



Falmouth Economic Improvement Committee

Wednesday, April 6, 2011 Meeting Notes

Attendance:

Name	Present	Name	Present	Name	Present
Ann Armstrong	√	Sterling Kozlowski	√	David Libby	√
William Lunt III	√	Anne Theriault	√	Jim Thibodeau	√
Mike Skillin	√				

Council Liaison: -
Staff present: Theo Holtwijk
Others present: -

Theo started the meeting around 4:05 PM and welcomed everyone.

1. Introductions

The group did a round of introductions. It was suggested to move item 5 Election of Chair and Vice Chair next.

2. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Theo briefly reviewed the role of the chair and vice chair.

Dave Libby expressed an interest in being chair, but also said he would be out all of May and perhaps some of June.

Dave Libby was nominated chair. There were no other nominations. The vote was 7-0 in favor.

Bill Lunt was nominated vice chair. There were no other nominations. The vote was 7-0 in favor.

Several other members stated that they were busy right now, but may be interested in the future in serving as chair or vice chair.

3. Handouts from February 16th meeting

Theo briefly reviewed the handouts he had assembled. He made the committee aware that LPAC+ is currently working to update the Town's Comprehensive Plan and that the local

economy was a required topic for that. He hope that the FEIC could provide input for that. Jim Thibodeau serves on FEIC as well as LPAC+.

Theo stated that he would gladly provide any other information that the committee would find useful.

The Available Commercial Properties list was reviewed. Ann A. asked if staff knew how many hits that site had gotten. Theo did not know, but could find out. It was also asked how the reception of the list has been. Anecdotally, the reception has been good, but it is not known how many people have used the list and located property through it. Anne T suggested making the residential brokers in the area also aware that this list exists as they may work with CEO's of prospective companies. Feedback from MEREDA was also suggested.

Anne asked if the Town pays for advertising in The Forecaster. It does, Theo replied. Anne suggested that The Notes may be another media outlet for the Town and that she writes the Falmouth News column for that.

Bill mentioned that he had heard that Cumberland County had recently filled an economic development position there. He wanted to make sure we were connected with that. Theo mentioned that he had not heard of that, but that there for the past five years there has been a CDBG grant program that does some economic development work and that he is vice chair of the Municipal Oversight Committee of that program. He will check to see if there is any other position that was filled.

4. Discussion of Possible FEIC Tasks

Dave stated that he felt education was needed. He wanted to invite the Board of Zoning Appeals and the Planning Board and their respective staff (with Town Manager permission) to come and speak to FEIC and ask them: What are your challenges?

Bill stated that there would be interest with Planning Board to do that.

Jim stated that there have been problems. He cited a bank that was turned away and incurred a month delay in review.

Anne T stated that she wanted Falmouth to be easy, the least cumbersome town to deal with relative to other towns. She says that developers avoid towns that are perceived as "impossible."

Jim cited Westbrook as an easy town to do business with. He mentioned Christman Pool which, he said, gave up in Falmouth and went to Westbrook.

Sterling asked if Falmouth is seen as unfriendly.

Dave stated that Falmouth had come a long way thanks to turnover in staff, but that there was more to accomplish.

Jim stated that it was not a staff issue currently, but the machine that is in play. He mentioned the natural resource rules and asked if people really wanted to add another review layer.

Anne T. mentioned that she did not want Falmouth to slack off on environmental rules.

Sterling asked if the group should also listen to business people who are not on the FEIC.

Dave agreed with that. He said it should be easier for business and that Falmouth should be open for business.

Sterling wondered if it was more an issue of process, and not people.

Dave said that there were many ordinances in Falmouth, some of which were unwieldy and convoluted.

Anne T. asked if the group should also talk to businesses that have gone elsewhere.

Sterling asked if it was the number of ordinances, the overlapping of ordinances, conflicting ordinances, or how Town staff goes about it.

Dave said all of the above.

Bill stated that the ordinances were written as development controls.

Jim said that the Resource Conservation Overlay District was one example of that.

Bill mentioned the Ridgewood project, where he said the permitting costs were so high, due to changing rules, that the developer lost the property.

Anne T. commented that she felt the buildings in Ridgewood were too close together.

Dave said that the Ridgewood developer had spent \$1M on permitting costs and had budgeted about \$300K.

Bill mentioned that the subsequent developer of that site had come to the Planning Board for amendments and the units were selling now. He suggested that talking to the new developer would be good.

Dave was thinking of another business that had a regulatory experience that the FEIC should hear about. He could not quite think of the name. The group helped him. The business was Hugs Restaurant. Owner's name is Beth McKenney. Nobody could remember what the issue there was.

Ann A. mentioned that in the meantime the group could work on business retention and promotion. The group also needs to understand what the successes have been.

Sterling asked if there any residents that the group should talk to. He said that in any community there seem to be 10-12 “thought leaders” that are involved in the community.

Bill mentioned that people think of businesses when they think of economic development, but that residential development was also important. He mentioned that development always follows water and sewer extensions. He noted that Cumberland had done a good job on Route 100 in creating a viable district there thanks to utility extensions. He mentioned that Falmouth had not taken the lead on making extensions. In Cumberland, the Town fronted the money. He said that such an investment could return money ten-fold.

Jim agreed. He mentioned a need to make policy changes to include more incentives and fewer burdens.

Anne T. asked about what the permit requirements were. Theo mentioned that all that information is on the Town’s website and that he would provide links to that.

It was asked if there was a welcome packet for businesses. Theo said a welcome packet does exist for residents, but not for businesses. The closest the Town comes to that is the business information resource website.

5. Next Meeting

The committee decided to meet next on Wednesday April 27 at 4:00 PM as several people were out on 4/20.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05 PM.

Draft Meeting Notes by Theo Holtwijk, April 7, 2011