Wolfeboro Economic Development Committee
Tuesday, April 6, 2017, 8 a.m.
Wolfeboro Great Hall
Meeting Minutes – Draft

Present: Chair Kathy Eaton, Denise Roy-Palmer, Alan Harding, Steve Durgan, Mary DeVries, Selectmen's Representative Dave Bowers, Selectmen's Representative Alternate Linda Murray; Alan Harding, Steve Johnson, Mike Roush; Dan Smiley, *The Laker*, member of the Wolfeboro Area Chamber's Economic Development Committee

Members absent: Cindy Patten, Dr. Craig Gemmell, Lisa Lutts

Staff present: Town Manager Dave Owen, Director of Planning & Development Matt Sullivan, recording secretary Larissa Mulkern

Chair Eaton commented on the text regarding the "purpose" of the meeting as stated on the invitation, and suggested changing a word, 'advice,' to 'input.'

Attendees discussed wording and content of the questions asking respondents if they would be in favor of allowing a 75 to 100-bed franchise hotel, and if they would support removal of the 50-room cap on hotels, motels and inns.

Mr. Owen suggested adding the words, 'with conference facilities,' to the question on franchise hotels.

Mr. Sullivan said what had to be fleshed out was whether attendees would favor resort-style or franchise hotels. The WEDCO lodging study had suggested a need in Wolfeboro for a franchise hotel.

Ms. DeVries asked why that would be critical to determine at this lodging meeting, as we haven't as yet heard from local experts who may have expansion plans if not for the limit.

Mr. Sullivan replied the question was important to ask, whether to allow something that the WEDCO study had already suggested and identified the need.

Mrs. Murray suggested the question be asked about both preferences: franchise hotel and/or resort facility, with conference facilities.

Returning to the review of Planning Board questions:

PB Question #1:
Mr. Sullivan said a member of the planning board wrote up the questions for the board, and then the board reviewed the questions during two meetings.

1. *As a lodge owner/operator, do the Town ordinances currently in place create any financial or operational burdens on your business that you feel should be reviewed and/updated?*

Discussion ensued.

- There is confusion over what part is zoning and what is part of mandatory life safety codes;

- The Town zoning ordinance is impossible for a layman to understand;
- Should the committee post a link to the Town's zoning ordinance;

PB Question #2:

2. *Does the lighting, noise, parking or sign ordinances and/or event permits make sense to you and your business?*

It was suggested to add, "please elaborate" to questions 1 and 2. Mr. Sullivan said we're not looking for written answers -- the questions are intended to guide the discussion at the Lodging Forum. He will include a sentence stating such.

PB Question #3:

3. *Should there be architectural guidelines for any newly constructed or building modifications? Should any newly proposed facility be required to use town water and sewer?*

Discussion ensued:

- If the new facility is located in the town's water and sewer service area, they are required to hook up;
- A suggestion to change the wording to ask if new facilities be required only in the area serviced by town water and sewer, unless the entity is willing to pay for extensions to the service.
- We just lost a 50-employer business, with a potential for 90 employees, because of the lack of adequate water supply that met state requirements;
- Look at our capacity, and what expansion it can handle as the two go hand in hand;
- Water consumption and the quantity of treated wastewater has been decreasing, but the Town has not yet solved the effluent disposal problem;
- Is the purpose of the questions to elicit responses to guide the EDC to where it should and should not go, or to inform people that expansion is limited due to the Town's limited infrastructure? Let's not front load the questions to get the desired response;
- We have to figure out how we can handle more grown but currently do not have sufficient infrastructure;
- Mr. Owen said the Town's infrastructure would be addressed in the update to the Town's Master Plan.

Mr. Sullivan will discuss question 3 with the Planning Board.

PB Question #4:

4. *Should architectural guidelines be mandatory or voluntary? Should the guidelines include creative uses of energy and materials?*

- Mr. Owen noted there are mandatory, regulatory standards, and guidelines that are just that, guidelines.

PB Question #5:

5. *Should the Planning Board encourage new lodging construction of any type in the Downtown or surrounding zones to include additional retail/office space within the proposed facility?*
   No changes.
6. *Should the Planning Board encourage mixed-use housing or extended stay housing in the Downtown, which may be included in a developer's proposal for lodging?*
   No changes.
7. *Do you feel that the current regulations and guidelines that apply to your business should be applicable to a new entrant?*

The consensus was to suggest deletion of this question to the Planning Board. Mr. Harding suggested adding, 'applicable to a new entrant in a similar business.'

8. *Would you be in favor of allowing a 75-100 bed franchise in Wolfeboro?*

Mr. Owen rewrote the question: "How would a 75-100-bed hotel with year-round conference facilities in Wolfeboro affect your business?

9. *Would you support the removal of the 50-room cap on motels, hotels and inns?*

Mrs. Eaton has no problem as this question stands.

Mr. Sullivan added the Planning Board wanted to remove the separate headers on the invitation so it appears as just one list of questions/discussion points.

