



Falmouth Economic Improvement Committee

Wednesday, May 4, 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: Nathan Poore, Theo Holtwijk
Others present: -

Dave started the meeting at 4:05 PM. He cited from the attendance policy of the Town.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the April 6th meeting were, upon a motion by Bill Lunt and second by Anne Armstrong, approved with a 4-0 vote (Kozlowski and Thibodeau had not yet arrived).

2. Discussion of Possible FEIC Tasks

Dave suggested to meet with Planning Board and Board of Zoning Appeals to find out what stumbling blocks they see in the permit process and what changes they may suggest to the ordinances. He also suggested to meet with the permit staff and with stakeholders, i.e. people who have gone through the permit process.

Ann A. asked if that was the suggested order of the discussions. Sterling suggested to hear from the business people first. The group agreed with that and brainstormed various names of people to invite. Kevin Dore of Christman Pool was suggested, as was Beth McKinney of Hug’s Restaurant. Nathan suggested that “good stories” should also be heard, such as with Gorham Savings Bank. True North was mentioned as having a potential handicap access issue.

Dave mentioned that the group should be looking for problems that it can solve. He cited as an example Route 100 issues that were not addressed by the Council. Nathan clarified that the group was looking for problems with the regulations, not with staff. Ann A. said the focus should be on zoning and signage issues. Sterling suggested that there also may be process improvements that would be needed. Nathan added that a lot also depends on the developer and the developer’s agent. Bill felt that it makes a difference how the board and

staff handle permit applications. He felt that due to staff changes, board changes and board leadership improvements had been made. He cited Wal-Mart as an example where there contentious issues but where he heard that the Board had acted professionally. He agreed that both sides should be looked at.

Dave suggested to add Cheryl Branch of Gorham Savings Bank to the list. Bill suggested Bill Sowles. Bill added that the problem was with the ordinances. A lot of them are workable, but some tweaking was needed to give the board more discretion. He said there were also overlapping issues between ordinances. Bill also felt that Nathan and Theo should get hold of applicants before issues arise. Nathan added that many applications the BZA deals with are for non-conforming issues. He also felt that minor site plan items could be handled by staff.

Jim cited an example where someone was told he needed a survey, where all he really needed was a mortgage loan inspection. He solved that issue, which saved his client \$1200. Nathan felt that that was a staff issue to give correct guidance.

Jim felt that the group should also hear from design professionals who assist applicants. This was done a few years ago, he said. He felt that staff should be empowered, the ordinance should be empowered as well as the review boards. He wondered if the ordinances should not instead become guidelines.

Bill felt that the staff can do a lot what the Planning Board currently does. As Board chair he has made many "clean" items administrative items on the agenda. He felt more could be done. Nathan was asking if that included waiving performance standards. Bill felt that in some cases performance standards should be able to be waived. He also wanted the Planning Board to be able to make design suggestions to applicants.

Ann A. suggested that small businesses coming to town would also be good to talk to.

Jim suggested Kevin McQuinn and wondered if Peoples United Bank had a sign issue. Sterling said he could contact that bank.

Anne T. wondered if the permit process with Ace Hardware had gone smooth. The group was not aware of any issues. Ann A. mentioned that Ace had to take down several "open" flags.

Jim suggested Adam Shapiro of Bernie's Restaurant. David asked if there were any issues there.

Bill mentioned an issue with Bangor Savings, where the consultant did not follow proper procedure. He wondered if that meant that the rules were too hard or that people were just not following them. Jim stated that engineers take directions from their clients. He cited the 100 Acre Woods project where he had multiple clients. He agreed that there were two sides to every coin. Bill stated that it was hard to get both sides of issues, but agreed that site designers were important to talk to.

Sterling stated that there was a difference between opinion and data.

