

Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes
5/18/21 DRAFT

Members or alternates present: Chairman Kathy Fairman (member,) Brian Deshaies (BOS member,) Kathy Tetreault (member,) Robyn Masteller (member,) Steve Durgin (member,) Dave Maher (member,) Jeremy Roberge (member) Liz Baker McClain via remote (member,) Carrie Duran via remote (member,) Linda Murray (BOS alternate,) Mike Hodder (alternate,) Lucy Van Cleeve (alternate,) and Mary DeVries (alternate.)

Absent: Barry Elliott (alternate)

Staff Present: Tavis Austin, Director of Planning and Economic Development, Beverly Woods via remote (IT,) Christine Dougherty via remote (secretary)

1. Call to Order:

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 8:02, however there were technical difficulties with the communication system. Those attending remotely could not hear those in the Great Hall at all and the microphone system in the Hall was working poorly. After a ten-minute delay the chairman said as there was a quorum present in the room she was going to proceed with the meeting. She would take minutes as Secretary Doherty could not hear the meeting.

Tavis Austin continued working on the technical problems and the remote participants were able to eventually join.

Steve Durgin: "This meeting isn't working. It's difficult to hear. This is not the way a democracy is supposed to be."

Mary DeVries suggested those trying to participate remotely use the "call-in" option.

2. Minutes

Robyn Masteller moved, and Kathy Tetreault seconded a motion to approve the April 20, 2021 Meeting Minutes as presented. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman K. Fairman introduced new EDC Member Jeremy Roberge and Alternate Lucy Van Cleeve and asked them to share a bit about their backgrounds.

J. Roberge is president of Huggins Hospital. He is a CPA (Certified Public Accountant) by profession and was CFO (Chief Financial officer) at Huggins prior to becoming president.

L. Van Cleeve has working primarily in the Hospitality Industry most recently as Director of Sales and Marketing at the Wolfeboro Inn where she served previously as

Events Coordinator. She is currently a realtor at Verani Real Estate in Wolfeboro, does hospitality consulting, and is president of the Wolfeboro Area Chamber of Commerce.

K. Fairman noted that at the request of some EDC members she was changing the order of the agenda and would take Old Business first and the Election of Officers last.

Old Business

1. Business Survey Update: Chairman of the Business Survey Committee Robyn Masteller reported that we have received 81 replies representing 30% of the 271 mailed. Only 4 or 5 were submitted on-line, the rest were returned via regular mail. She is pleased with the results so far. Her Committee will meet soon to discuss next steps. She expects the project will wrap up in the fall.

2. Hodder Comments (Attached)

K. Fairman thanked Alternate Mike Hodder for his time and interest in the Economic Development Committee. She said she did not agree with some of his assertions and thought it would be helpful for members to have additional background, which she provided in advance of the meeting. (Attached)

She then opened discussion on the subject.

Steve Durgin thanked Mike Hodder for the work he put into his research. "I don't think we ever had a member go back and read all the minutes." He favored further discussion.

K. Fairman asked for comments from each member and alternate and asked M. Hodder to wait until everyone spoke before responding.

Dave Maher suggested it would be helpful to define the word "tourism," and that the EDC should be thinking both short-term and long-term. Several other concurred, as there seemed to be different interpretations of what "tourism" included.

J. Roberge said Huggins Hospital is very reliant on tourism as July and August are the only two months out of the year when the hospital is profitable.

Selectmen Brian Deshaies suggested that may be a result of an influx of summer residents rather than tourists.

Selectmen Linda Murray said she doesn't think the EDC and Planning Board have had difficulties. "They don't always agree, but that's okay. Like when the EDC recommended that the Planning Board like the 45-room limit for lodging. The Planning Board said no and that was that. The EDC moved on."

Kathy Tetreault suggested the EDC use the 2019 Master Plan as a means of focusing on priorities.