Ms. DeVries suggested adding to question 9, 'the EDC recommends eliminating the 50-room hotel room cap,' to put it in context.

Mr. Durgan asked what happened with the room allowances – what happened to the 50 plus rooms; the questions ask about 75-100 bed hotels. He was struck with what Rusty McLeer had said in a recent meeting that the development in Meredith didn't happen all at once. An outer limit on the number of rooms can affect a developer coming in. Mr. McLeer would have not come to Meredith had he known there would be a limitation to the number of rooms he could establish. Mr. McLeer developed in three steps and that is something over time that makes sense. The question should be as open as possible.

Mr. Johnson suggested adding or changing the question to, 'are you in favor of limiting the number or rooms?' and that could be a yes or no answer.

Mrs. Eaton added the question format is limiting, a way of getting the answer you want. This is hard. Mrs. Murray said the EDC and Planning Board are just looking at it from different points of view. The Planning Board looks at it in terms of regulations and the EDC in terms of encouraging economic growth. Mr. Durgan agreed, and added that he did not see the two organizations to be at odds – planning for the future does not mean restricting… it means looking forward.

Mr. Durgan added that member Craig Gemmel at last meeting suggested the EDC and Planning Board seek common ground to start with so the two groups can work together.

Mr. Harding suggested that banks be invited to attend this lodging forum. Banks will be loaning money to hotels so let them have a say.

Mr. Sullivan suggested keeping the questions from the EDC and the Planning Board separate and that he will bring forth concerns. Approximately 25 establishment owners have been invited to attend via a "save the date" invitation.

Mr. Smiley asked if a 100-room hotel would affect the visitor seeking the type of travel experience [i.e. a stay at Gray Shingle Cottages on Rust Pond] offers. A person who books the Wolfeboro Inn is looking for a difference experience than one booking at a Holiday Inn. There are many shops and museums in the area that would benefit from having another 300 visitors in town every week. Is the focus on 20 or so existing hotel and inn owners missing out on the big picture?

Mrs. Eaton said we need input from the owners who are already in town. We have been working on Business Retention and Expansion, and talking to existing businesses. She seeks to change the tone of this topic so it does become something the lodging people will participate in and find helpful for planning purposes.

Discussion commenced on the proposed EDC questions. The questions will be forwarded in advance.

The proposed EDC questionnaire included:
In order to help us better gauge Wolfeboro's lodging needs we'd appreciate you providing the following anonymous information about your lodging facility:
Months open:
If not year-round, why not?
Number of rooms:
Average occupancy, spring, summer, fall, winter:
Do you ever turn business away? If so, when?
How do you advertise?
Do private home rentals, including AirB&B/VRBO impact your business?
Is so how?
Does the current 50-room limit discourage growth of your facility?
Are there any other existing planning/zoning ordinances that discourage growth of your facility?
Would year-round conference facilities benefit your facility?
Can you accommodate a tour bus (24 rooms w/two double beds, 1st floor or elevator?)
What can the Town of Wolfeboro do to help your business prosper and grow?
Any additional comments?

The questionnaire will be emailed in advance. Comments:

- The chamber's EDC can help the town's EDC with follow up. Mr. Durgan complimented Mr. Sullivan's ability to work with both organizations.
- Mr. Sullivan stated the reason we're doing this is the WEDCO study recommended attracting a larger hotel. In order to affirm that recommendation, we're doing our due diligence to reach out to folks who are already in town, who may not be supportive of a resort hotel but its critical to gather their perspective in a formal setting so as we move to the comprehensive master planning stage, we're not just taking in one account or perspective. It's critical to make sure we have balance between a long-term plan that involved a resort hotel, and existing businesses. He added his forum is critical because looking forward to master planning process, the existing lodging owners need to be involved in identifying appropriate recommendations. Some of these questions might be leading and there may be resistance to removal of a room cap, but we need that input. The reason for not inviting everyone [from all business sectors] was to provide a comfortable environment to provide honest feedback on the regulatory process and for a direction in moving forward for lodging. This group is intended to be representative of the larger constituency.

- Mrs. Roy-Palmer reiterated that the EDC took on the topic of lodging needs two years ago after suspecting the town was losing potential lodgers to other towns. WEDCO received funding for a lodging feasibility study conducted in two phases: the first to

determine if there was leakage. If the determination showed no leakage, it would not have proceeded to the feasibility study phase. The consultant who conducted this study has done 40 of these. The firm is reputable.

Discussion ensued regarding a wide variety of points: competition, desirable hotels in town, customer preferences, room limits, visitor requests for a swimming pool in town, and the potential question regarding year-round attractions.

Mr. Smiley suggested adding a question, "What type of year-round activity do guests request that are not currently accommodated?"

A motion was made, seconded and voted on to accept the draft EDC questions as proposed on Mrs. Eaton's separate draft questionnaire.

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded and passed at approximately 9:25 a.m.

Respectfully submitted:
Larissa Mulkern
Recording Secretary