

ECONOMIC CORPORATION OF NEWPORT

Zoom

Minutes of May 17, 2021 – Full Board

MEMBERS PRESENT: Hunter F. Rieseberg, President; Mark A. Pitkin, Vice President; Terry Door, Treasurer; Richard Bates, Secretary; Donna Mahair, Bruce Jasper, Paul J. Brown, Ella Casey, John Hooper

MEMBERS ABSENT: Robert Collins, Brendan Minnihan

STAFF PRESENT: Christine Benner, Economic Development Coordinator

CALL TO ORDER: President Rieseberg called the meeting to order at 7:48 am.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES: **May 12, 2020 and March 1, 2021** – *Motion to accept both May 2020 and March minutes by Mrs. Casey, second by Vice President Pitkin. The motion passed unanimously.*

FINANCIAL REPORT: *After review and discussion, motion to accept the financial report by Mrs. Casey, second by Treasurer Dorr. The motion passed unanimously.*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR UPDATE: Mrs. Benner updated the group on current and upcoming grant applications including funding for the potential dog park/community garden/teen play area, a new trail along the Sugar River towards Sunapee, as well as improved infrastructure and new amenities across the community. In addition, she has been working extensively on 12 requests for earmark funding through Senator Shaheen's office, including for the Community Center, Park n Ride, and many more critical projects in Town. Vice President Pitkin asked about progress on the property across from the NHMS Track, which was earmarked as a potential bus location for travel to the Upper Valley. President Rieseberg indicated that the location was part of a transportation plan being investigated by Southwest Community Services. More on this to come.

Mrs. Benner shared that the School to Work Program has made great progress including working with both Ruger and Eichenauer on more 'project focused' internships while COVID precautions are still in place. Ruger is working with the Business I students at the Tech Center on a marketing/Newport pride project that has proven to be enriching for all involved. Ms. Mahair stated that she (Petal Patch) would like to be involved with the program again.

Business outreach has greatly picked up after Mrs. Benner sent out letters to every Newport business. She has worked extensively with many, including the new owners of Kathan Gardens, leadership at Eichenauer, Shrinkfast, Dad's Dogs, Ruger, and more to assist in post COVID recovery, hiring efforts, and possible growth opportunities.

A focus for Mrs. Benner's grant seeking efforts has been the expansion and improvement of Newport's trail system and increasing the recreational opportunities throughout Town. In all of the recent webinars sponsored by the State, recreation has been found to be the key driver in a post COVID world for economic success in New Hampshire. As such, Mrs. Benner has been working with the UNH Extension staff, newly selected Director of the NH Department of Outdoor Recreation, and others to examine possible new trails, marketing of our current trails, and other recreation 'hot spots' that would not only improve tourism but the quality of life for Newport residents. She has several grants in the works for this effort. For many of these grants, an engineering study is needed to determine what it would take to rebuild and renovate the trail along the Sugar River towards Sunapee. Bridges will be needed, new/improved pathways, etc. She has been speaking with an Engineering firm that specializes in trail creation and the estimate for such a study is about \$20,000. Mrs. Benner is seeking a \$5,000 grant and asked the Board to consider a financial commitment of up to \$15,000 to assist in this key economic development effort. *Mrs. Ella Casey made a motion to apply for a grant on behalf of ECON for the engineering study with a match of up to \$15,000, second by Donna. Motion passed unanimously.*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN: Mrs. Benner stated that in an effort to ensure the newly adopted Economic Development Strategic Plan is effective and we can continue to measure its progress, we shall create the following EDSP Subcommittees:

- Downtown Initiatives/Main Street Beautification
- Business Support/Diversification
- Housing
- Marketing

Being sure to involve key players throughout the community that are already working on some of the same efforts (i.e. Newport Area Chamber, Library Arts Center, business owners, realtors, etc.) Ms. Mahair stated that she will assist Mrs. Benner with the creation of these committees. It was decided that Mrs. Benner will continue these efforts, bringing potential committee members to the Board at a future meeting.