R. Masteller concurred noting that that's what we've been doing the last year.

D. Maher: "While we need to work on the Master Plan Goals, we should consider them guideposts not goal posts. Like (the goal for) a conference center. Really? When the town's biggest employer is not profitable 10 months out of the year?"

S. Durgin RE Tourism "We've had this discussion over the years. Without Lake Winnepesaukee, Wolfeboro would dry up and blow away. We are dependent on the property taxes paid by the people who own waterfront home," He said he didn't understand that when he was a teacher or a police officer, but he realizes now that it's that money that pays for the schools and services like the police department.

Mary DeVries agreed that defining "tourism" would be helpful. She spoke of three categories: Summer Residents, Tourists, and Year-round Residents.

Lucy Van Cleeve said tourism is important in Wolfeboro. She said local businesses are having a hard time finding employees. "We need people to work here. If we don't have the people and the food is bad and the service is bad, people will stop coming."

Carrie Duran said she was unable to hear the first half of the meeting remotely and asked if guidance regarding marketing had been discussed.

K Fairman said it had not.

Liz Baker McClain said she also could not hear the first half or more of the meeting, noting that the call-in option was also not functioning. She suggested that the meeting may be in violation of the Freedom of Information Act because members of the public were told they could attend remotely but in fact they could not.

RE: EDC Master Plan Goals, L. McClain suggested having a bigger conversation which would include defining the goals; that there may be some misconceptions about subjects, the hospital, for example.

K Fairman asked Tavis to weigh in on the discussion.

T. Austin said there seems to be some semblance of disparity between the EDC and other boards. He's been here six months and thinks the EDC plays too close to the ground and should look at the broader picture; that it is too project specific and needs to focus on the larger scale. He suggested the EDC could attend a Planning Board work session.

M. DeVries said she understood the EDC is supposed to report to the Board of Selectmen not the Planning Board.

M. Hodder reiterated his position regarding the focus of the EDC and said his analysis was based on facts not opinions and suggested the EDC should be participating in current committees meeting on Short Term Rentals and Workforce Housing.

K. Fairman said the EDC offered to participate on the Short-Term Rental Committee but was not invited.

M. Hodder said if someone attended he'd be sure they were included.

K Fairman said she agreed that defining tourism would be helpful to the group. She noted that a year ago when the EDC reorganized during the Pandemic she agreed to serve as chair for one year to help out during the difficult time. She looked to the new EDC Master Plan Goals for guidance in order to help the Committee gain traction. She doesn't think the MPGs should be the only focus, that the Committee should also look to the EDC's Mission Statement for guidance and quoted it:

“The Mission of the Wolfeboro Economic Development Committee is to identify opportunities to enhance the economic growth and opportunity of the Wolfeboro community and to encourage actions to achieve economic health while balancing the town's environment, character and culture. The EDC was established and appointed by the Board of Selectmen in 1992 and serves in an advisory role as a bridge between the public and private sectors.”

New Business

2021-22 EDC Work Plan including Meeting Schedule

K. Fairman said that according to the New BOS Guidelines the EDC needs to establish an annual calendar of meeting dates. Currently it is the 3rd Tuesday of each month from 8-9:30 am, but the Committee can change that and will revisit under the new chairman.

Selectmen's Report

Selectman Linda Murray reported that the Fourth of July Parade has been tentatively approved by the BOS, however a final decision will be made June 18 after taking into consideration updated CDC and State of NH guidelines.

Election of Officers

K Fairman nominated David Maher to serve as chairman. K. Tetreault seconded the motion. There were no other nominations or discussion and the motion passed unanimously with K. Fairman, K. Tetreault, Robyn Mastellar, Linda Murray, Jeremy Roberge, Liz Baker McClain, and Carrie Duran voting in the affirmative.

Other members had left the meeting early.

Adjournment:

R. Masteller moved to adjourn. L Baker McClain seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, June 15, 2021.

Kathy:

Attached is a short analysis of the EDC's current role and what I suggest should be its role in the future. The EDC could be a vital part of the Town's response to the way our economic future looks to be unfolding. As focused and as constituted now I do not think it can play the effective role for which it was established.

