if those were strictly commercial which Peter confirmed and added some have houses on them because they applied for a Special Exception.

Ginger noted a property on Rte. 103 that has a trailer on it so some do indeed have homes. Charlie asked Ginger what she would suggest for this exercise and she said she would take the ones that don't have anything on them and weed them out to what's for sale and what's not for sale. She made the point that some of them we don't need to spend time on, for instance Brayshaws and we should concentrate on anything that can be developed into a business.

Peter suggested going back to the maps which show which properties are vacant. Ginger said she and Peter can do that before the next meeting. Christine asked if they could distinguish which ones are on the market through MSL and Ginger said they could do that as well. The committee discussed the vacant CAT building, that there has been a lot of interest in it, what is there for land and building square footage, and should they be seeking through DRED the type of business they would like to attract to that property.

Christine asked what the intended role of the committee is. Charlie said he had provided something at the last meeting and read the document as follows: *The purpose of the committee is to support the existing business community, encourage economic development that serves local needs, is environmentally responsible, fits aesthetically with the towns historic architecture, increases municipal revenue and establishes an economic development committee to advise and implement economic development activities and provide as official liaison to the town and business community.* Charlies noted this came from the Master Plan. The committee discussed whether or not their charge was to recruit new businesses and how they would go about doing so.

Darryl said he feels they are developing the preparedness for opportunities when they come along. We need to lay the groundwork and if we can get Warner better prepared that gives the seller the information they need in order to recruit the right person who is going to be able to move through the process in a good way. It's not necessarily that we have to physically be interacting with the seller, we want to empower them. He continued one of the challenges he ran into establishing a business in town was navigating as it was unclear. Part of the revisions to the Planning Board Site Plan Review process have been based on some of the feedback of how difficult it was to navigate the town environment from a distance. Preparing a good foundation is what he sees as our primary role and sees the committee as behind the scenes which other members agreed with.

Charlie said 99% of the time he would agree with that but how do we get on the front end to offer a tax break for example. Christine said we need to understand legally what we can do and who will be the front people that we need to contact. Joe said we need to communicate this idea to the land owners and then they would contact a myriad of professional real estate brokers, so the owner would know what we would welcome and like to see.

Charlie asked if they could foresee a document that comes out of the Board of Selectmen's office to commercial property owners in town that the Warner Economic Development Committee would create as a template of what the community would like to see. The committee was in agreement with this idea.

- 10. Factors the inhibit business growth in Warner** - Peter Anderson said his job was to identify factors that inhibit growth and he is in process. He talked to the Retail Manager of Development at Market Basket who has been in Warner since 1990 in one form or another. In 1990 they had an option on the land next to the Shell Station, spent two years trying to develop it but couldn't do it. They worked with T.J. Maxx to bring them into Warner and T.J. Maxx went to Claremont instead.

The number one negative factor is lack of population. Peter said he took the ten nearest towns to get a regional population from the 2010 Census Data and came up with a total of 25,140 people, 28,000 when you add Warner. The other big negative is the traffic count on Route 89. In 2010 it was 19,000-21,000 a day, 2013 was the same which is the most recent one done. Peter continued, as an example of how low that really is, Exit 3 on 93 in Windham which they just redid gets 21,000 cars a day going through the exit.

Darryl said the people who actually get off a Warner exit was measured this year and was 7600 a day. The discussion continued that the number of people who get off is not enough, that it's not beneficial for large retailers, that there are 16 acres of prime land to get developed that won't happen with small retailers. Peter said he was not encouraged by this information and that he also has appointments with three restaurant groups and will report again at the next meeting.

The discussion continued on elderly housing and what would work in Warner, that there is a new one going into Whitefield, NH, that those types of facilities are difficult as they require a lot of licensing by the state.

- 11. Assignments for next meeting** – Charlie reviewed that Ginger and Peter would look at the tax cards further, he will invite DRED to the next meeting or the one after, Darryl will finalize the survey and do comparative data with the earlier survey, and Peter will do more research in the area he is investigating.

Charlie asked if the committee felt they need to have a discussion on Caterpillar and that town of Warner should be looking at that as a revenue source. Joe asked about inviting the listing agent for the property to a meeting and the committee said they felt it was too soon and they would be stepping over their boundaries. The discussion continued on what is the committees role when a business moves out. Charlie said they could invite the part of DRED that recruits businesses. Darryl said it would be good to understand the process. Charlie said they will get Economic 101 in as the next step.

Christine said she would volunteer to put some data together. At any level when we're going to be doing this we're going to need to know the basics and she could show where we sit compared to others and where our strengths are based on the kinds of businesses that are here. Darryl said he will work on data for the meals and rooms tax.

Charlie said we got a lot of good information tonight and will have the task of how to take the data and put it into a meaningful document. There is a lot of opportunity and this committee could have a report with a recommendation with a number of different tracks, commercial development, retail focus, retention focus. Tonight helped show what that outline might be and as we go through this people need to jump in and suggest sectors to look at.

12. Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Recorder of the minutes: Lois Lord