

Wednesday, July 26, 2017 Meeting Minutes

Economic Development Committee – Joint Workgroup Meeting

EDC Members Present: Ed Morrell, Gene Braddy, Stacey Piesche, Valerie DeLoach, Bryan Green, and Niki Jones

EDC Members Absent: Paul White and Lee Mabry

Staff Present: David Bergmark, Wyatt McGhee

Guests: none

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The meeting was held in the Conference Room at Town Hall, 15 E. Fourth Street. The meeting was called to order at 5:33 P.M. David Bergmark welcomed all present and asked if the new members had introduced themselves. Valerie DeLoach and Bryan Green indicated they had. Wyatt McGhee introduced himself as the Town’s new Planning Technician. Mr. Bergmark said there were no members of the public present to comment.

David Bergmark said the EDC needed to elect new officers, a Chair and Vice-Chair, and then opened the floor for nominations. Bryan Green made a motion for Paul White to continue as Chairman; Stacey Piesche seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Edward Morrell made a motion for Stacey Piesche to serve as Vice Chairperson; Gene Braddy seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Bergmark indicated that the date of the minutes needed to be revised to June 28. Ed Morrell then made a motion to approve the minutes from the June 28, 2017 meeting. Stacey Piesche seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

David Bergmark distributed and reviewed a list entitled “EDC Accomplishments” that the Economic Development Committee had been involved with. He said originally the EDC was formed in 2013, with the primary task of establishing a certified site. He said the EDC successfully reached out to property owners with prospective sites, and received good feedback from those owners, but was unable to get them to commit to a price, or do the necessary due diligence to create a certified site.

Mr. Bergmark said copies of the bylaws were included with his email. He said the bylaws spoke of two work-groups, but that the EDC had suspended meeting as separate work groups and had met jointly for some time. He said he wanted EDC members to view their time as well spent and asked the committee what they saw as important roles for the EDC or if they had specific projects or initiatives they wanted to be involved in.

Bryan Green said he thought the EDC’s role as a liaison between the Town and the broader community was a critical role. He said he saw this committee as a means of distributing information to businesses and citizens. Gene Braddy asked if the planning department could share information regarding available properties and prospective businesses looking to locate in Wendell in between the regularly scheduled EDC meetings. Mr. Bergmark said that should not be a problem.

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Niki Jones said he thought the Town needed a strategic plan dealing with Economic Development. He said we need to establish our priorities. Mr. Jones asked if downtown development was our primary focus, and if so we need to make that clear and pursue that goal. He said many businesses are looking at traffic counts, median income, and the like when making their location decisions, but if there were three or five specific businesses types that we want to attract, we should focus our policies and efforts on those types of businesses.

Mr. Bergmark said the Town did have a strategic plan at one time and advanced a select number of its goals, but that many of the goals were not well defined or were not feasible. He said he thought having a plan was important, but any plan would need to recognize that there is no real funding assigned to economic development. Mr. Bergmark said the Town had just revised its incentive policy to raise the threshold for large businesses from one million dollars to five million dollars.

Niki Jones said he also thought the façade grant was an important tool and he was glad to see that it was funded for this fiscal year.

Ed Morrell said he saw two things the Town needed to do. He said the first item was to try to bring employers to town. He said the Town should reach out to local large businesses and ask them who their vendors are, and whether their business would benefit from having the vendors locate closer to their business. Mr. Morrell said the second item the Town needed to work on was bringing retailers to the Town that would be assets. He said it was crazy that the Town did not have a dry cleaner. Gene Braddy said the Town needed a dry cleaner with a store front, even if it was only a drop off and pick up location.

David Bergmark said if the Town is reaching out to businesses asking them to locate here, we need to have specific locations to direct them to, and we need to know what the lease rate or purchase price would be for those locations. Mr. Bergmark said he knows there are three tenant spots in the Parrish Realty Office Building that are available, and that Chuck Corbett would be sending him some marketing material. He said he has also met with the new owner of the Todd house and Todd's Train depot building. He said the owner planned to create two tenant spots within the old train depot building.

