

Wednesday, July 23, 2014 Meeting Minutes

Economic Development Committee – Joint Workgroup Meeting

EDC Members Present: Barry Perry, Don Brown, Paul White, Joe Ann Wright, Ed Morrell

EDC Members Absent: Kyle Williams, Ginny Porter, Lesia McKenzie

Staff Present: David Bergmark, Patrick Reidy, Tamah Hughes

Guests: Commissioner Virginia Gray

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The meeting was called to order.

Mr. Perry reminded everyone to call their Representatives to thank them for their work on the highway designation.

An EDC member made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded and approved.

Don Brown brought the Committee up to date on Item 5D, House Bill 1135, pertaining to state loans for shovel-ready sites. He said there are some groups lobbying to extend the payback period from 5 years to 15 years.

Patrick Reidy updated the Committee on the status of bringing a high speed fiber service to Wendell (Item 5B). He said the Board of Commissioners liked the idea and asked staff to do more research. He said the town manager, planning staff, and the Town's IT person had visited other municipalities to see what they've been doing with fiber. Tamah Hughes said they met with Holly Springs (who's building their own fiber), Wake Forest (working with RST), Wilson (grandfathered in their own business model), and NCRN about building into their network.

Mrs. Hughes said NCRN is the network that connects universities, hospitals, etc. She said this is what Holly Springs is connecting to. She said the NCRN line currently goes from Wake Forest to Garner, and is about 13 miles from Wendell, but this could be the cheapest, most reliable method. She said to connect to fiber like this would cost about \$100,000 per mile.

Mrs. Hughes said staff also talked with AT&T. She said staff doesn't believe that Wendell will be attractive for companies to come in themselves to lay fiber. Mrs. Hughes said Wendell Falls will likely be using a company like AT&T to lay down fiber, but the town won't be able to take advantage of this.

Tamah Hughes said there are three models:

1. A third party like AT&T comes in to lay down fiber. The problem with third party companies is that they'll only build what they need and they'll charge to make each connection.
2. The Holly Springs model, where they spent \$1.5 million (which included planning, engineering, etc.) to lay down 13 miles of fiber. Originally they had projected a 10 year payoff, but now they're projecting a 5 or six year payoff. The town can now be provided high speed internet independent of the larger companies. They can provide access to nonprofits, they can give away strands to companies to incentivize growth.

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3. Wifi downtown.

Tamah said staff estimates that they could build 6 miles of fiber to start. Mr. Reidy said that the plan would be to run a ring around downtown, picking up the Community Center, government buildings, and nonprofits to start. He said the town can provide access to businesses. He said due to the higher speeds, the town could then provide free wifi downtown, which the commissioners expressed an interest in. He said the town wouldn't have enough power to run that with its current service.

Mr. White said that the town isn't going to encourage large-scale businesses without it.

Mr. Reidy said that Salsbury had a very poor business model when they built the entire system as a grid at once, and were stuck when the economy went south. He said Wilson and Holly Springs advised Wendell's staff to take a more incremental approach and to build growing, connected rings.

Mrs. Hughes said that attracting businesses is important, but the EDC should also keep in mind that if the town doesn't lay the infrastructure, AT&T isn't going to bring these services. They had said in a meeting with staff that Wendell isn't big enough for them to be interested in it. Patrick said that Holly Springs has only been live for 6 weeks, and already the large internet companies are going to homes and businesses and offering lower prices for their services. Even though citizens can't hook on the town's fiber yet, they're already seeing a benefit. Holly Springs and Wilson also said that their best advice is to have a strong business model, choose a contractor that's reliable (not necessarily the cheapest), and to follow through.

Mr. Perry asked about the fiber line down the railroad track. Mrs. Hughes said that is owned by Quest Technology. She said the town doesn't have a contact for them yet, but it could potentially be a route to pursue since it's so close.

The EDC asked staff to gather more information about how close the lines are to Wendell and to continue to keep them informed.

5A. Status update on Outdoor Dining Regulations

Mr. Reidy said that the Outdoor Dining Policy was passed by the Town Board the past Monday. He emailed the new policy to Nelson Hernandez from the Wendell Tap Room, who plans to participate. He will also drop off the policy at Primo's and Peedie and Aubrey's. Anyone else who wants to participate can submit an application at any time.

Mrs. Wright asked when the Wendell Tap Room expects to open. Mr. Reidy said that the expected date is now 2015, since the owner is trying to do most of the construction himself.

Mr. White said that he has approached the Chamber of Commerce about hosting their annual banquet in his recently purchased building downtown, so that will be good exposure for the Downtown area. The Chamber of Commerce seemed to be interested. Mr. Perry said that he spoke with someone at Empire Restaurants about doing something in Wendell, but Wendell isn't on his radar because he's already involved in a lot of projects. Mr. White said that if a renter was willing to build a kitchen, he would let them be in the building rent free for a year.

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Mr. Perry asked if the dry cleaner was planning on reopening. Mr. Reidy said that's not the plan right now. Commissioner Gray said that there was significant structural damage to the building.

Mr. White asked about progress with the indoor firing range. Mr. Bergmark said that the Planning Board met a couple of days previous and made a recommendation to approve an indoor firing range to the Board of Commissioners with some conditions. The only thing the Planning Board changed from the staff's recommendation was that they increased the minimum distance from schools to 1200 feet. Mr. White asked why it mattered how far a shooting range was from a school. Commissioner Gray said that people are being careful with all of the school shootings. Mr. Perry asked where they got the number 1200 feet, since it seems randomly selected. Mr. Bergmark said that the proposed 1200 feet doesn't preclude as many areas as it may sound.

Mr. Perry pointed out that the Planning Board recommended 60 decibels, and an alarm clock is 80 decibels. Mr. Bergmark said that this is the recommended level of noise you can hear from the property line. Mr. Perry said that silencers will bring the noise level of a gun to 110 decibels. He pointed out that it will be louder at an outdoor football event than it will be at a gun range. He said they just killed the project. Mr. White said that they need to go to 110 decibels and that they need to lower the distance from schools to 300 feet.

Mr. Bergmark pointed out that there's a difference between something that's loud for an hour and something that loud all day. Mr. Perry said that he can call an industry professional and that he can get staff a decibel level that would be appropriate.

Mr. Perry said that you can currently legally walk by the school openly carrying a gun. A restriction like this won't keep visible guns away from the school, it will only restrict the business from coming to Wendell in the first place.

Mr. Bergmark said that the 60 decibel recommendation didn't come from the Planning Board. He said that staff recommended that number based on what other municipalities do as well, as a series of studies that say that 85 decibels over a long period of time will cause hearing loss. Mrs. Wright asked if they were recommending 60 decibels inside or outside. Mr. Bergmark said the 60 decibel limit pertained to outside at the property line. Mr. White asked if Staff had checked to see what the noise restrictions were on already-built firing ranges in Raleigh. Mr. Bergmark said that those facilities were grandfathered in, so they don't have any noise restrictions when they were built.

Mr. Perry said that the cost involved with bringing these facilities up to code won't come from meeting these noise restrictions, they'll come from making sure they comply with EPA rules.

Mr. White asked staff what they know about the gas line. He said they're looking to bring a new transmission line through Wendell. Mr. Bergmark said that they've set up a meeting with staff. Mr. White said that they sent letters to all the businesses in Wendell, and to him this will only be a benefit to the town. Mr. Perry said that there's already a natural gas line that goes through Wendell, straight through many residential areas.

Mr. White talked about the Board of Commissioner's request for changes to the UDO. He said the Board should go back to the UDO that was first developed.

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Mr. White said that a new tire business was coming in to town. Mr. Perry said that it may not be the most exciting business, but they are successful in other places. Mr. Reidy said that this will be more of a storage area to support their business located elsewhere.

Mr. Bergmark asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. White made the motion. Mrs. Wright seconded it.