I would like EDC members to read and discuss this document. If the agenda for the April 6 meeting has not been closed would you add it and allow some time for discussion. If it has, please add it to the agenda for the May 18 meeting.

Regards

Mike Hodder

"The Economic Development Committee has the potential to be one of Wolfeboro's most important growth assets for our town's future. We all can see the impending challenges we face and I think all of know that creative and diligent enterprise will be required to meet them. No one, for example, could have anticipated the unprecedented demand on our housing stock during the pandemic. Our realtors and builders are successfully responding to the challenges of increased demand yet the infrastructure expected by the new arrivals to town does not exist in the forms they are used to and our regulations have not yet been adapted to pandemic realities.

"When the EDC was first set up it was given two goals: to advise the selectboard on matters economic that affected the Town's present and future health and to work at the direction of that board towards accomplishing those recommendations that had been adopted. In its earliest years, the EDC promoted the creation of a multi-town business oriented civic organization that rapidly became the Wentworth Economic Development Corporation. WEDCO's sponsorship of businesses and programs has grown to become an important quality of life influencer in and outside of Wolfeboro. The Town's EDC was an outspoken champion of the program to preserve Wolfeboro's airport, drawing attention not only to its use by several corporate executives who lived in town and used the airport to reach their corporate locations but also to its convenience for many well to do Brewster families. EDC's campaign was unsuccessful but in hindsight it is interesting to think what the presence of an airport in town might have meant to the desirability of Wolfeboro as a pandemic refuge.

"Those examples are just two of the macro initiatives EDC took on in the past. Since then, EDC's focus has narrowed and its role in the Town's economic life has become marginalized. EDC now concentrates its resources and activities on promoting tourism and overlooks other elements in the Town's economy that are more profitable, have greater public impact, and show an alternative (and more sustainable) direction to the Town's economic future. EDC works in close collaboration with the Wolfeboro Chamber of Commerce, as it should, but an adversarial relationship has developed between EDC and parts of the Town's administrative structures that is profoundly counterproductive to its delegated role as advisor to the selectboard.

"Economic challenges to Wolfeboro's future are daunting. Directions forward can and have been suggested, however. The Economic Development Strategic Plan (2010) outlined several in recommendations that almost seem prescient. The Business Retention and Expansion Program's

conclusions (2015) reinforced the more far-seeing suggestions of five years earlier. The Lakes Region Planning Commission's 2013 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy report warned against dependency on tourism for a town's economic future health. It should be understood that a successful program of tourism promotion is ultimately self-destructive unless the finite resource promoted is thoughtfully managed and its use fairly regulated if its inherent quality is to remain attractive to its market.

"The dollar impact on Wolfeboro of the education, health care, community retirement living, municipal and building trades sectors is serially greater than that made by the tourism industry. The future focus of the Economic Development Committee must include all sectors of the Town's economy or it will miss the bus and fail in its mission. As it did when first constituted, the EDC should work collegially with the Town's Planning Department and all land use boards to support business-friendly initiatives. EDC membership should be expanded by promotion to Town business leaders of sectors not already represented on the committee. Regular, bi-annual reports of the Town's economic health should be presented to the selectboard along with recommendations for measures moving forward. If Wolfeboro is to successfully manage its future economic direction the Economic Development Committee must step up and recapture its role as the selectboard's economic advisor."

May 16, 2021

To: Wolfeboro Economic Development Committee
RE: Background for May 18, 2021 Meeting

I've reviewed Mike Hodder's recent letter regarding the "role" and "focus" of the Economic Development Committee and I do not agree with several of his assertions.

I've served on the EDC for the last nine years, some of them as chairman, and I'm proud of the work the EDC has done during that time and appreciate the efforts of the volunteers with whom I've had the pleasure of serving.

During my tenure I have always experienced a fine, respectful working relationship with all town officials, boards and committees with which I've interacted.

