

Wednesday, February 25, 2015 Meeting Minutes

Economic Development Committee – Joint Workgroup Meeting

EDC Members Present: Paul White, Ed Morrell, Lesia McKenzie, Barry Perry, Don Brown, Ginny Porter

EDC Members Absent: Jo Anne Wright, Steven Kyle Williams, Ed Morrell

Staff Present: David Bergmark, Patrick Reidy, Allison Rice

Guests: Sam Laughery, Gina Gray

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The meeting was called to order by Paul White, and was promptly turned over to David Bergmark.

Mr. Bergmark went over the Wake County Transit Report with the Economic Development Committee.

The minutes from the January 28, 2015 meeting were approved.

Mr. Bergmark discussed some of the bills being presented to the state legislature that would impact Wendell. He said the bill that proposed to outlaw individual towns' ability to restrict design standards for new housing developments was back before the House. Mr. Bergmark said the Town Board had previously adopted a resolution in opposition to this bill. He said that a bill was also presented to allow towns more power of eminent domain for economic development.

Mr. Bergmark said that the Town's incentive policy was brought up at the Board Retreat, so he wanted the EDC to start thinking about it. He said he had compared Wendell's policy to other towns', including Garner. He said that he believed additional language should be added to the Town's current policy to make it more clear. He said it would be useful to add language that would be directed at businesses thinking about moving to Wendell, instead of businesses that were already located in Wendell. Mr. White said that this incentive would benefit businesses currently located in Wendell, and would encourage them to invest more money in their business than they would otherwise. Ms. Porter said the Chamber saw a lot of people starting businesses without realizing how expensive it would be the first year. Mr. Bergmark said as it stood, current Wendell Businesses could use this incentive but there was nothing to stop the owners from pocketing the difference.

Don Brown asked Mr. Bergmark to pull out the sections of the incentive policy that he needed the EDC to look at. He said they had gone through this process with the previous planning director and that they had cut back a lot of the language because the policy was so long. Mr. Perry asked Mr. Bergmark to look into what incentives Garner offered Cabela's to locate there.

Mr. Bergmark said he would like to add language saying that if the Town was giving the business an incentive, they would have to join the Chamber of Commerce. He said he would also like to add language saying what would happen if the business didn't fulfill their part of the agreement, and what kind of contract and application process there would be. Mr. White said there would be more money spent on lawyers than the benefit the business would give the Town. Commissioner Gray said that this was something that needed to be looked at for larger businesses. Mr. Reidy said that businesses would appreciate clarity in the language from the beginning so they would know what they were getting

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themselves into. Mr. Bergmark said that right now the Town didn't even have an application or a process in place.

Ms. Porter asked if there were any towns that had a small business incentive package, since we were concerned about developing the Downtown. Mr. Reidy said Wake Forest had one, and that he would look at it. Mr. Bergmark said the Town's current small business incentive policy was based on development fees, which was worth about \$300. He said that may not be enough of an incentive. Mr. Bergmark asked if the EDC wanted to look at more incentives or incentives that were aimed at bringing certain types of businesses to Wendell, for example restaurants. Mr. Bergmark said currently there was no language restricting the business to the corporate limits, which he would like to see changed.

Commissioner Gray and Ms. Porter said they would like to see incentives for restaurants and retail. Mr. Bergmark said the EDC could also look at incentivizing residential units above the current downtown stores.

Mr. Reidy asked if there were other Downtowns that members of the EDC would like to emulate. Ms. Porter suggested Apex.

Ms. Porter asked if there were any incentive policies directed at existing businesses. She gave the example of offering an incentive to Wendell Drug to stay open later. Commissioner Gray suggested an expansion incentive. Ms. Rice said some towns offer to pay utility bills during Christmas to incentivize homeowners to put up Christmas lights. Ms. Porter said it would be helpful to encourage businesses to stay open during the Holidays. Ms. McKenzie said there needed to be more retail in the Downtown area, and that would encourage people to stay open later as well. Mr. Bergmark said the Town used to have a Downtown retail overlay district with the old zoning code, and he had been thinking about reestablishing it at the appropriate time.

Ms. McKenzie suggested that the Town offer an incentive to building owners to find retail and food occupants for their buildings instead of letting the units sit vacant. Mr. Reidy suggested that the Town offer an incentive for businesses that last longer than 1 year to make improvements.

Commissioner Laughery said that he wanted to let the EDC know that the Board had approved of downtown wifi at the last Board Meeting. He also asked if anyone had looked into incentives directed at Downtown property owners to fix up their properties and to be flexible with things like rent to help business tenants just starting out. Commissioner Laughery said that the cell phone tower was approved for Cooke Street and is expected to be completed in April. He said that the Town had found out that high speed fiber already existed along the railroad tracks, although there was not an offramp, and that would be a huge selling point for any business looking to relocate to Wendell who could afford to put an offramp in.

Mr. Bergmark and Mr. Reidy gave updates about the progress of the Distillery and the Taproom. Mr. White said that a bill had been presented to the State Legislature to allow distilleries sell samples of their products on the spot. Mr. Reidy said the Appearance Commission was meeting to form a subcommittee to volunteer their services to help businesses dress up their storefronts. He said Ms. McKenzie would be helping out with that. Ms. Porter said the Chamber of Commerce was moving forward with setting up their nonprofit status.

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Mr. Reidy said Broach Custom Signs had talked to the Planning Department about offering a shingle sign frame at a discount for downtown business owners.

The meeting was adjourned.