

MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
FOR TOWN OF NEW LEBANON
HELD ON DECEMBER 7, 2020 VIA TELECONFERENCE

Present: Al Bellenchia, Rita Carver, Cynthia Creech, Anna Duhon, Gregg Carroll, Deb Gordon (Board Liaison), Tistrya Houghtling, Ellen Ann Kafkalas, Peg Munves, Sharon Powers, Monte Wasch (Chair)

Guest: Ted Salem, Comp Plan Review Committee

Absent: Richard Beckwith, Chuck Geraldi, Mitch Kelleher, Nina Keller, Jack Lancto, Erminia Rasmussen, Josh Young

Members of the public: One

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 6:30pm by Monte Wasch who turned the meeting over to Ted Salem, chair of the NL Comprehensive Plan Update Committee for a report.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVIEW UPDATE BY TED SALEM

The report included the following points:

The committee lost most of its funding so doing the report with just volunteer participation. Because of the unknown effects of the Pandemic on the town and its residents, the report will just be an interim update of the 2005 plan, which has not been updated in 15 years. This will allow the committee to complete the report with little resources. The intention is to write a plan for the next 2-3 years and hope it is revisited in about 5 years.

Importance of the Comp Plan: Reaffirms the values and goals of the Town to stop outside influences such as the siting of large solar arrays that is now going on in other towns

Changes that have occurred in the last 15 years to New Lebanon

1. Median age has gone from 40 to 50
2. Proportion of 18 year olds and under has gone from 26% to 15%
3. Proportion of residents over 65 has gone from 13% to 21%
4. Housing stock is old and tends to be larger homes - not affordable to younger, new families
5. Rental fees are very high - many people are paying more than 30% of their incomes towards rents
6. Housing issues are a barrier to getting younger people in
7. Economic activity has changed - there is no longer a large manufacturer or grocery store in NL - there are mostly small businesses and 70% of the residents who work are commuting more than 15 minutes to work, which means they aren't working in NL
8. Internet is much improved - more can work in home-based businesses
9. There are some emerging small rentals in Air Bnbs but this is just beginning

Effects of the Pandemic

1. The economic data being used is from 2018 and most likely obsolete - unemployment and poverty rates are probably much higher now
2. The make-up of the town has temporarily changed with more moving up here, but is this permanent or temporary and does it have any long-lasting effects?

Where the Information for Comp Plan committee has come from

1. Survey and focus groups - not great participation which may have resulted from the pandemic
2. 60 people signed-up for focus groups but only 25 participated

3. Survey questions came from results of both the Behan Hamlet study and the library conversations - 10 questions emerged from that

What the Town Residents want (based on survey & focus groups)

1. Access to basics was on the top of the list - including grocery store & pharmacy
2. Maintaining the rural character of the town and resources
3. Sustainable economic development

Less Important to the Town Residents

1. Enriched lifestyle
2. Community Center
3. Town Center
4. Uniform design standards
5. Making NL a tourist destination

How this information translates to NL

1. The Town must balance the competing interests - there is a great resistance to progress here
2. The rural character of the town is the primary impetus
3. Developing undeveloped properties can expand the town's tax base
4. The need for bigger and better properties competes with maintaining the rural character and people don't want tourism
5. Should new development in town be somewhere else instead of on the 20/22 corridor?
6. We can't have businesses here that bring pollution to the land and the water

Possible Roads to the Future of NL

1. Should we promote new commercial & residential development?
2. Do we need new businesses that are not water and waste intensive so we can attract more businesses without having to change the infrastructure or should we focus on changing the infrastructure to include water and sewer development to attract different types of businesses?
3. Should we try to attract professional offices and a pharmacy as opposed to big box stores that require intensive resources?
4. Can we promote tourism to the people of NL - give people more information on what is available in the town for internal consumption but allowing outsiders access to it? This would help residents and possibly attract others to come to NL.
5. Should we do more to support work from home - making sure everyone has good access to internet and offering support services such as access to rail and airport hubs, better transportation service overall

Questions/points from others:

1. Monte pointed out that the economy is going to get worse between now and March but we want to think beyond that. The access to the internet should attract more people to town
2. Gregg asked about the impact on farms but Ted said the committee hadn't come to a conclusion about that yet - all agreed that we needed to find out how we could support the existing farms.
3. Gregg also mentioned that sales tax is apportioned to the county so it doesn't matter what businesses we have - she said we had to come up with goals of the committee - do we want to increase business for taxes or for quality of life in NL?
4. Do zoning barriers exist that prevent us from having more farms? Ted, who is on the Zoning Rewrite committee, said he wasn't aware of any issues being brought to the committee that may be barriers but the committee would certainly be interested in addressing them if they had the chance.
- 5.

DISCUSSIONS ON WHAT THE BEDC SHOULD BE FOCUSING ON FOR THE FUTURE

*We should identify what zoning problems may exist in the town that stop the town from progressing

*A permanent committee should be formed to help people get things done in town - it was pointed out that all this info now exists on the town website. Should someone create a handbook to help people or

would that be too large and unwieldy. Also, so many exceptions exist to situations that no handbook could possibly cover every situation.

- * Improve the information resources in order for people to get the information they want in terms of Business and Economic Development
- * Should we put more work into infrastructure - there was disagreement on whether or not the town needed this - most businesses in town can deal with the water and sewer availability as it is or they wouldn't be here. But what about future businesses coming to town? How many is NL missing out on, such as a laundromat? Will putting these structures somewhere else help and ease the burdens on the NL aquifers and the Wyomanock?
- * Should we recommend a new town center (maybe more west on Route 20) or an additional town center that would be more amenable to development?
- * Should we survey the active businesses in town and find out what it is they want - would they want sidewalks? Would they buy into sewers if the town invested in them? Would they expand their businesses if this existed? Deb Gordon said this would be unnecessary since the current businesses now have what they want and most likely would not expand if it was available to them.
- * Should it be a goal of the BEDC to try to encourage new businesses to come to town? Would having the "new" downtown encourage more businesses and be less of a burden on the natural resources? Would there be issues on the land more west on Route 20?
- * Should the BEDC examine the possibility of a new business district? (This had been recommended by Behan). Would this hurt the current businesses?
- * Should the BEDC set up a structure to address the specific regional and occupational needs of the business in town?

OTHER BEDC BUSINESS

The Outreach and Marketing Committee is moving forward - the directory has helped to highlight the businesses in town

Hess station - still in limbo

Farmers Market online - is there a way the BEDC can help support them? Should a more formal relationship exist between the town and the market?

Next meeting of the BEDC: Monday, January 18, unless a conflict with already existing meetings exists

The meeting was adjourned by Monte Wasch at 7:45 pm, seconded by Rita Carver

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Powers