Valerie DeLoach asked how the Town markets itself. She said she sees marketing as a role of the EDC. She said she has a website and blog 'WhyWendell.com' that she uses to promote the Town.

Bryan Green asked who will control what content is placed on the new electronic billboard. Mr. Bergmark said he was not certain, as there was no written agreement. He said he had been told the Town would have access to place informational or promotional material on the sign, but he did not know how much space the Town would be given or how often the Town's content would rotate on. Mr. Green asked who with the Town did know. David Bergmark said he would follow up on that question with his boss and get back to the EDC.

Ed Morrell said most successful business owners are branches of existing successful businesses or are locals. He said locals grind it out during tough times. He asked how many local people would love to start a business if they had some encouragement. Mr. Morrell asked if the EDC could place promotional material on the existing electronic message board, or on the future electronic billboard promoting the Town as business friendly or encouraging new businesses to locate here. Mr. Bergmark said the Town

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Manager approved messages for the existing electronic message board sign. He said he would check with her to see if such material could be placed on the message board sign.

David Bergmark said one marketing piece that had not been successfully utilized was the Wake County Economic Development newsletter. He said Wake County ED sends out a monthly newsletter that includes municipal highlights for new and expanding businesses. He said staff had experienced great difficulty getting businesses to provide a few sentences for staff to send to the County. Stacey Piesche asked how staff had contacted the businesses. David Bergmark said staff contacted them over the phone or in person. Stacey Piesche said it might help if staff met with them to talk about the new business and staff created the write-up. Valerie DeLoach said she had found meeting with the business owners at their store really opened them up. She said she was always warmly received when she came to their store, took a photo, and offered to highlight them on her website.

Mr. Bergmark asked if Valerie would be willing to provide a similar service for the EDC, in order to generate a few sentences about the business to share with Wake County. Valerie DeLoach said she was already doing the work, so she didn't see any problem with performing that service.

Gene Braddy asked if the Town could purchase the building on the corner of Marshburn Road and Wendell Boulevard. He said it is an eyesore. Mr. Bergmark said he knew the Town Manager had approached the owner in the past about purchasing this property, but he was not certain how much they were asking. He said he would bring this back up to the Town Manager.

Gene Braddy said he also thought the Town should look into painting and fixing up the stage at the Town Square. He said this could potentially be an Eagle Scout project or Boy Scout project.

David Bergmark then described the Town's involvement with the Wendell Wonderland event. He indicated that the Kannon building may or may not be available this year, but Paul White has offered the Universal showroom or another space as possible locations for the event. Mr. Bergmark then described the Christmas Craft market and said staff would contact the craft vendors if the EDC members could contact businesses along Third Street and Main Street to get commitments on staying open late, decorating windows, participating in the raffle, or even donating items to the raffle. Bryan Green offered to help with this. Ed Morrell then asked how the Chamber of Commerce has been involved with Wendell Wonderland. After a general discussion among the committee members and staff regarding the Chamber's support and involvement with Wendell Wonderland, Mr. Bergmark said their involvement as a group was limited, though members had participated with their own businesses. Bryan Green said he was on the Chamber Board, and he would like to bring this up to the Chamber to see if they could help with getting local businesses to participate. He said even if the Chamber Board did not commit, he could contact the downtown businesses himself.

David Bergmark provided an update on the status of the Wendell Taproom (Everest Kitchen), Wendell Falls commercial sites, Wendell EMS station, ABC site, and Kannon's building, and answered questions. He said he had also met with the developer interested in locating a shopping center on the property north of the ABC store site along Rolesville Road.

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Gene Braddy asked for an update on the Brunch Bill. After some discussion among the committee members regarding its potential impact in Wendell, David Bergmark concluded by stating that the Town Commissioners are scheduled to take action on this matter in August.

Mr. Bergmark asked if there were any additional committee members' comments. Seeing none, he asked for a motion to adjourn. Niki Jones made a motion to adjourn. Gene Braddy seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The EDC meeting was adjourned at 7:02 P.M.