Ann A. brought up the issue of welcoming new businesses to the community. Anne T. stated that new businesses want to be recognized. Nathan suggested that the Town could work with the Chamber of Commerce to do something for new businesses. Ann A. wondered if those new businesses would also join the Chamber. Nathan thought that doing so would be marketing opportunity for those businesses and felt that The Forecaster could also be a part of it. Anne T. suggested that the Town set money aside for a Forecaster ad blast. Dave felt that that was a business owner's responsibility. He cited all the promotional that Gorham Savings Bank had done. The suggestion was made to have a process in place where the Town would do x, y and z with a business open house. Nathan stressed the need to be flexible, as businesses may have different needs.

Ann A. agreed to contact Cathy and Andre at Ace Hardware.

Sterling stated that all issues that would arise from the discussions are data. He also stated the importance of communicating what makes a good application. Nathan replied that the key was early, pre-application meetings with staff. He cited the example of Wal-Mart which had met with staff beforehand. Sterling felt it made sense to talk to consultants, and that Jim's suggestions made sense regarding requirements in the ordinance.

The group asked if there was a packet of information for businesses who need permits. Ethan Croce is the key contact person for that.

At this point in the meeting, the group observed a member of the public (Michael Doyle) in the doorway and invited him in and sit down. Mike replied that he was not yet involved in economic development issues.

Bill suggested Steve Woods of EMG3 as a guest.

Nathan asked that the group think about and come back with ideas of what should be included in a welcome package, such as maps or a recycling bucket.

Bill noted that the FEIC members had staggered terms. He felt that it was important that the committee members get out there and become part of the effort.

Ann A. saw the need for two kinds of information packages, one for people who need permits, the other as a welcome to a new business packet. Dave mentioned that he envisioned a simple tri-fold flyer that stated the steps of doing business in Falmouth. Nathan agreed that doing something like that would show that the Town cared.

Nathan also recounted that the CBI study of a few years ago recommended that the Town create a How-To manual. The Council had not acted on that pending the completion of an administrative update of the ordinance.

The group agreed to invite the speakers to come in two groups, as long as they were comfortable sharing their feedback. Sterling expected that it would take 2-3 meetings. Target dates for the discussions are May 18th and June 1st.

Anne T. suggested that questions be prepared ahead of time. The group agreed with that and formulated several questions:

- How did people perceive the permitting process?
- Why did they choose Falmouth? Or, if they left, why did they not choose Falmouth?
- How did they feel they were helped or supported by staff?
- What more the Town could have done for them?
- What rules they perceived as unnecessary obstacles for them?
- What would have made their experience more efficient?
- How the FEIC could help them?
- What they would have liked to have known before they started?

Sterling asked if any business retention numbers were known. The group cited Natural Fitness which had left and Books Etc. which had closed.

Dave wondered if the meetings after the ones planned should be with the Planning Board and BZA. Sterling suggested to reserve the June 15th meeting for the FEIC, so it could discuss what it had learned thus far and what questions it would have for the review boards. The group agreed with that approach.

The group reviewed all names and which committee member would contact each person:

- Christman Pool, Kevin Dore (Jim T)
- Beth McKinney, Hugs Italian Restaurant (Ann A)
- Gorham Savings Bank, (Ann A)
- True North/Foreside Place, Kevin McQuinn (Jim T)
- Morong, Bill Sowle (Dave L)
- Peoples United Bank (Sterling)
- Bernie's Restaurants (Ann A)
- EMG3, Steve Wood (Bill L)

The group will find out what dates each of the invitees would be able to attend and reviewed the top questions:

- 1) How did you perceive the permitting process?
- 2) Why did you chose Falmouth?
- 3) Were you helped/supported during the process? What would have made it more inviting or easier?
- 4) Were there any rules/ordinances that proved burdensome or did not make sense?
- 5) What more could the Town have done?

3. Next Meeting

The committee will meet next on Wednesday May 18th at 4:00 PM.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM.

Draft Meeting Notes by Theo Holtwijk, May 6, 2011 Rev: May 11, 2011