Master Planning Economic Development Sub-Committee
April 22, 2014

In Attendance: Mayor Donna Holaday, Art Currier, Chris Johnston, Ann Lagasse, Ray Nippes, Delia O'Connor, Ann Ormond, David Strand, Charlie Tontar and Bruce Vogel

Mayor Holaday welcomed members of the committee as well as members of the public present who were observing.

DH – she stated that in the last Master Plan that there was a lack of not one person being tasked with action steps, updates and reports. She would like to make sure that we build that in to this MP.

Also, stated that there are more IT capabilities now to insure that updates etc. can happen on a timely basis.

The Mayor reviewed the overall mission of the committee and reviewed the attached agenda.

The ED section of the MP is one of the more complex sections of the entire plan. There is a lot more data in other examples of plans from other cities and towns for example Amherst, Arlington and Hudson. She feels that we need more data. Arlington draft report is loaded with economic indicators. She encouraged committee members to go online to the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) for more data as well.

DS – asked how Arlington got their data.

CT – Need to look at location quotients in the process as well. He has access to employment and wage data.

A list of potential resources was discussed and which are as follows:

MVPC
MV WIB
MOTT

DO – Is there a correlation between a strong MP and a strong community?

BV – What is Arlington doing that indicates a good strategy? DH stated bond rating, schools, capital needs, and infrastructure

There were questions on the current MP:

DO – Heritage Tourism is still strong as well as in the larger community as well. Birding is world class. Rail Trail and ENHC is a strength as well.

CT – What is the economic impact of tourism? Need a hotel. If people stay overnight they tend to spend more money.

CT – The City should target specific types of industries.

RN – WE have many events that bring people to town, Eagle and Literary Fest for example

AO – We need to have a longer duration of stay. Need overnight guests "beds in heads"

BV – Shops don't stay open late we need to have extended business hours

CJ – there is a major disconnect from Storey Ave and the Train Station to the downtown

BV – Need a branding and marketing effort on who we are

AO – Wayfinding is also crucial to moving people around the downtown and to the Tannery

AC – What are the economic drivers?

CT – noted the second paragraph of the economic development overview sheet – what are we now and what do we want to be? Do we want a busier downtown? What about traffic and parking ramifications if the downtown is busier. What about growth and preserving the character of the city? What is the impact on residents?

AO – Gave an example of a vibrant, resident focused downtown – Wellesley, MA

BV – What about the effects of Yankee Homecoming and those that leave town for the week and those that stay

CT – There is a correlation between city size and amenities. We are a destination city – what is the number of theaters and amenities for example. Need to build consensus on whether or not we want a more active city.

AC – Need to put together a vision statement

DS – Where does the city derive its income from?

BV – Need to look at tax revenues

BV – What are our capital needs? We need more money. The bulk of funding comes from property tax. What is the assessor's formula on how businesses are assessed in the park?

DS – How can we beef these numbers up. We don't have growth opportunity in the housing sector.

CT – Business location theory. Why are businesses where they are? High paid intelligent workers want communities with amenities like NBPT. WE cannot ignore the downtown – it is important. Change the zoning to attract businesses that we want.

DS – We should work to increase tourism, it's an indirect benefit to the brand of NBPT. We should be concerned that we are considered "pro-business"

RN –Need zoning changes in the park to be able to go up and attract R & D. It is currently too expensive to be a manufacturing company in MA. The engine could be the park. If the zoning is there the land could be an asset.

DS – Are we "pro-business?" what is the perception out there? Need to streamline and expedite the permitting process. Will permitting remain a challenge?

DH – In the past Con Comm has been difficult to work with. There is new leadership now so there are fewer issues.

CT – we cannot ignore the wetlands.

DS – There is a long standing perception problem that we are not pro-business. We need to let people know that we are pro-business. Do we need a dedicated economic development person?

AO – Andover has a great "Starting a business in Andover" guide. She has a copy.

DS – What economic resources does the city have to brand and increase economic development? What is the budget? Mayor stated 1 % in her State of the City address.

DO – Amenities matter when they recruit physicians. They also utilize and commend many city services such as police, fire and building.

DO – There is limited growth opportunity in the area of health care. They are really focusing on quality.

DH – What about elder services? Look at aging populations – "The Village" model

CJ – Kudos to Anna Jaques and their birthing center. Growing families are a big economic driver.

DH – So many factors that we must take into consideration.

Next Steps:

Need clarity on the process

Look at the three towns that the Mayor suggested and come back with your thoughts on what you liked about each.

Look at the meeting notes and think about how we organize next steps.

What is your goal for this process? DH suggested "a master plan that represents the community young to old and where we should be in 10-15 years."

Mayor stated that she would take the information from the visioning exercises and send to the committee.

Need data from Dan Raycroft on tax base.

Need a list of businesses in the park with their NAICS codes. Ann stated that she will check with MVPC to see if they have this list.

Next meeting will be Thursday, May 22 at 6:30 PM