INITIATIVES/PROJECTS/REPORTS

A) INITIATIVES

- **Creation of ECON II:** President Rieseberg directed everyone to the copy of the incorporation paperwork included in the package for today's meeting. Mrs. Casey asked if Mr. Jasper, as an attorney, had any thoughts. He would like to look at it more in depth and Mrs. Casey suggested he meets with the Executive Committee to discuss his thoughts. President Rieseberg suggested the Executive Committee look further into the paperwork and the goal of this new incorporation further. Discussion will be postponed until the Executive Committee researches further.
- **CDBG Housing Rehab Project:** Mrs. Benner shared that she will be applying for a CDBG planning grant in June to fund a "housing inventory" which will help us determine potential projects for complete rehab. She will then pursue a Housing Rehab grant in the January CDBG

cycle. Mrs. Casey stated that the Town previously was successful with a housing rehab project and she would love to sit on any committee charged with looking at potential projects/funding.

- **Mural Update:** President Rieseberg updated the group that the mural on the outside of Coronis Market has been completed. The \$5,000 has been paid to the local artist upon his completion. As mentioned last meeting, the mural on Main Street belongs to Mr. and Mrs. North. They were contacted several times about this potential rehabilitation by the Town and ECON with no response.
- **Funding for Town Benches:** President Rieseberg shared with the group the Town's efforts to place benches along the Common. The total project will cost \$16,000 and Mrs. Benner currently has a few grants out to assist with this funding. President Rieseberg asked if there was any interest on behalf of ECON to provide a funding shortfall if the grants come up short. Vice President Pitkin suggested opening the benches up to 'sponsorships' or dedications. Local businesses, residents, non-profits, etc. would have the chance to have their name listed on a bench for a \$500 fee. From this first discussion alone, the Sugar River Bank, Petal Patch, LaValley's and Pinnacle Sports, pledged to sponsor a bench. Mrs. Benner will begin creating an application and process for such a sponsorship. If the full grant amount is secured, these pledges could assist with additional benches along Main Street. *Mrs. Casey made a motion for ECON to fill the funding gaps after grants, business donations, and bench dedications were secured, up to \$16,000, second by Ms. Mahair. Passed unanimously.*
- **Funding for Newport Argus/Community Newspaper:** President Rieseberg shared with the group the continued discussion that has been occurring with key players in this new community newspaper project. The concept is that Good News Media (out of White River Junction) would be the compiler with a local editor in charge of the content and collection. It has been decided that due to the critical economic development benefits to such a project (both locally and for tourism) Christine Benner will be the local publisher for the first year. Mrs. Benner will then funnel the information collected to Jennifer at Good News Media who will put it together, print it, and mail to every home in Newport. There will be 6 editions a year (every other month). At the end of the first year, the group will decide if this is something the Newport community wants to take over fully or if we want to continue working with Good News Media. Discussion followed on the feasibility, popularity, and success of such an endeavor. The project total for the first year will be \$35,000. \$25,000 has already been secured by a private donor, the group is looking for the remaining \$10,000. With ECON's support, a section of the paper would be provided to highlight efforts underway and how ECON is supporting the community. *Motion was made by Mrs. Casey to fund up to \$10,000 for the one year pilot. Second by Mr. Jasper. Passed 6-3 in favor.*
- **Marketing:**
 - o **Funding for Business Pitch Book:** Mrs. Benner shared with the group that every major business she has approached (chain restaurants, Aldi grocery store, etc.) would like to see a Town "Pitch Book" i.e. why would a business choose to move to Newport? What does the community offer? How would life be for their employees? It is with this in mind that she would like to create a pitch book, both in print and digital form that would highlight the many things Newport offers: a great quality of life, business incentives and support, recreation, etc. Moreover, with the creation of an independent, focal website we can use various online ads (social media, google ads, banner ads) and can then track the success of such efforts through google analytics. The Board was very interested in this initiative,

and asked Mrs. Benner to provide a detailed budget for a multi-level marketing approach for review.

