

Wolfeboro Economic Development Committee

Tuesday, January 17, 2017, 8 a.m.

Wolfeboro Town Hall – Great Hall

Meeting Minutes – [Draft](#)

Members present: Chair Kathy Eaton, Cindy Patten, Denise Roy-Palmer, Alan Harding, Steve Durgan, Lisa Lutts, Board of Selectmen/EDC Liaison Dave Bowers, and Board of Selectman/EDC Liaison Alternate Linda Murray

Members/staff absent: Mike Roush, Jeff McGuinness, Dr. Craig Gemmell, Steve Johnson (alternate), Town Manager Dave Owen

Staff present: Director of Planning & Development Matt Sullivan, Recording Secretary Larissa Mulkern

1. **Call to Order:** Chair Eaton called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m.

2. **Approval of Minutes:** A motion to approve the minutes of the December 8, 2016 meeting minutes as amended was made, seconded, voted on and passed, with Ms. Patten abstaining from the vote.

3. **New Business**

a. **Business Updates:** Mrs. Eaton heard that a new publishing company was coming to Bayside Plaza.

b. **Zoning Warrant Articles:**

i. **Planning Board-sponsored articles:** Mr. Sullivan spoke to this topic. There are four Planning Board sponsored warrant articles, related to small changes to the wetlands overlay district, changes in special exception to permitted uses, and changing Bed & Breakfast from a special exception use to a permitted use in the Wolfeboro Falls and Bay Street Limited Business District. The last Planning Board sponsored article relates to compliance with the state's new requirements for Accessory Dwelling Units. Mr. Sullivan said he anticipated there would be some refinement to that regulation at the municipal level as communities work out their ordinance changes.

ii. **Petitioned warrant articles:** One petition deals with allowing drive-through [restaurants] in different districts. The Planning Board voted unanimously not to endorse that petitioned warrant article, noted Mr. Sullivan. A second petitioned warrant articles deals with business directional signage; the way the petition is written may create a

change that the petitioner did not envision, and, thus, the petitioner may speak against the petitioned warrant article at the public hearing. The petition seeks to disallow business directional signs in the public right of way; the petitioner believed they were allowed on private property, but in fact, they are not allowed under the current ordinance. What the petition would do is prohibit off-premise, business directional signage. Mr. Sullivan suggested reconvening the way-finding sign committee to further look into signage and regulations. The subject is of particular interest to the downtown core. Mrs. Murray said this topic has been on the back burner for too long; she agrees it should be moved to the forefront. Members discussed the past work, results of the way finding committee. In further discussion, Mr. Sullivan said in his opinion, the EDC does not need to take a formal position on the proposed warrant articles. He spoke to the Wolfeboro Chamber and that group stated that it does not take a position on warrant articles. Mr. Durgan, who serves on the Wolfeboro Chamber's EDC Committee, said he thought there was adequate interest from the Chamber to take a position.

Discussion ensued regarding the petitioned warrant article regarding drive-through establishments. Mrs. Eaton said she reviews the EDC Mission Statement when considering what the committee should or should not do, and she looks at opportunities and barriers to business, and the character of the town. She said she didn't think preventing drive-thru establishments keeps business out – Wolfeboro does have a drive-thru restaurant. Some drive-thru restaurants in other areas are very attractive and fit with the architecture of the town. Some cities don't have drive-thrus for the various chain restaurants. A number of places in Wolfeboro offer quick meals and onsite parking. She did think that having a drive-thru with lines of cars takes away from the character of the town, adding that "character" is subjective. On the other hand, there is a restriction, and there is an interest of removing restrictions for business.

Mr. Bowers said many people driving up from Massachusetts, for instance, say they'll stop next time they see a McDonald's restaurant or so forth. They don't necessarily stop and sit down at a restaurant. He may not be in favor of adding drive-thru restaurants, but from what he reads, sit down restaurants are becoming more rare due to fast food and takeout. The town does have a drive thru car wash, drive-thru banks and a drive-thru restaurant.

Mrs. Eaton added that anything that detracts from the character of the town has the potential of affecting it economically.

