

MINUTES of the ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
February 9, 2022 @ 4:00 p.m.

Committee Members present:

Councilor Martin Dumont, Chairman
Councilor Donald Austin, Vice Chairman
Councilor Richard R. Michaud
Councilor Matt Gerding

Staff Members present:

City Manager Bob Belmore
Director of Planning and Comm Dev Michelle Mears
City Clerk Jonathan Slaven

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Dumont at 4:00 p.m.

APPROVE MINUTES OF JANUARY 19, 2022

Councilor Austin made a motion to accept the January 19, 2022 minutes as submitted. The motion was seconded by Councilor Michaud and passed 3-0-1. Councilor Gerding abstained.

COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION TAX RELIEF INCENTIVE PROGRAM APPLICATION 60-64 HIGH STREET – SOMEDOWNTOWN LLC, DAVID BAKER

City Manager Belmore reviewed a memorandum from Director Mears regarding the 79E application from Somedowntown, LLC. Manager Belmore explained the project is a complete renovation of 60-64 High Street (where China Panda currently operates). He said the application highlights public benefits including building improvements, beautification, and additional housing. Councilor Michaud thanked Mr. Baker for his ongoing efforts within the City.

Mr. Baker stated this building is a great example of a decaying historic structure in need of restoration and is an attempt to add housing and attract more young people to Somersworth. Mr. Baker mentioned that the last four housing units he created in the City sold within three days. He said the process with this project may be a long one and a bit expensive, but he likes to do things the right way. Councilor Michaud agreed with the plan and supported moving it forward. Councilor Austin inquired about the layout of the building. Mr. Baker stated the 1st floor will have two one-bedroom apartments and the top floor will be a loft style apartment. He added there will be a small apartment on the backend of the building as well. Councilor Gerding stated he had no issue with the plan and that Mr. Baker has always been considerate of historic details with his projects.

Manager Belmore inquired about the assessed value of the property. Mr. Baker replied he believes it is approximately \$387,000. Manager Belmore stated he would obtain the value and include in a future meeting packet.

Councilor Michaud made a motion to support the 7-year 79E Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive Program Application submitted by David Baker, of Somedowntown, LLC, for 60-64 High Street. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gerding and passed 4-0.

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS FOR FORMER BRETON'S CLEANERS SITE

James Farrell Construction, LLC

James Farrell stated he was very excited for the prospect to develop this property. He acknowledged the large number of constraints this project presents, but said his vision can add a lot to Somersworth. Mr. Farrell expressed his goal to create a property with high sustainability standards and energy efficiency ratings; and hopes it can receive international ratings as well.

Councilor Gerding asked Mr. Farrell to speak more on the sustainability aspects of his project. Mr. Farrell said he is seeking a LEED rating, though he also understands that is expensive, and plans to tightly insulate the building while utilizing local materials in addition to a solar array and battery storage. Councilor Gerding also inquired about how his project may relate to the City's nitrogen agreement. Mr. Farrell stated his plan includes catch basins and swales to prevent stormwater runoff from getting to the Salmon Falls River. Mr. Farrell also stated he is coordinating with a UNH professor on an inexpensive method of removing contaminants from the soil using microbes.

Councilor Austin noted that his initial proposal looks like a building that is too large for that site. Mr. Farrell stated this was just an initial rendering and his current plan is scaled back some, but will include more parking for each unit he is proposing.

Councilor Michaud expressed the traffic concern of difficulty getting onto Market Street during high traffic hours. He also stated his apprehension that the retaining wall on the property is too close to the river and large issues that could arise from that. Mr. Farrell stated he is hoping to implement a helical footing system which his engineers said would be the best method of footing for that location, while also helping to limit the amount of concrete needed.

Councilor Gerding asked if Mr. Farrell had an updated visual to give to the Committee. Mr. Farrell stated no as the Architect did the proposal for free and he was reluctant to go back to them.

