

Community and Economic Development Advisory Meeting
Minutes of Meeting
October 22, 2012 5:30 PM

Present: Chair Peter Gross, Rick Bates, Pete Brown, Kipp Wright; Alternates: Meg Quijano, Deb Dodge

Liaisons: Martin Cates (Select Board), Lowrie Sargent (Planning Board), Robin McIntosh (Pen-Bay Chamber)

Guest: Bob Gordon (Ragged Mountain Redevelopment Committee)

Absent: Brian Hodges and Ellis Cohn

1. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM in the Washington St. Conference Room
2. **Approval of Board Minutes:** Meg Quijano moved to approve the minutes of the September 24th meeting as presented and Pete Brown seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved.
3. **Ragged Mountain update:** Bob Gordon from the Ragged Mountain Redevelopment Committee presented an update on the progress of fundraising and planning. Bob reported that to date the fundraising efforts have exceeded \$3,000,000.
 - A recent art auction netted \$175,000 and a challenge grant of \$400,000 has been issued.
 - The “Fund a Chair” effort is underway with 30 of the 100 chair goal reached so far.

The committee is hoping to reach the \$4 million goal in time to present the \$2 million bond request by November of 2013. Bob also reported that they have received approval to purchase new high efficiency snow-making guns and are pursuing a grant from Efficiency Maine for part of the purchase price. Other improvements are in the works: the replacement of the septic system is almost complete; new trails have been added to the mountain.

The group discussed the growth of Mountain Biking, and in particular the success of the NE Kingdom Trails in Vermont whose Mountain Biking activities have surpassed skiing.

During the discussion Lowrie suggested reviewing the Town trust funds to see if there is any opportunity to use any of the excess income for special projects within the town. Deb Dodge mentioned that the Town has already done some of that and have been able to use certain of the funds instead of tax dollars to assist Community Service agencies.

4. **Tannery Site:** Chairman Gross started the discussion with posing the question of how can CEDAC advise the Select Board in regards to the Guiding Principles and disposition of the Tannery Site.

The following discussion revolved around whether the principles and list of “accepted uses” were a barrier to a sale or whether the value of the land was the issue. It was noted that the language of the June 2008 Town Meeting required the Select Board “...to use as many of the

Guiding Principles...as are reasonably practicable in the discretion of the Board” allows the Select Board some leeway in applying the principles in a potential sale.

Martin Cates mentioned a number of issues:

- * promotion of the property without use of an agent and therefore no commission resulted in inquiries only the bargain hunters, and that pool of potential buyers has been exhausted.
- * the value of the land has continued to decline due to the current market
- * enlisting a broker means the property would be marketed at its highest and best use, it would involve creating a marketing and pricing strategy

Lowrie wondered what the Town could get for the property if the charge were to sell it within a year. The most recent appraisal was \$145,000 and it has dropped since then due to the market. Martin suggested the range of \$40,000 - \$70,000. Concern was raised that the value of the land could drop so low that the idea to retain the land for the Town as a park would be raised as an option. However, the committee discussed the need to continue to make the clean-up bond payments, and the increase in cost to the Town for improving the land to make it a park. The consensus of the committee was that a sale of the land was preferable in order to generate tax revenue to help reduce the cost of the bond to the town.

Was subdividing the land an option? Lowrie suggested that since the value of the land is so low now, and it is an odd shaped lot a subdivision could lead to being left with an unusable and unsalable parcel.

The need to create incubator space has been a recurring theme in the town wide discussions on economic development and Martin has received numerous inquiries for such space. Does that lead to the option of creating a Municipal Development Corporation to take on that role on behalf of the Town? The committee felt it was an option worth exploring, but enlisting a broker was the first step to be taken to move forward with development of the site.

In reviewing the list of “accepted uses” the committee agreed that they were still optimal and sound choices for the land.

Meg Quijano made a motion to forward the following recommendation to the Select Board:

“As a first step we recommend the Select Board immediately proceed to enlist a commercial real estate broker to market and sell the Tannery site in compliance with the allowed uses in the Guiding Principles.”

It was seconded by Kipp Wright and approved by a unanimous vote.

5. **Goal Setting:** Chairman Gross suggested that in addition to the work with the Downtown Network the committee focus on moving forward the TIF proposal for the Mill before we lose the opportunity to capture the gain in value and revisit and act on a Credit Enhancement TIF proposal suggested by Brian Hodges.

Pete Brown wondered where on the list is the branding and marketing project. Deb Dodge mentioned that it was on the Downtown Network’s list, but Robin clarified that their work

would be a piece of an overall effort. Pete wondered about funding for the effort, Peter Gross suggested it could come from available TIF funds and there was \$25,000 in the TIF reserve that can be spent this current fiscal year.

Robin McInstosh suggested that we collaborate with the Chamber and other midcoast entities to hear a presentation by a consultant that specializes in community branding. She has seen his presentations and work. She will forward his contact information. The committee agreed to explore having him make a presentation.

Pete Brown raised another possible opportunity for CEDAC's involvement. What could the committee do about the sheds at the head of the harbor? They are in dilapidating condition. Both Lowrie and Martin commented that the permitting issues and cost of rehabilitation were barriers for both current owners and potential buyers. Cost per shed could be as high as \$2.5 Million. The owners may not be motivated to invest anymore in efforts to redevelop. At this time there was no sense of how the committee could be involved.

Lowrie raised the issue of the lack of good options for the use of upper floors in the downtown buildings and did that have potential for committee involvement. There followed a short discussion of some of the existing barriers: ADA (American with Disabilities Act) requirements, Fire Codes, MUBEC, restrictive old Maine statutes; life safety codes, parking and zoning issues. Robin mentioned that this in area where the Downtown Network Center of Augusta could be of assistance and perhaps Jamie Logan, a state employee in Augusta whose job it is to help prospective business navigate red tape. Deb suggested that CEDAC could have discussions with downtown property owners as it begins its work on the downtown section of the Comp Plan revision.

The consensus of the committee was to pursue the two TIF projects, continue its work with the Downtown Network (including the branding project) and to use the Comp Plan process as a way to work with downtown property owners.

- 5. Reminders:** Peter Gross reminded the committee of the upcoming Mobilize Maine Foundation and Discovery Event on October 30 in Newcastle.

Next meetings: Downtown Network Board on 11/13 at 3:30 PM
CEDAC 11/26 5:30 PM

- 6. Meeting Adjourned at 7:15 PM**