Mr. Durgan said sometimes people don't open their eyes to reality: the town has a drive-thru restaurant and it's a business. To further preclude others is unfair, arbitrary and capricious. Visit McDonalds in Alton and see how many people from Wolfeboro go there, and not just while they are passing through to Rochester or elsewhere. They return to town. This is a lost economic opportunity, he added. Sooner or later we are going to have a Planning Board candidate run with a [pro-drive-thru] position and it's his opinion they will win in a landslide. We ought to recognize many of our young people prefer drive-thrus. People want it and it is good business, he added.

Mr. Sullivan added the petition [proposal] would allow the use in the downtown area, but also in the Route 28 Mixed Use, and Wolfeboro Falls and Bay Street Limited District. Currently, he wasn't sure if drive-thrus were listed as a "permitted" use in any district. That's the critical issue. There is always the Zoning Board review through the Special Exception process.

Ms. Patten said the mechanism might already in place to review applications from a traffic perspective and so forth. But she didn't think a business would have enough space to build a drive-thru downtown.

Mrs. Eaton suggested that rather than take an immediate stand on this petition to take a wait and see approach and see what the Town and its citizens have to say. She thinks it better to have it go through the regular planning board process.

Mr. Sullivan said the Planning Board seemed favorable to the idea of drive-thrus in some locations, but were particularly concerned with unintended consequences of what was being proposed.

Ms. Patten said the Planning Board has been thoughtful and considerate in its approach in trying to get as much public opinion as possible -- and that takes time.

Mr. Sullivan added the Planning Board is working on developing some architectural standards; what has to go along with that process is some analysis of what uses can shift into "permitted uses" as a result of adding a layer of regulation. Some of the existing "special exception" uses are that because of their aesthetic qualities and if you install a layer of regulation for buildings of a certain size you would

then allow some of those to move into “permitted uses,” and drive-thrus may be one of those uses.

Ms. Patten said you should be designing your architecture so when an existing uses changes another business can acquire/move into that space. That can help make sure there are no storefronts that end up vacant, or buildings that are too large to be a multi-faceted business.

Mr. Sullivan said these things can be done – York, Maine has a beautiful McDonalds that you would never know existed. They can be done with the right standards in place – or the right negotiations between the Planning Board and the developer. It does not all have to be done through regulation.

Ms. Lutts said she personally does not like chains and one of the things that impressed her about Wolfeboro was the lack of chain businesses. If chains/drive-thrus are permitted, they should be restricted to certain areas and with very careful design considerations. The tourists come here wanting to see and stay in a quaint New England town that also has restaurants, she added. She does see that other side of the argument, but this is her opinion.

Mr. Durgan related how the Town of Littleton revitalized its economy by bifurcating the town into zones – a great quaint downtown area similar to Wolfeboro, and another open commercial zone on the other side of Interstate 93. They opened it up to American capitalism. The end result is a revitalized downtown area and a number of years ago Littleton was recognized for having the ‘best downtown.’ The town put some thought into it, in a positive direction.

Mr. Harding suggested the topic for a joint meeting of the EDC and Planning Board.

There was a consensus not to take a formal position on the warrant articles.

iii. Regular meetings with the Planning Board:

Mr. Sullivan suggested the EDC meet with the Planning Board as part of its regular meeting as an agenda item. Or every three months the Planning Board would meet alternately with the EDC, the Heritage Commission and the Conservation Commission. He wasn’t sure what the structure would be. Discussion could include the hotel room limits, the architectural standards, and business directional signage.

Ms. Patten added we have to give the board space to do their job.

Further discussion ensued. Mr. Sullivan added he didn't think it was realistic to have a roundtable discussion with the board every three months.

iv. Inviting Rusty McLear to the February meeting:

Mrs. Eaton provided a copy of a rough agenda/list of questions to be asked of entrepreneur Rusty McClear of Meredith. In summary:

1. Any recommendations as to how best to interest developers in building an 80-room hotel in Wolfeboro; did he receive a copy of the Spurrier survey?
2. Thoughts on Wolfeboro addressing noted infrastructure shortcomings and then advertising for businesses to audition;
3. What does he think of featuring Wolfeboro as the small town museum capital of New Hampshire; we will soon have five.
4. Who would he recommend we contact in Concord to help us solicit a developer and what preparations should we make now?
5. What kind of relationships should we be cultivating to improve the business climate in Wolfeboro

The EDC will invite Mr. McLear to meet, perhaps for a special meeting with the planning board and the board of selectmen would be invited as well.

