

FARMINGTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Tuesday, February 4, 2014

Chairman Ryan Morgan called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M. with the following members present: Joshua Bell, Jessica Berry, and Dennis Pike. Town Manager Richard Davis, Assessor Mark Caldwell, Budget Committee member Stephan Bunker and members of the press and public were also in attendance.

ITEM 1: Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Chairman Ryan Morgan led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

ITEM 2: To Discuss the Formation of a Local Economic Development Committee

Chairman Morgan began by describing the initiatives that the Town has recently undertaken in order to help attract businesses to Farmington. These include the new Downtown TIF and Franklin Printing TIF renewal, the development of the Town's new website and promotional brochure, lowering the sewer connection fees and user rates, and applying for "Certified Business Friendly Community" status. He stated that his goal is to encourage growth and attract families and businesses to Farmington.

Mike Blanchet of the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce provided an update on the Chamber's status. He said there is a new full-time Executive Director, and the Chamber membership is currently up to 200 members. He introduced Greg Patterson, who is the manager of the Farmington Wal-Mart, where the Chamber office is located. Mike offered the Chamber's assistance with business attraction. He expressed an interest in attracting restaurants and other amenities to Farmington.

Jessica Berry said that we want to be inclusive and attractive to any businesses. Ryan Morgan mentioned the development in the area of the Auburn Mall as a good model. He stated that he would like to see development that will keep people here. Stephan Bunker gave kudos to the Chamber for its work.

Resident Shawn Riggs asked where the idea of forming a local economic development committee originated. Ryan Morgan answered that it is something the Board of Selectmen has discussed and believes necessary. The meeting tonight, he said, is a starting point. The Board wishes to gather public opinion about the idea. Jessica Berry asked what the committee would look like, who would be on it and how it would be organized. She wondered if it is even feasible. She said we don't need another committee if it is not effective or is redundant.

Resident Charley Murray asked what the committee would do. Ryan Morgan replied that it would look at what the Town could do to attract and encourage businesses. It would take a larger view of business opportunities. Jessica Berry stated that she wished Andrew Hufnagel could have been present for the meeting, as he is particularly interested in

exploring the formation of a committee and could probably speak more eloquently on it than she. Joshua Bell stated that the committee would provide another opportunity for a group of businesspeople to brainstorm ideas. It would work in conjunction with the Greater Franklin Development Corporation (GFDC). Ryan Morgan said we are trying to find ways to sell our community.

Resident Jim Bouffard said that all Farmington businesses, both in the downtown and outside of it, need to stick together. Shawn Riggs felt that a new committee could make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen for the use of TIF funds. He asked who the members of the committee would be. The thinking is that it would be a diverse group of citizens with an interest in economic development.

Steve Bunker said that he had recently had conversations with GFDC Executive Director Alison Hagerstrom and GFDC Board members (and Farmington residents) John Bogar and Ed David about that group's mission and activities. He said that he is hesitant to launch another group, seeing it as duplicating and perhaps thwarting the efforts of GFDC. He noted that some well-meaning individuals have attempted to recruit companies from other communities in Maine, and that this is considered unethical business practice. He noted that this practice can be used against us as well. Alison Hagerstrom stated that GFDC is happy to work with the Town of Farmington in the same manner as the Chamber of Commerce.

Jessica Berry stated that she doesn't think a new committee is necessary. She felt that we have sufficient resources to attract businesses. She cited the website, brochure, etc. She said we don't have the know-how to recruit businesses, and that it should be left to the professionals. Jim Bouffard felt that the businesspeople should have their own committee and the Board of Selectmen should continue doing their own part to create a good business environment. Shawn Riggs said that the businesspeople are too busy, and that business attraction should operate at the Town level.

Resident Nancy Porter said we need to go beyond our own boundaries. We need to get in touch with job creators and give them a reason to come here. She talked about some of the available commercial properties in town.

Charley Murray said he doesn't think we need a committee for business attraction. We have GFDC for that, and another committee would be redundant. Joshua Bell said the Selectmen don't always know if a business is interested. Jessica Berry said that knowing and trusting that we have good representation on the other committees is essential. Steve Bunker said that he shares the Board's frustration on the misses, but knows that those discussions must take place behind closed doors so that businesses aren't put at a disadvantage. He said that often the discussions take place between the business and the land owner with no involvement of the Town or the Development Corporation. Some corporations talk to no one when making their decisions.

Resident David Keith said that he is all in favor of “poaching” businesses. He asked how we market Farmington. Perhaps this committee could do that by acting as an ambassador committee.

Ryan Morgan stated that we have a huge workforce. There are not enough jobs for the college students, and he would like to see more created.

When asked about the next steps, Ryan Morgan said that he would like to get a sense of whether a new committee is wanted. Accordingly, he called for a straw poll to give the Board direction. The vote of all those present was three (3) in favor of creating a committee, five (5) opposed.

Ryan Morgan declared the matter tabled by sentiment of those present.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting adjourned by consensus at 7:04 P.M.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Richard P. Davis.

Dennis C. Pike – Secretary