

**Wednesday, August 27, 2014 Meeting Minutes**

**Economic Development Committee – Joint Workgroup Meeting**

**EDC Members Present:** Don Brown, Paul White, Joe Ann Wright, Ed Morrell, Lesia McKenzie, Steven Kyle Williams, Ginny Porter

**EDC Members Absent:** Barry Perry

**Staff Present:** David Bergmark, Patrick Reidy, Allison Rice

**Guests:** Commissioner Virginia Gray, Brad Rhinehalt from Newland Communities

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The meeting was called to order at 5:40 pm.

Mr. White made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Ms. McKenzie and approved.

Mr. White made a motion to have the EDC meet once a month in the evening, to have one committee instead of two work groups, and to call additional meetings as needed. Ms. McKenzie seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. White suggested that Brad Rhinehalt from Newland Properties join the EDC, perhaps as an ex officio member or an unofficial member. Mr. Rhinehalt said that he was planning on coming to most of the EDC meetings anyway. Mr. Morrell said that he is very excited about Newland being in town, but feels that Mr. Rhinehalt may not feel comfortable being a member of the committee. Mr. Morrell said that there might be a conflict of interest. Mr. Rhinehalt said this might be true, and that he was focusing on joining the Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Rhinehalt gave an update about Wendell Falls, saying that the amenity center is on track. He said the foundation was put in and they had just started putting up the steel.

Mr. Reidy gave an update to the committee about broadband fiber for the town. He said he had been talking to many different companies, asking for current locations of fiber, and researching the feasibility of bringing fiber to Wendell.

Mr. Morrell asked about the status of the cell phone tower. Mr. Bergmark told the committee the current status of the cell phone tower in the M&I district now that SHPO has not approved of the location. He said the cell phone company was looking for alternate locations, but if they didn't find one, then they could still build at the original location. Ginny Porter asked how much time the Cell Tower company had to review alternative locations. Mr. Bergmark said he was not certain. Mr. Reidy said that there were inquiries into a location of another tower by a different provider on Cook Street.

Mr. Bergmark updated the committee about the firing range ordinance. He said it was passed by the Board of Commissions with the Planning Board's recommendations. He said the Planning Board's recommendations did include a limit on decibels and required a special use permit.

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Ms. Rice discussed relevant case studies pulled from “Small Towns, Big Ideas”, to give the Economic Development Committee ideas to pursue for the town. She said there were several avenues small towns could take towards economic development: workforce development, entrepreneurial development, encouraging businesses to move to Wendell. Ms. Rice also suggested that they focus on unique community building, which means making Wendell an attractive place to live, and focusing on amenities like greenways, tourism, ecotourism, arts and historic preservation based development.

Ms. Rice pointed out the lessons learned from the report, saying that these were things that Wendell could learn from. She said, for example, Wendell could look at what its weaknesses were, come up with a strategy to work with them, come up with a business development plan, and work with different groups to have a sustainable plan.

Mr. Bergmark said that lesson number 6 might apply to Wendell directly: to measure and celebrate short term successes to sustain long term community economic development. Mr. Bergmark said that would be a good and easy one to do. He said when we have something like the façade grant, we need to promote that. He said a lot of times we were too negative about what we can't do or say it would cost too much money, and we didn't do enough to congratulate ourselves for the things that we do.

Commissioner Grey asked what staff suggested to get the word out more when good things happen, such as when the baseball team wins or when someone uses the façade grant. Ms. Rice said that the town was starting to use social media more, they had the kiosks, and the chamber of commerce did a lot. Ms. Rice suggested that they build on all of the avenues available to them. She said the Town could, for example, have an annual award dinner for everyone that contributed to the town, or just hand out awards for recognition to people that contributed to the Town. Ms. Rice also suggested service events where momentum could be built, like a day of service, where Boy Scouts or 4H club could get involved.

Ms. Rice said that identifying our weaknesses and understanding the EDC's role would be helpful in knowing where to move forward. For example, we didn't have anyone working for the town that could write grants to get different projects. She said identifying that gap should help us work towards that for the future. She said it would be like putting together a business plan instead of just winging it. Mr. Bergmark said it was important to point out that there is not one solution that's going to fix everything.

Mr. Reidy talked about how the Appearance Committee was trying to build off of the Wendell Wonderland festival by incorporating a residential Christmas decoration contest.

Mr. Brown asked if only town employees could write grants, or if a citizen committee could do it. Mr. Bergmark said there wasn't necessarily a requirement as to who could fill it out, but that it would be a long confusing process. He said there are several towns that are able to do multi-million dollar projects and have most of them paid for. Ms. Wright asked if there were funds to hire a grant writer for the town. Mr. Reidy said the biggest thing wasn't so much the writing, it would be knowing that the grants are out there.

Mr. Rhinehalt said that staff could canvass other small, nearby towns to see what kind of grants they had gone after. He said Holly Springs got a lot of money for water and sewer. Mr. Rhinehalt also said that he was going to bring up getting funding for Marks Creek Greenway. Mr. Brown said that greenways were a really big deal right now and they were becoming what people want to live by. He

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said the Neuse River greenways are pretty close to downtown, and Wake County has a lot of conservancy lands nearby.

Mr. White said that it was likely that an Amish Deli would be taking over his building downtown.

Mr. White asked what was happening with the Farmer's Market. Commissioner Gray said that the Chamber of Commerce wasn't going to be doing the Farmer's Market next year. Mr. White said that he was looking to buy the property where the Farmer's Market currently stood, and that if the town would take it over, then there were things he could do to make the location better. He said he could put a car port and a log cabin up that would be for sale.

Mr. Brown asked if the town had looked in to incubators. He said a lot of small towns are doing that now, and now that we're going to have an extra 4000 homes come it, a lot of those people aren't going to want to go to an executive office. He said they're going to want to go to a flex space where there were people around. Mr. Brown said with an additional 4000 units coming in, there would certainly be enough people to support an incubator in the downtown district.

Mr. Bergmark said the town hasn't really considered establishing its own incubator to his knowledge. He said these usually aren't run by the town, but rather they're run by the Chamber of Commerce, a downtown organization, etc.

Mr. White said that the main problem they were running into was that Wake County has some of the strictest fire inspectors in the state, and Wendell should look into getting their own fire inspector.

Mr. Bergmark said that, going back to the list, he saw one idea that he liked. He said one town created a network of retired business people to mentor entrepreneurs in town. Mr. Rhinehalt said that SCORE, which Wake County sponsors, does something similar. Mr. Reidy said that Wake Tech also does a lot of free small business training. Mr. Reidy said he would reach out to them, make contact, and let them know that Wendell is here.

Ms. Rice suggested that the EDC start thinking about a long-term strategy. She suggested that the members read through the literature that was given to them and email staff their ideas to discuss at the next meeting. Mr. Bergmark said Wendell has some assets; there was the Business Center downtown for example.

Mr. Bergmark said that Buxton, a consulting firm, would be speaking to the EDC at the next meeting and that staff would be inviting all of the commissioners.

Commissioner Gray said that WRAL would be taping at Zep's soon.

Mr. Reidy gave an update about the status of the distillery, the tap room, and the Mexican grocery.

Mr. Bergmark asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Brown made the motion. Mrs. Wright seconded it. The meeting adjourned at 7:10.