That doesn't mean we've always agreed. Differing viewpoints are to be expected and even necessary when all stakeholders gather around a table. It is the assigned role of the EDC to bring to the table viewpoints representing the community's businesses and economic health and those may not agree with others at the table. In my opinion, that's healthy, not adversarial.

I offer the following as background information I know from personal experience; I've tried to indicate, where appropriate, what is my opinion.

RE: EDC Membership:

Traditionally the town's largest employers, Huggins Hospital, Brewster Academy, the Governor Wentworth Regional School District, the Chamber of Commerce and the Town itself have filled five of nine seats on the Committee. Others are filled by volunteers or people, like me, who are recruited by the Selectmen or other EDC members seeking those with business experience and backgrounds.

I think the EDC is currently well balanced with representatives from: Town of Wolfeboro (Brian Deshaies), Brewster Academy (Liz Baker McClane,) GWRSD (Kathy Tetreault,) Meredith Village Savings Bank (Robyn Mastellar,) Chamber of Commerce (Steve Durgin, also Goodhue Boat Company,) All Saints Church (Bill Petersen, also with a hospitality/education background,) Volunteer (Dave Maher, retired Fidelity/Marketing) Volunteer (Carrie Duran,) Wolfeboro Trolley Company (Kathy Fairman, also a commercial real estate owner.)

RE: EDC FOCUS

Under the leadership of four different chairmen in the last nine years the EDC has reached out to all sectors of the town's economy.

The most significant tool we used to do this was the Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Project 2014-2019. The results are still relevant today and can be seen on the EDC page of the Town's website.

BR&E is based on the premise that economic growth will be better accomplished by helping existing businesses stay in business and grow, rather than by trying to attract new businesses to move to town. The EDC partnered on this project with WEDCO (Wentworth Economic Development Corporation,) the Wolfeboro Area Chamber of Commerce, and the University of New Hampshire's Extension Service, which created the BR&E program.

The three-step BR&E Project began with a comprehensive survey in which over 100 businesses representing all aspects of Wolfeboro's economy were invited to participate; 93 chose to do so. The 50-question surveys were completed in person during which business owners or managers were interviewed by two-member teams of local volunteers, often other business owners. The responses were confidential, and the results compiled by UNH. With the results in hand UNH faculty and advisors led the EDC in establishing Project Committees to address some of the issues identified in the survey.

Progress has been made in some areas and work remains to be done in others. For example, we have improved and expanded the rest rooms at Dockside. However, the number one issue named in the survey, lack of sufficient parking/traffic congestion downtown, still needs work.

Among other issues raised in the survey was the need to attract visitors in the fall, winter and spring, and a recommendation for collaborative group advertising.

In response the EDC concentrated about 75% of its marketing budget on promoting those seasons and based on feedback from the Wolfeboro Area Chamber of Commerce and various business segments, this focus should continue.

We've dedicated about 25% of the Marketing Budget to attracting businesses to relocate to Wolfeboro with a "Work and Live Where You Love to Play" ad in state-wide professional publications.

Many of the same issues raised in the BR&E Survey are also part of the 2019 Master Plan adopted by the Wolfeboro Planning Board.

Last spring the EDC reviewed the MPGs (Master Plan Goals) assigned to the EDC, prioritized them and established three project subcommittees to work on the following, which include a variety of sectors in our economy:

EDC MPG 01/1.3 *"Update the existing publication "Doing Business in Wolfeboro" under the guidance of the EDC. Publish a shorter one-page document with simplified language."*

EDC MPG 06/6.1 *"Research and develop a plan for bringing training expertise to this area to develop trade skills needed to support appropriate economic growth and encourage participation of local youth."*

EDC MPG 01/1.8 *"Improve partnerships and communications with the Town's largest employers."*

EDC MPG 03/3.8 *"Develop monitoring and tracking system for downtown commercial space vacancy/availability as a method for measuring downtown economic development health."*

EDC MPG 04/4.1 *“Study and determine a possible location for a conference center.”*
EDC MPG 04/4.2 *“Consider the need for more lodging facilities and the effects of current zoning ordinances on existing and future lodging facilities in order to provide more options.”*

We have collaborated with Planning Board Member Susan Repplier on EDC MPGs.

