

East Haddam Village Revitalization Committee
Meeting
Thursday, January 26, 2012
Minutes

DRAFT

Committee Members Present: Bill Gerrish, Melanie Kolek, Michael Gionta, Phil Barlow, Randy Dill.

Others in Attendance: George Fellner, Jef Wolter

Mr. Gerrish called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Approval of minutes

Minutes from the meeting of September 29, 2011: Motion made by Mr. Barlow to accept minutes, seconded by Mr. Gill. Motion carried.

Old Business

Mr. Gerrish stated that after discussion with Mark Walter, Mr. Walter would like the committee to meet and discuss our recommendations to move our charge forward. The RFQ process rendered no interested developers.

New Business

Mr. Barlow reported that feedback from prospective developers regarding the committee's RFQ is that financing is very difficult for mixed development at the present time. He further indicated that the size of the project was also a problem. Mr. Dill reported that of his four directed inquiries of those who received the RFQ, only one responded back. Konover indicated that the project was not big enough and did not want to get involved in mixed development. There was also concern from prospective developers that there was no anchor to draw patrons. When Mr. Dill asked for suggestions, it was recommended that the committee should look for smaller developer and look at "Simon Pierce Glass" in Vermont as example. Another example was Pat Pinnel's "Mashpee Commons." Mr. Barlow further reported that there was some interest from a local residential developer.

Mr. Gerrish, with input from Mr. Wolter, also reported that the artist housing gave Goodspeed the opportunity to have notable public officials visit this area. Mr. Wolter advised that the Committee on Culture and Tourism monies are mostly dedicated for operating costs and there is no real focus/investigation on how much economic development monies would be given. Mr. Wolter echoed the feedback received from Mr. Barlow and Mr. Dill, stating that the economic environment is "bad, worrse today that it was a few years ago," that projects that are being built now are typically federally funded projects.

There was discussion regarding Goodspeed's focus on efforts to get people to come to Goodspeed earlier and stay later. There was further discussion regarding the success of Showboat and the desirability of another theater in close proximity where Showboat could have been transferred after its scheduled run as it was a hit show.

Mr. Dill asked about the vacant buildings now that the new actor housing is open. Mr. Wolter said that once Goodspeed gets through a full season, it will reassess its spacing needs as well as those spaces for other possible concepts, e.g. museums.

There was discussion regarding plans for renovation of the old middle school, which Mr. Gionta stated he believed was not moving forward at this point. Mr. Gionta and Mr. Barlow began discussion regarding the viability of a town hall in the Village space as previously discussed as a possible alternative option. Mr. Wolter expressed concern that government could completely leave the Village area, which would only leave a few select businesses other than the Goodspeed for local draw. Mr. Wolter stated that it would be interesting to see what attention, if any, would be generated with an alternate proposal that would include a town hall.

There was further discussion regarding alternative, parallel courses of action and how those proposals could be presented to the Board of Selectman. Mr. Gionta stated that the alternative option of the town hall in the Village would stay true to the vision and would likely overcome any financing issues as the same would be open for private/public financing. Mr. Barlow said that any other alternative option would be to table the project and wait until the economy rebounds.

Ms. Kolek made a motion that the committee agrees to explore the alternative, parallel course of action using a town hall as an anchor for a potential developer and make that recommendation to the First Selectman. Discussion was had about the precise consensus. Mr. Gionta seconded the motion with amendments as noted. Motion carried.

Mr. Fellner stated that with respect to the renderings, there could be a combination of the two rear buildings to one building to create the alternative option of a town hall in the Village plan.

Committee membership: Lisa McNellis has resigned from the Board. There was discussion about appointing an alternate at the next meeting.

Audience of Citizens

None.

General Discussion

None.

Next regular meeting scheduled for February 23rd at 7 p.m. at the River House Annex

Motion to adjourn made by Mr. Gerrish, seconded by Mr. Dill. Meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm.