

Unity Economic Development Committee

February 5, 2018 Minutes (Approved)

Note: Decisions and commitments made in ***bold italic***.

Present: Mary L, Mary Ann H, Najean S, Jim B, Jon W, Ellen B, Lucia P, Larry K, Jenny d, Alicyn S, Tony A, Kari H, Gail C

Excused: Mike G

Guests: Zoey Bond, Dan McCormick, Penny S, Andy Reed (budget committee)

ITEM 1: Approval of Minutes

Moved to accept as presented (Mary Ann); Seconded (Lucia). Approved unanimously.

ITEM 2: Committee Updates

RLF Committee: The first loan has been preliminarily approved, pending setting terms.

Marketing, Makers Space, and Trails: No updates.

ITEM 3: Lodging Committee Update

Selectmen reviewed a draft RFP last month and recommended that the item go before the town meeting for funding approval of the feasibility study, due to the size of the appropriation, rather than being assigned to previously-appropriated funds.

ITEM 4: Budget Committee & EDC

What are duties of, and relationship between, EDC and Budget Committee, and should they be in better communication? Reading ordinances, there is overlap on the work both committees are doing, and some level of communication could save work.

Andy stated that the Budget Committee can meet up to 4 times a year, but typically only has enough business to justify one or two meetings. Mary stated that it would make sense for EDC and Budget Committee to jointly participate in conversations about TIF appropriations prior to Town Meeting. Andy says the committee would be more than happy to do so. No ordinance change is required for the two groups to meet; but intentional joint discussion would lead to more informed people at Town Meeting, and make sure everyone is aware of the state mandated restrictions on TIF funding. Andy stated the Budget Committee would appreciate a short TIF primer because there was confusion about the EDC recommendation about spending down old appropriations before requesting new, and the Budget Cmtee did not feel they got a good explanation of what has been approved vs future.

ACTION ITEM: Members of EDC will attend next Budget Committee meeting Feb 7th @ 6:30pm @ UCC to provide a TIF overview, and provide insight into recommended appropriations, both old and new. Mary Ann committed to preparing a presentation for the Budget Committee.

ITEM 5: TIF Budget Proposal

Discussion about whether to keep the new TIF budget items grouped together as a slate or break them up for discussion at Town Meeting. Jim observed that at last week's Budget Committee meeting, some members were reluctant to vote on the TIF budget as a slate, and rather wanted to vote on individual items.

Tony stated that he preferred at least the lodging feasibility to be stand-alone.

Lucia and Gail suggested combining the streetscape appropriation with the “Traffic calming” portion of the “Traffic calming, KVCOG dues, legal, general administration” appropriation. However, the Streetscape item is for a plan and some want to keep the lighting plan separate because it may be more controversial, and we would need to implement changes in steps.

Penny referred to a conversation some members of the marketing committee had with a Central Maine Power (CMP) representative a few weeks ago. Penny stated that lighting replacement is very costly. Jenny and Mary asked whether the selectmen still think a lighting feasibility study is needed. Discussion ensued about the options for lighting. Gail noted that a plan will help the town reach a future vision. Alicyn asked Penny what else could be done with the \$10,000. Penny would support if we removed the word “plan.” Mary stated she did not want to put something on the docket that the Selectmen do not agree with; Jim disagreed, and recommended we let the people decide. Gail stated a concern that if the Selectmen do not like the concept, even if approved, when it comes to implementation, they will not approve the actual spending.

In the end, the group decided to leave the \$10,000 for a plan.

Decision: The TIF budget for new appropriations will be presented to the Town Meeting as 8 individual articles – the 7 that were decided at the last meeting, plus one article for lodging feasibility study from NEW appropriation (taking this project out of old), which leaves \$15,000 in available among previously appropriated funds.

ITEM 6: Selectmen and EDC – What’s Next?

Mary observed that Selectmen vision of roles contrasts with EDC vision of roles. We all need to be more on the same page to prevent spinning wheels. What if the selectmen do not approve of anything in the TIF budget? Gail stated that if the town people do approve, the Selectmen have historically honored that.

Gail asked the Selectmen to state what they would like to see in terms of economic development in the town of Unity?

Penny stated that there is still low hanging fruit. Tony stated that he has not seen the town benefit from the TIF funding over the past 5-10 years, aside from the UBX map. He wants to see impacts sooner than 5-10 years down the road. He believes plans and studies do not pay off soon enough. Jim stated that business develops more with planning, and that we have to make multiple-year plans and steps. Jim asked what projects can be done immediately? Penny responded that wayfinding signs is a low hanging fruit.

Tony stated that we could reach out to owners of establishments that are vacant/closed and ask what they need. Gail reminded the group that a facades grant could help, but only if there is a viable business – the entrepreneur has to have a solid business plan. A facades grant without the business plan is Fairfield. Gail reminded the group that businesses that do exist were surveyed and stated they wanted more marketing and lodging; this has been repeated in several reports. Mary and Mary Ann stated that without a website, there is little we can do to “list” or link the town on other sites. Jon noted that the EDC brings up professional services and that’s when Selectmen disagree.

Larry recalled that the Grow Smart process was perhaps grandiose; and suggested that we might want to connect with the state chamber of commerce so we know what new businesses might be interested in coming and get Unity on their radar. Gail suggested Maine & Co instead, and that we might want to have a property inventory. Lucia asked how Envirem and the dollar store got located here? Andy asked whether Envirem might be able to help attract other businesses? Mary stated Envirem seems to want to strengthen their own position, and did mention that they feel the lack of lodging in the area.

Tony stated he would sign off on anything that would increase tax base or jobs for the town. There was general and shared frustration about the lack of common ground between the Selectmen and the EDC. Jim Buckle left the meeting.

Alicyn stated that the Town Meeting will be a time to take the pulse of what the general public wants, and that by considering each item we will know how the public feels on each one. Several members agreed with this optimistic sentiment. Alicyn volunteered to create "floor sheets" for the meeting explaining the items and how TIF funds are not affecting general funds or tax rates.

ACTION ITEMS:

- 1. Larry will call the Maine State Chamber of Commerce to ask what aid they might offer and what the town can do to be ready for business.**
- 2. Tony will call building owner(s) who have empty lots to ask what might be needed to keep business here. Mary and Gail willing to assist.**
- 3. Alicyn will create sheets for each TIF budget article, with help from Mary Ann and marketing committee.**

ITEM 7: Annual Report

Penny advised that Kari in the Town Office asks that the annual report is limited to 1-2 pages for inclusion in the larger annual town report. Deadline is early March.

ACTION ITEMS: Mary Ann and Gail will revise the draft annual report for further review at the next EDC meeting.

ITEM 8: Broadband

Gail stated that she has heard complaints about Internet service in the Town. There is a planning grant available for connectivity. UniTel has received funding for improved service and a web ad for "fiber to the home," yet people still have lousy web service. Gail suggested talking to someone who knows more about broadband. TIF funding can be used for broadband, but the \$ might not go very far.

Can the EDC start looking into this? There was general support. Gail suggested inviting the broadband arm of UniTel to a future meeting, and in the meantime gather input from customers about their satisfaction with the speed. Larry and Mary caution against criminalizing the company, but support finding out what UniTel's plans are for fiber to home and high speed internet.

ACTION ITEMS:

- 1. Gail will invite UniTel to next meeting to provide an update**
- 2. Jenny will inquire whether Unity College's information officer might be willing to present to the committee**

Meeting Adjourned at 8:05pm.

Next meeting is March 5.