Economic Development Committee (EDC) Meeting Minutes

Date: 3/26/26
Time: 6:34 PM
Location: Dunstable Town Hall

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at **6:34 PM**.

2. Attendance

Present: Annika Selinger, Dot Mastakouras, Jeff Rosen, Linda Scully

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3. Business Outreach / Restaurant Interest

- The committee discussed prior outreach efforts, including a **business survey** sent to local businesses.
- A response was received from **Ryan and Paul O'Connor**, owners of Tavern on the High, expressing interest in opening a restaurant in town.
- The owners indicated they believe a quality restaurant would:
    - Support economic growth
    - Provide a community gathering space
- The committee is currently developing a **resident survey** (Google Form) to assess:
- Annika to follow-up with MCO Cottages regarding the commercial parcel to the left of the post office.

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4. Approval of Minutes

- Motion made to approve the **March 4 meeting minutes**.
- Motion seconded.
- **Vote:** Approved

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5. Responsible Lighting Bylaw

- The committee discussed progress on the **Responsible Lighting Bylaw**.

- Key points:
    - Goal: Support **dark sky preservation** and promote **eco-/astro-tourism**.
    - Emphasis on careful wording to avoid perceived infringement on personal rights.
    - Research indicates bylaws framed as "Dark Sky" regulations often face resistance.
- **Decision:**
    - Target **Fall Town Meeting** rather than Spring Town Meeting.
    - Rationale:
        - Spring meeting is heavily budget-focused and may reduce support.
        - Fall meeting may attract more favorable audience.
    - Additional time will allow refinement of language.

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6. 476 Main Street Parcel / Ad Hoc Committee

- The committee discussed a parcel at **476 Main Street**:
    - Privately owned land, partially under **Chapter 61** designation.
    - Owners are offering the property to the Town for purchase
- An **ad hoc committee** has been formed to review the potential purchase.
    - Representation includes Select Board, Conservation Commission, Historical Commission, and EDC.
- **Annika** has been appointed as EDC representative.
- Discussion points:
    - Much of the land is wetlands, limiting development potential.
    - Concerns raised about removing land from tax rolls.
    - Suggestion made to include a **Land Use Committee representative**.
- Annika will raise this consideration at the first committee meeting.

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7. Zoning Bylaw Amendments (Business Districts)

- The committee reviewed proposed updates to zoning bylaws to support economic development.
- Background:
    - Current zoning heavily relies on **special permits**, which may discourage developers.
    - Feedback from other towns suggests developers prefer **by-right uses**.
- Input from Planning Board:
    - Preference to maintain **special permit authority** rather than expand by-right uses.
- **Proposed Amendment:**
    - Add the following uses to **Section 9.3 (B2/B3 Districts)** by **special permit**:
        - Craft Brewery
        - Craft Brewery Taproom
        - Craft Distillery
- **Discussion Points:**
    - These uses align with trends in comparable towns.
    - Potential to increase economic activity and attract visitors.
    - Concerns raised:
        - Limited demonstrated demand
        - Possible public pushback at Town Meeting
        - Need to justify focus on alcohol-related businesses
- Additional uses considered:
    - Gyms (likely already permitted)
    - Offices and medical offices (already addressed in zoning)
    - Hotels/motels (not considered suitable for the town)
- **Next Steps:**

- Further refinement of proposal
- Preparation for Town Meeting presentation and anticipated questions

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8. Other Discussion Items

- Brief discussion of:
  - Meals tax and alcohol taxation structure
  - Importance of prioritizing impactful economic development initiatives

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7. Zoning Bylaw Amendments (Continued Discussion)

B2 District – Craft Uses Proposal

- Continued discussion on the proposed addition of:
  - Craft Brewery
  - Craft Brewery Taproom
  - Craft Distillery
- Definitions for each use were reviewed, distinguishing:
  - Production vs. on-site consumption
  - Taproom operations vs. full restaurant service
- Committee consensus:
  - These uses align with the town's character (small-scale, craft-oriented businesses)
  - Potential to support community-oriented activities (e.g., tastings, small events)
- Concerns discussed:
  - Public perception of focusing too heavily on alcohol-related businesses
  - Need to clearly explain rationale at Town Meeting
- Additional uses considered:

    - Medical offices (identified as a possible addition, though less aligned with community goals)

- **Decision:**
    - Proceed with proposed B2 amendment as drafted
    - Include clear explanation and educational context at Town Meeting (including basic zoning concepts)

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8. Town Meeting Presentation Strategy

