

MINUTES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE ROOM
October 15, 2019 at 5:00pm

Committee Members present: Councilor Martin P. Dumont, Sr., Chair
 Councilor Donald Austin, Vice Chair
 Councilor Dale R. Sprague
 Councilor Richard Michaud

Administration/Staff present: Bob Belmore, City Manager
 Trish Harris, City Clerk
 Robin Comstock, Economic Development Manager

Chairman Dumont called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

APPROVE MINUTES

Motion made by Councilor Michaud, seconded by Councilor Austin, made a motion to accept the minutes of the previous meeting as presented, Motion passed 4-0.

WENTWORTH DOUGLAS HOSPITAL – SOMERSWORTH PLAZA LEASE REQUEST

Wentworth Douglas is requesting approval to install a generator at their location at 85 Main Street. This land is leased from the City as part of the Somersworth Plaza.

There was general discussion of the size and placement of the generator. The plan includes landscaping to shield the generator.

Councilor Sprague, seconded by Councilor Austin, made a motion to approve the installation of the generator, with the condition that they use current onsite gas for the gas supply. The motion passed, 4-0.

PLAZA CITY FAÇADE – SIGN STANDARDS

City Manager Belmore explained that the façade and sidewalk of the Somersworth Plaza are owned by the City. In the 1990's the City took out a loan and hired an architect to design and eventually to build the facade. The intent was to have the green lettering that was consistent.

There was discussion regarding the maintenance of the façade and sidewalk adjacent to the businesses. Stripe Nine requested to install their own sign on the façade, which has been temporarily approved.

The Committee agreed that the green lettering signs show "no personality" of the businesses in the Plaza and does little to attract patrons to the area.

Regarding the approval process of the signage for the Plaza, City Manager Belmore stated that two things come in to play; who has the authority to approve the signs for the Plaza, and some criteria for the signs will need to be developed. He suggested having Director Saunders to work on guidelines, additionally any signage would need to comply with the City's sign ordinance. Belmore stated that the Ordinance spelling out Council Committee authority could be amended to give the EDC that authority or Council could give the authority to the Manager.

The Committee discussed the approval process for the signs.

Consensus of the Committee is to have the City Manager work with staff to develop guidelines for signs at the Somersworth Plaza and the Economic Development Committee will be charged with approving the signs moving forward, pending full City Council vote.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICE UPDATES

EDM Comstock reported that she and Director Saunders have been invited to be on 98.1 WTSN Talk Radio this Friday morning, live, at 9am. There was discussion of the topics that they will be discussing,

including growth, diversity, Mayor and Council invested in infrastructure, efforts to be business friendly, community outreach and our community tax relief program success.

Councilor Sprague encouraged them to speak on how the Mayor and Council have been aggressive on infrastructure, with several roads being repaired/resurfaced this year. What other towns in the seacoast are doing this much infrastructure with the tax rate projected to go down. He also asked that they talk about the schools. Somersworth Schools have never lost State accreditation. He emphasized that the tax rate is going down.

EDM Comstock said that she has been visiting with business and property owners, to talk about tax relief programs. She is making a point to stop and visit each of them.

EDM Comstock stated that she is also meeting with investors and developers, for walkthroughs of the downtown.

The RFP for Plaza is out.

MISCELLANEOUS

The Committee had a brief discussion of the new brewery, Stripe 9.

There was discussion of 319 Main Street, which is for sale.

The Bretton's Cleaners property is complete; they are just waiting on final paperwork to make a decision to sell or keep the property for City use.

The old ortho practice next to LaFreniere Eye Care is now the headquarters of Concopro.

Dairy Queen requires a franchisee to purchase and reopen at this location.

Porter Hill Sweets, a chocolate maker who specializes in gourmet chocolates, is coming in to what was the Chamber of Commerce Building by November 2020.

There was brief discussion about the Chamber of Commerce.

ADJOURNMENT

***Motion made by Councilor Austin seconded by Councilor Michaud to adjourn the meeting at 5:55 pm.
Motion passed 3-1; Councilor Sprague voting opposed.***

Respectfully submitted,

Trish Harris, City Clerk