Councilor Dumont stated his concern about the building being so close to the railroad. Mr. Farrell stated his proposed setback from the railroad is less than the DES setback and said the railroad poses the greater issue to him. Councilor Dumont inquired if his timeline has changed. Mr. Farrell said it had not and noted that while it is ambitious, he believes it to be reasonable having been in construction all his life.

Councilor Gerding asked about Mr. Farrell's financial status as well as any references he might have on similar projects. Mr. Farrell stated he has some interest from a few local banks and that this would be the largest project he has ever done, though he has built single and multi-family homes before.

City Manager Belmore asked Mr. Farrell to clarify that: 1. He would like the property for \$0, 2. He would like to have the sewer connection fees waived 3. Not accept responsibility for the monitoring wells on site. Mr. Farrell said he would prefer to have the sewer connection fee waived, but has built the cost for this and the monitoring wells into his budget. Manager Belmore inquired about the dollar amount estimated by Mr. Farrell's interested banks. Mr. Farrell replied they are projecting on the lower end of \$3-5 million.

Boston Pie, Inc.

David Jenks, owner of Boston Pie Inc., stated his excitement for the possibility of having a location in downtown Somersworth after having his eye on this particular property for a number of years. Mr. Jenks stated he has been in business for 41 years and has dealt with environmental contaminants on 4 or 5 of his properties.

Councilor Gerding asked about his waste and stormwater mitigation plans. Mr. Jenks stated he has used Cultech systems in the past with success and has been discussing adding green space to the parking lot. Manager Belmore asked about amount of purchase, monitoring wells, and financing. Mr. Jenks stated he is willing to pay \$200,000, take on the responsibility of the monitoring wells, and stated he does not have any

financing constraints. He also stated he is willing to move the sewer line at his cost. Manager Belmore asked if there will be indoor or outdoor seating or both. Mr. Jenks replied there will be both and said he was excited about the possibility of giving his customers an outdoor space to enjoy. Manager Belmore mentioned that his proposal may require a variance. Mr. Jenks said he would be happy to go through that process.

Councilor Dumont asked about Mr. Jenks' timeline. Mr. Jenks replied his timeline is 6 months once necessary permits are obtained. Councilor Dumont mentioned that while he is compassionate towards the similar neighboring businesses, he appreciates Dominos' program of purchasing neighboring businesses gift cards to distribute to residents.

Councilor Gerding asked how much business is delivery and how Mr. Jenks planned to deal with the traffic issue. Mr. Jenks stated it is approximately 60/40 delivery/dine-in and is willing to work with the City on his hours of operation, install any necessary signage, and train his delivery drivers.

MISCELLANEOUS

Councilor Michaud inquired if Chinburg has been notified about an open door on one of their properties and if the Sports Dome project is moving forward. Manager Belmore replied that Chinburg has been notified and the Sports Dome project is currently moving forward.

Councilor Austin stated he believes the Boston Pie Inc. proposal brings more security with the development project, but worries about the existing pizza places. Councilor Dumont said the idea of another pizza place doesn't bother him, especially one with great experience in the market. He said he was ready to move on the Boston Pizza Inc's proposal.

Councilor Austin made a motion to support the recommendation of the Boston Pie Inc. to full Council. The motion failed for lack of a second.

Councilor Gerding stated his opposition to having a Dominos in the downtown area and worried it would not allow the other pizza businesses to survive. He said Mr. Farrell's proposal checked more of the boxes of what the City is looking for in downtown development. He said he would like to give more time to Mr. Farrell to come back with more information. Councilor Michaud stated he is undecided on how to move; adding that Mr. Farrell's proposal was nice, but a lot of loose ends and it is tough to know without seeing the actual concept. Councilor Dumont stated it sounds like the Committee is heading in the direction of rebidding the project, but reminded the Committee that they have an opportunity in front of them to do something rather than have the property be a negative impact.

Councilor Austin moved to table to discussion until further information is received. The motion was seconded by Councilor Michaud and passed 3-1. Councilor Dumont voted NO.

ADJOURN

Councilor Michaud made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilor Austin and passed 3-0. Meeting adjourned at 5:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Slaven, City Clerk