- Discussion regarding presentation approach:
    - Presenters are limited to approximately **5 minutes**
    - Important to clearly and concisely explain:
        - Zoning structure (by-right vs. special permit)
        - Purpose of proposed changes
- Committee agreed:
    - A brief **"mini zoning overview"** will be necessary
    - Presentation may be shared or supported by multiple members if needed
    - Visual aids (e.g., maps) may help clarify proposals
- Noted that timing and agenda placement at Town Meeting may impact effectiveness

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9. B3 District – Warehouse Use Proposal

- Discussion on potential amendments for the **B3 (Expanded Business) District**
- Original proposal:
    - Add **warehouses** as a use by special permit
- Revised proposal based on feedback and research:
    - Focus on **cold storage warehouses only**
        - Defined as temperature-controlled storage for perishable or sensitive goods (e.g., food, pharmaceuticals)

- Rationale:
    - Lower perceived impact (traffic, scale) compared to large distribution warehouses
    - Potentially higher tax revenue due to specialized infrastructure
    - Market demand identified regionally
- Additional considerations:
    - Limited number of developable parcels in B3 district
    - Minimal impact on residential areas due to location and access routes
- **Consensus:**
    - Proceed with proposal to add **Cold Storage Warehouse** as a use by special permit in B3
    - Include:
        - Map of affected area
        - Traffic pattern explanation
        - Potential tax revenue benefits in presentation

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10. Marijuana Zoning and Tax Articles

- Discussion on two related proposals:

A. Marijuana Retail Excise Tax

- Proposal to adopt a **3% local excise tax** on retail marijuana sales
- Effective date: **July 1, 2026**
- Would align with state allowance under Massachusetts General Law

B. Zoning Amendment for Marijuana Retail

- Current bylaw:
    - Prohibits marijuana retailers unless approved by ballot vote
- Proposed amendment:

    - Allow marijuana retailers and related businesses **by special permit** in B1, B2, and B3 districts
    - Remove requirement for separate ballot vote
- Discussion points:
    - Strong revenue potential observed in nearby towns
    - Regional demand remains strong, particularly due to proximity to New Hampshire (where recreational marijuana is not legal)
    - Concerns raised:
        - Potential impact on public safety resources (e.g., police)
        - Public perception and possible resistance
- Clarification:
    - Special permit process would still provide oversight and control
- **Next Steps:**
    - Finalize language for both articles
    - Prepare to address anticipated public concerns at Town Meeting

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11. General Discussion

- Emphasis on:
    - Prioritizing impactful economic development initiatives
    - Balancing community character with growth opportunities
    - Learning from neighboring towns' approaches and outcomes

12. Zoning Amendment

- Proposal to:
    - Allow marijuana retailers by **special permit** in B1, B2, and B3
    - Remove requirement for separate ballot vote
- Discussion:
    - Would still require:

        - Special permit approval
        - Site plan review
        - State licensing
    - Consideration of:
        - Revenue potential
        - Public safety concerns
        - Public perception
- **Consensus:** Move forward with both articles

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13. Town Meeting Strategy

A. Article Order

1. Meals Tax
2. B3 Zoning (Cold Storage Warehouse)
3. B2 Zoning (Craft Uses)
4. Marijuana Local Tax
5. Marijuana Zoning Amendment

- Rationale:
    - Begin with general revenue generation
    - Follow with economic development opportunities
    - Conclude with more complex items

B. Presenters

- Linda to present **Meals Tax**
- Jeff to present remaining articles (with potential support from other members)
- Consider joint presentations to strengthen messaging

C. Presentation Approach

- Include:

    - Clear explanation of zoning concepts
    - Visual aids (maps, comparisons)
    - Emphasis on revenue generation and community benefit
- Note: Presentation time is limited (~5 minutes per article)

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14. Meals Tax Discussion

- Estimated modest initial revenue (~$7,500 annually)
- Long-term potential tied to future restaurant development
- Applies to:
    - Prepared food sales
    - Food trucks and events
- Strategy:
    - Show comparison with surrounding towns
    - Emphasize minimal cost impact (e.g., ~$0.75 per $100)

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15. Additional Discussion

- Advisory Board expressed general support for revenue-generating measures
- Discussion of local businesses and permitting challenges
- Acknowledgment of need to balance development with community concerns

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16. Action Items

- Jeff:
    - Submit finalized articles to Jason
- Annika:
    - Participate in ad hoc land committee
- Committee:

    - Prepare Town Meeting presentations
    - Continue outreach to potential restaurant operators

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17. Next Meeting

- Proposed: **April 15 at 6:30 PM**
- Additional meeting may be scheduled prior to Town Meeting for presentation preparation

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18. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at **8:08pm**
