



Town of Camden
Minutes of the Meeting of the
Camden Economic Development Advisory Committee
March 25, 2013
5:30pm

PRESENT: Chairperson Peter Gross, Martin Cates, Staci Coomer, Deb Dodge, Meg Quijano, Lowrie Sargent, Kipp Wright, Development Director Brian Hodges.

ABSENT: Rick Bates, Pete Brown, Ellis Cohn

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:30pm.

1. Approval of Minutes from January 28th

Deb Dodge made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 28, 2013 meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Meg Quijano. It was unanimously approved.

2. Comprehensive Plan Report

Lowrie Sargent reported on the work that is being done on Chapter 12 of the comprehensive plan, "The Harbor." Sargent said that the Comprehensive Plan Committee had originally moved the review of this chapter forward on the schedule due to the busy summer season ahead. However, the Harbor Committee had decided to rewrite the Harbor ordinance, and this could impact the comprehensive plan work. In addition, Sargent told the group that the Public Landing project that is currently underway could have an impact as well. Therefore, he said that while the gathering of input from groups such as CEDAC continues, the chapter work group for the Harbor chapter would do much of their review during the fall.

Sargent noted that upcoming considerations by the chapter work group will include looking at what the right balance is between fishing boats and recreational crafts in Camden Harbor, as well as the ratio of resident boats to transient visiting boats, and how many spots should be allocated to each. Another consideration will be the rising water level during big storms and the changes that may be necessary to handle this situation, he said.

Peter Gross suggested that CEDAC put this item on their next agenda for further discussion. Meanwhile Chapter 12 of the Comp Plan will be emailed out to CEDAC members to look over.

3. Opera House Needs Assessment

Susan Dorr updated CEDAC on progress that the Opera House Committee is making as it takes a look at what the best uses are for the facility and how it can better serve as an economic engine for the Town. Dorr told the group that the Committee is pursuing 501(c)3 non-profit status in order to establish a "Friends of the Opera House" group of supporters for fundraising. Dorr also said that the Committee has contracted with a company that will be performing a feasibility study to create the case for updating the Opera House's third floor.

Dorr reported that the Opera House staff has had to be resourceful in order to accommodate large events like the Camden Conference, Pop!Tech and CIFF, given the current limitations of the facility. She said that renovations to the third floor will be the next step in keeping the Opera House a viable conference center. A common complaint during all the large events, Dorr said, has been the limited bathroom facilities on the third floor. She said there are other improvements as well that must be made to accommodate these large events and to keep them in Camden. Dorr told the group that the committee is looking at \$350,000 as a ballpark figure to be raised for these projects, and drawings have been made for what the third floor might look like. She said that eventually the question will be whether they look at a bond issue, a capital campaign, or a combination of both in order to raise the necessary funds to do the improvements. She added that the Opera House Committee will report to CEDAC and the Select Board with regard to their progress as they move forward with their work.

Sargent asked whether CEDAC might contribute by doing an analysis of what the economic impact of the Opera House might be if the third floor were finished, to include what the facility would be able to attract in terms of conferences and events. It would be useful, he noted, to look at what the economic impact of the Opera House is currently.

Kipp Wright suggested that the Opera House's schedule could be more full during the off-season to help attract visitors to Camden. He said that many of his guests are planning six months out and want to know what activities will be going on during their stay. Dorr described that the audience for events in the off-season has been unpredictable and that ramping up marketing efforts is difficult given the small staff.

Gross noted that because the Opera House is a Town-owned facility, it caters to local groups in support of community events. Traditionally, this means that the Opera House has been reserved by organizations for their use on an ongoing basis at the same time every year.

Dorr said that the auditorium is able to pay 60% of its overall cost of operations and that the facility raises 40% of its income from ticket sales. She cited that a recent study by a student and professor from UMO had shown that this is a very high number for freestanding auditoriums, so from the revenue perspective it functions very well, she said.

Gross suggested that the recent economic study from the UMO professor and student team be emailed out to the group. CEDAC members also expressed interest in seeing the designs that have been put together for the Opera House's third floor.

4. Riverwalk and Public Landing project update

Brian Hodges summarized progress on the Riverwalk and Public Landing projects, saying that the consultant group had been selected, a workgroup had been formed, and that the first community meeting was scheduled for April 1 at 6:30 at the CRMS cafeteria. Hodges said that this first community meeting would focus on the Riverwalk, with a subsequent community meeting that would focus on the Public Landing to be held on April 22nd.

Meg Quijano, CEDAC's representative on the project's work group, reported on the first committee meeting with the consultants. She said she felt the group was cohesive and that they offered up some good ideas. Part of the conversation had focused on the idea of a bridge from Library Park to the public landing area, she said.

On a related topic, Hodges noted that the budget committee would be revisiting the section of the budget that addressed the Development department's funding. First aid services were also discussed.

5. Branding/Marketing/Advertising and TIF funds – update and next steps

Gross recapped that \$30,000 is currently available in TIF funds for use on a Town project. Hodges told CEDAC members that while launching a branding and marketing campaign had been considered, it turns out that it would be best to wait on this until it has full support by the Select Board. Gross and Hodges asked for input on other ideas for the TIF funds. Members of the group talked about using the funds for a project that would be visible and tangible. Some of the ideas discussed included town-wide wifi and Opera House renovations. Hodges noted in upcoming years there would be a total of around \$120,000 available in the TIF account.

Peter Gross suggested that an engineering study could be launched to look at the repairs necessary for the dam that controls the waterfall. He estimated that a study like this would not be expensive, possibly around \$20,000. Sargent brought up the possibility of a University of Maine graduate student project to absorb some costs of repairs of the dam, if the construction were to utilize new techniques and technologies. Gross said that to some extent, repairs to the dam could be covered by the Town's capital improvement line.

Martin Cates shared his feeling that establishing business incubators is critical for attracting small business to the region. He gave a recent example of a company wanting to locate to this area but had to go some distance away to find appropriate space.

Hodges said he would send the final prioritization of projects from the Downtown Master Plan to CEDAC members so that this could be discussed further at the next meeting.

6. Public Comment/questions on agenda items

There were no public comments.

7. Adjourn

Next Meeting

The next CEDAC meeting will be held on April 29th at 5:30, since the community meeting was schedule for on CEDAC's regular meeting date.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Brace
Recording Secretary