4. Old Business:

- a. **Pickering House Tax Relief Update:** Mrs. Murray reported the Board of Selectmen have an agreement and will vote to grant the Pickering House owners the tax incentives under NH-RSA 79-E; it will be the first application to the town.

Hotel Ordinance Update: Mrs. Eaton stated the Planning Board decided not to take action this year to remove the 50-room limit on hotels; the EDC prepared a presentation listing all the reasons it was important to delete the restriction. The topic is tabled until next year, as the Board wants to work on architectural standards. The EDC felt the standards were in place in the form of height restrictions and site plan review. Mrs. Roy-Palmer noted that her concern was that the board seemed to want to add restrictions at time when others favored less restriction. Mr. Durgan added the board's points were logical, and debatable. Discussion ensued regarding hosting or co-hosting a forum with hotel operators or developers, and who should do the hosting

and inviting. Mr. Sullivan noted that a forum hosted by the EDC would be more comfortable.

Mr. Bowers suggested the EDC host an evening forum for the public and boards to contemplate the future of the town, how we should expand and what businesses would be desirable.

Mrs. Roy-Palmer added there is a need for a meeting focused on lodging, where operators can discuss how existing lodging facilities work together. There is a need for more lodging in Wolfeboro.

Mr. Bowers noted he would draft an agenda for a public EDC-hosted forum in town, so the EDC can collect thoughts and ideas from the public. Mr. Harding talked about the need for trade schools and the training and good jobs they could provide in the region; this topic should be on the agenda of a future meeting.

- b. **Fisherville:** Mrs. Murray said the BrewFest might be held on land at the Dockside area, although the committee hopes there would be enough ice to get bobhouses out on the lake. An event is planned for March 4, a 'Brew & Chew.' The committee will seek a beer sales license from the State of New Hampshire. The committee is also supporting publicity efforts of Town Parks & Recreation Department Director Christine Collins and the many activities planned in the near future.
- c. **Project Committee Updates (Special Events, Group Advertising, Communications):** Mrs. Murray reported that the **Special Events Committee** hosted the Last Night in Wolfeboro event; the Wildlife Encounters presentation at the Great Hall was very popular with more than 250 attendees; more than 600 people participated in various events. They sold pizza and ran out. The **Group Advertising Committee** hasn't had success meeting recently due to various circumstances, but Mrs. Eaton said they hope to get together in coming weeks and pursue a package of collaborative advertising and look into placing an ad in the mapping guide of the Lakes Region Tourism Association. The EDC is already signed on to do an ad in Mills Falls Magazine. Ms. Patten of the **Communications Committee** reported that a flyer regarding the Town of Wolfeboro web site was sent out in the town's electric bills. The committee also started advertising Wolfeboro's tourism on Yelp; the ad benefits other local businesses and enables instant information such as how many clicks to Yelp resulted in clicks to the Town's website. Ms. Patten said the many people use Yelp as a map.

- d. **BR&E Quarterly Meeting Update:** Mrs. Roy-Palmer noted the tentative date of Tuesday, Jan. 31 at 6:30 p.m. at the Great Hall, if the space is available. The purpose of the meeting is to get the BR&E Committees together and report on progress to the Leadership Teams.
- e. **Woodbine Update:** Mr. Sullivan discussed the progress of this facility with the developer's agent. The project is still in flux due to a water supply [insufficient well tests] problem. Mr. Sullivan did speak briefly with Public Works Director David Ford regarding potential extension of the water line.

5. **Other Business:** None.

6. **Adjournment:** A motion to adjourn was made, seconded and passed at 9:45 a.m.

Respectfully submitted:
Larissa Mulkern
Recording Secretary