Other EDC actions in recent years supporting a variety of economic sectors include:

2014: Supported transitioning Railroad Station Playground from private/public to public.

2015: Supported Wolfeboro Planning Board in NOT Recommending approval of a petitioned warrant article that would have further limited commercial uses in the rural residential/agricultural zones. (I recall the intent was to block a proposed facility for patients with memory loss at the junction of Rtes 109/28 near 7-11.)

2017: Supported Warrant Article to pay for design/engineering of Bay Street Sidewalks citing benefits to 29 existing businesses including the Taylor Retirement Community, Front Bay Park and the NH Boat Museum.

2017 & 2021: Supported Warrant Articles for repairs/expansion to Town Docks.

RE: 2010 Economic Development Strategic Plan (referenced by M Hodder.)

It is my understanding that in 2010 the Town hired a consultant to develop an Economic Strategy Plan that was to be in a two-phase document. After the first phase was received the EDC did not rehire the consultant to do the second phase, and the plan was not adopted.

RE: Tourism

I firmly believe that tourism/hospitality remains Wolfeboro’s prime industry and is the lifeblood of our economic vitality. Whether you are a hair stylist or a hospital, you do more business in Wolfeboro in July and August than any other months of the year.

While service industries including our public schools, hospital and municipal services employ the largest numbers of people as single entities, I am confident that the total number of people employed by businesses related to tourism, vacationism or second-homeism, whatever word you want to use, is far greater.

I include in this group all those employed in the building trades from architects to painters. I believe most people who move to Wolfeboro, whether they are buying or building, are doing so because of the quality of life, especially in the summer. Many will not be here in the winter.

RE: Tourism Sustainability

If managed properly, I believe our town should be able to welcome visitors, vacationers and seasonal homeowners for years to come. Wolfeboro is known as the “Oldest Summer Resort in America” for a reason. We’ve been doing this for over 250 years.

We've been most successful when we've adapted to changing times and we still are. As an example, I only have to look at what our Town and businesses accomplished together last year to meet the new and frequently changing needs and desires of our summer visitors during the Pandemic.

Housing

Realtors and builders are doing the best they can, however they are not able to meet the demand. There is an overall housing shortage exacerbated by the Pandemic and not unique to Wolfeboro.

There is a critical shortage of workforce housing in Wolfeboro (cited in 2019 Master Plan,) which is impacting the ability of local businesses to attract and hire employees.

I believe this is in part due to the loss of year-round apartments to short-term rentals, which has been encouraged by the lack of affordable lodging.

This is not a new issue. In 2015-16 the EDC partnered with WEDCO in facilitating an outside Lodging Feasibility Study (completed by Spurrier Consulting and available through WEDCO.) It concluded that there was a "lack of affordable lodging" and that "a lodging facility with a room count of 75 would work well."

Wolfeboro's existing zoning and planning laws prohibit lodging facilities with more than 45 rooms. In September 2016 the EDC recommended to the Planning Board that the limit be deleted, however the Planning Board declined.

RE: Going Forward

As per the Town of Wolfeboro Website:

"The Mission of the Wolfeboro Economic Development Committee is to identify opportunities to enhance the economic growth and opportunity of the Wolfeboro community and to encourage actions to achieve economic health while balancing the town's environment, character and culture. The EDC was established and appointed by the Board of Selectmen in 1992 and serves in an advisory role as a bridge between the public and private sectors."

I believe the EDC has been have been true to that mission and will continue to do so in the future. Members serve at the pleasure of the Board of Selectmen. With two selectmen participating on the EDC we can be confident they will let us know if we should change direction.

Sincerely,

Kathy Fairman, Chairman