

## **Economic Development Subcommittee**

**April 14, 2021**

**5:45 PM**

### **MINUTES**

**Members Present:** Councilors Melanie Hamblen, Glenn Jones, Andrew Bissanti, Cobi Frongillo

**Town Staff also in attendance:** Town Administrator Jamie Hellen, Chrissy Whelton - Assistant to the Town Administrator, Bryan Taberner- Director of Planning and Community Development, Amy Love - Town Planner, Alecia Alleyne - Executive Assistant.

Councilor Hamblen called the meeting to order at 5:47 PM

#### **1. Community Planning Grant Program Discussion:**

Mr. Hellen gave a brief overview of the Community Planning Grant Program. He explained how the state program has changed over the years making the application process easier. Mr. Hellen noted that the Town did submit their expression of interest including MassWorks Grant on Grove Street and Kenwood to redo the entire corridor all the way up to the SNETT, Franklin Ridge, Nu Style and Downtown Zoning. He noted that June 2nd is the next deadline feature. Mr. Hellen also explained that the Town does plan on applying for the MassWorks grant and the town also put in a request for federal appropriations relative to Franklin Ridge for \$5.5 Million. Mr. Hellen mentioned that himself and Bryan Taberner had a meeting with MAPC's Head of Land Use Department, Head of Economic Development and another planner and scoped up what a visioning and rezone w/in a mile of train stop at Dean College in downtown. He also stated that they went through timing, scopes, objectives and goals in trying to help them assist us go through the process of doing the rezoning. Mr. Hellen noted that they are still waiting for some guidance from the state as well as a defined scope and price with MAPC but they are excited to get started on this project. Mr. Taberner mentioned that the problem with the towns zoning bylaws is that they have been incrementally changing them over the years however they need a thorough look through in a comprehensive assessment. Councilor Bissanti agreed with Mr. Taberner regarding the incremental zoning changes however he thinks they need some major changes. Councilor Frongillo stated that he appreciates the incremental changes and believes that if we see a small change that will improve the town we should take them when we see them but also agrees that we need to look at everything holistically. Councilor Jones agreed that we need to take a hard look at all our zoning bylaws. Councilor Hamblen asked if all four projects in the expression of interest will be funded. Mr. Taberner explained that the expression of interest is a statement from the Town on what our current priorities are, what we will be working on in the near future. Mr. Hellen noted that June 2nd is a deadline for certain

grants and other grant opportunities may not be available until later in the year and that not all grants are due June 2nd. He also noted that complete streets is one of the top priorities now that the policy is done and we expect to receive some additional revenue for this. Mr. Hellen also mentioned that he received a grant report from the Finance Director stating that in FY21 alone to date the Town has applied for and received \$1.948 million dollars in state funding grants and in FY20 the year of the pandemic the town still brought in over \$2.223 million. Councilor Hamblen asked if there was any guidance on rezoning the downtown and if we would be able to meet the June deadline. Mr. Hellen responded that there is guidance however we are waiting for MAPC to give us a scope and price and what to actually ask for. Councilor Frongillo asked how the grant leads to zoning changes? Mr. Taberner responded that not everyone agrees with the Zoning changes so it's best if you get a third party to assess the zoning. He also mentioned that MAPC has the experience and specialists that can work with the town in addressing these issues such as Affordable Housing. Councilor Bissanti mentioned that there are some exciting other forms of zoning out there that we could look into. He also asked if CPA funds would be available for developers to develop in Franklin. Mr. Hellen answered that yes private developers can apply for CPA funds for affordable housing however if you do units through CPA the median income you can have for CPA is higher than what you can allow under the affordable housing index so you may not get the units if you pay for CPA you may be achieving part of the goal in town by having those units deeded but you may not be counting those units towards your SHI which is ultimately needed to be at the 10%. He also mentioned there is a legislative proposal to fix that issue but could take some time.

## **2. Nu Style Discussion:**

Mr. Hellen gave a brief overview of the Nu Style property at 21 Grove Street stating that 2 years ago the Town Council authorized the Town Administration to put out a request for proposals. He mentioned that the town did receive proposals and accepted one bid from an adjacent land owner. Mr. Hellen also stated that the town entered into a contract to sell the property with conditions to clean up and permit the property. He noted that the recipient was well aware of the conditions and had some visions for the property but unfortunately in 2019 there was not positive response that any of the conditions were going to be met and the recipient of the RFP was well past deadlines to get the work done so the town had to cut the cord with the proposal with the Town Attorney. Mr. Hellen stated that ultimately the decision for the EDC and Town Council is what to do with his property next. Councilor Bissanti stated that the piece of land is a waste of a great location with all the contaminations. He also asked if we started any clean up on the property and if there were any superfund grants to clean up the property. Mr. Hellen stated the town has not done anything because of the cost to clean up the property. He also mentioned that the Town has applied to many grants but has

not been successful. Councillor Hamblen asked what project was put on the expression of interest for Nustyle

Mr. Taberner said Nustyle was put on the expression of interest as one of the long term problems that need to be addressed. He said whether it means the town pays for the clean up and tries to sell the property or looking at an alternative. Mr. Taberner noted that the town needs to assess the environmental contamination on that parcel and adjacent parcels as we need to know the extent of the contamination. He also stated that Nu Style company owned several parcels in town all of which have or likely have contamination and that the town hopes another developer will come in and clean up and develop a project. Mr. Taberner explained that at some point the town is going to need to have a land use study to get some people and properties at the table to come up with a plan where everyone gains. Councillor Hamblen agrees that a land use study is important and asked if there was anything we could do to rezone that area. Councillor Frongillo asked if the town had an update on the status of Garelick. Mr. Hellen noted that there are new owners and they are in constant contact with the town's Finance team. Councillor Jones mentioned that it would be a good idea to just sell the land for a dollar as it's like a Pandora's box. He noted that if we started to make any changes to the property we may stir up more issues and it's risky as it is too close to Mine Brook. Councillor Jones asked if this property was a tax taking. Mr. Taberner said yes it was a tax taking sometime before 2005. Councillor Jones suggests that the town get rid of the land and not spend any more money on trying to fix it. Councillor Bissanti asked what level of environmental study the town did on the property. He mentions there are still some uses that could become of them and that selling the property does not absolve the liability on the town. He also stated that we should hang on to it, think outside the box and figure out what we can do with it. Councillor Hamblen agrees that the property needs to be cleaned up. Mr. Hellen explained that there are not a lot of financial revenue sources coming in that can allocate that kind of cash to see this through. He also mentioned that when the town does this work we pay prevailing wage so that is a 30%-40% mark up than what the private sector can do. Councillor Bissanti said if we have to hand it to someone we hand it to someone in phase 2. Councillor Jones said he is just concerned with the safety aspect of it and does not want to have an environmental accident if the contamination leaks into the Mine Brook which is a main water source.

Councillor Jones made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Councillor Bissanti. Vote was unanimous by Roll call vote. Vote 4-0

**Meeting Adjourned at 6:49 PM**