- **Funding for Town Signage:** President Rieseberg presented the idea of new Welcome to Newport signs to the Board. The idea would be to keep the granite poles at each entrance, possibly move them out to include more of the Town, and add a new one on the entrance from Sunapee. The new signs would be much brighter, welcoming, attractive, really capitalize on everything that is Newport including the covered bridges, the architecture, and the Common. Right now the image when you first drive in is not how we want to be perceived (drab and dreary). The new signs would be hand carved by an artist in the Monadnock Region and will cost approximately \$10,000. President Rieseberg asked if this is something the Board would like to support. *Mrs. Casey made a motion to pledge \$10,000 to this new signage project. The Board agreed the signs were welcomed, and then discussed ECON's mission. No second. Motion failed.*

Mr. Jasper left the meeting at 9:44 am.

B) PROPERTIES

- Ash Landfill :

- **Reimbursement to Town of Newport for maintenance costs accrued:** President Rieseberg stated that the Town has been maintaining the landfill for the past 5 years. Currently the amount due from ECON to the Town is \$185,000 for this required testing and maintenance. Discussion followed on the delay of receiving such an invoice. There was also a question as to why there was not a corresponding account payable on the balance sheet for each year the invoices were due. President Rieseberg requested some level of assurance that ECON will pay that outstanding balance of the invoice. He indicated that the State is not reimbursing ECON for funds drawn down on the Trust. Vice President Pitkin stated this is in direct conflict with the original Trust Agreement with the State, which stipulates that the NHDES Commissioner shall sign off on all necessary expenses to meet the requirements of the post closure permit. No definitive indication was given as to why the state was not approving the Town's invoices, which is a requirement to release money from the Trust to pay the bill. Given the situation, and the immediate and unanticipated request for payment, Vice President Pitkin agreed to set up a meeting with the NHDES Commissioner immediately after this meeting. On ECON's behalf, he will be discussing the hesitancy to approve the Town's invoices as well as the dwindling prospects of ECON to provide financial assurance to maintain the Ash Landfill on a 30 year rolling basis. He will report back at the next Board meeting.
- **Post Closure Inspect Report:** In the most recent post closure inspection report, it was noted that a few well heads are in need of maintenance due to deterioration over time. President Rieseberg stated that we don't have exact numbers on that project yet but will let everyone know as soon he does.
- **New roof on Ash Landfill garage/Town of Newport Lease:** President Rieseberg stated that he would like to formalize the arrangement made between the Town and ECON

many years ago, allowing for use of the shooting range and garage. The garage does need a new floor and roof. Due to the dirt floor, the humidity levels are very high and it is endangering the integrity of the building. The Town would like to propose in exchange for a 10-year lease, it will pay for and complete the concrete floor and a new roof (about a \$22,000 value, or approximately \$2,200/year in-kind rent). Secretary Bates stated that before the lease gets executed the insurance numbers need to be updated to be more realistic. The current numbers listed are not adequate. President Rieseberg will have that updated. *Motion was made by Mrs. Casey to enter into 10-year agreement with Town to lease the utility building. The lease is to be drafted by the Town. Second by Vice President Pitkin. Passed unanimously.*

- **Smith House & Barn:** Mrs. Benner has worked with the Community Development Finance Authority to access the remaining \$7,000 in the Childcare Feasibility study which will now be used to create a plan and estimate of how much it would cost to renovate and retrofit the Barn into a childcare center. This information will then be brought back to the ECON Board to determine next steps and if we want to move forward with a Community Development Block Grant to assist with such a construction project.

C) REPORTS

- a. **STATUS OF NOMINATING COMMITTEE:** Mrs. Benner stated that the Committee met last month and created a list of potential Board members. Mrs. Benner will be meeting with each candidate, having them fill out the newly created Board Member Application form, and will bring the completed forms to the next Committee meeting (set for June 4th). The Committee will then evaluate the applications and determine their nominations before the Annual Meeting on June 11th. Secretary Bates offered a candidate for the Committee to consider.

OTHER BUSINESS

ADJOURN: *Motion by Treasurer Dorr to adjourn at 10:06 am, second by Vice President Pitkin. Motion passed unanimously.*