

1 **Selectboard Meeting**
2 **Tuesday, September 21, 2021**

3 **Meeting Minutes**

4
5 **NOTE: The meeting was held both remotely via video conferencing and some in**
6 **the Town Office Conference Room.**

7
8 Members Present: Brian Carpenter, Heather Seeley, Dan Brown, Esther Thomas, Nick
9 Artim, Lindsey Fuentes-George and Farhad Khan.

10
11 Staff Present: Town Manager Kathleen Ramsay and Director of Planning and Zoning
12 Jennifer Murray

13 **1. Call to Order**

14
15 The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Chair Brian Carpenter.

16
17 **2. Approval of Agenda**

18
19 Khan moved to approve the agenda, and Seeley seconded it. The agenda was
20 approved with 7 in favor. **MOTION PASSED.**

21
22 **3. Economic Development Initiative (EDI)**

23
24 Jennifer Murray began by giving a brief history of the EDI project and how it has
25 changed through the years. She said idea for development of the Bakery Lane parking
26 lot began around 2006. She said by 2008 a study had been prepared with some
27 possible uses, but there were questions about the type of structure and the parking loss.
28 In 2012 the Middlebury Business Development Fund (MBDF) was created between the
29 College and Town, and in 2015 an RFP went out for developers who might be
30 interested in the EDI site, but only one proposal was received from Nexbridge Partners,
31 a local group of investors. She said a committee was created to review the plans, along
32 with some moderated public meetings, and efforts were made to create a development
33 agreement between the Town and Nexbridge, but it became clear more work was
34 needed and issues to be addressed.

35
36 Murray said there's around 50 parking spaces in the Bakery Lane Parking Lot, and she
37 estimates 30 of those spaces are used by Mr. Ups restaurant on a regular basis, so
38 these spaces would need to be replaced somewhere, and the average cost of
39 structured parking is around \$35,000/parking space.

40
41 Murray reviewed the summary of the public meetings and how there was strong
42 community sentiment about the site and what should happen on it. She said it became
43 clear there were many ideas about what should happen on the site, and that should
44 there be more public input to refine the plans to meet the community's ideas.

45
46 In 2017, Murray said she applied for funding for a Downtown Master Plan, and in 2019
47 she obtained funding. She reviewed the Downtown Master Planning process and the
48 various focus groups they spoke with. She said the majority wanted to see buildings
49 that kept to the New England style on the EDI site, and she went over some of the
50 conceptual drawings included in the Master Plan.
51
52 Murray said the team that developed the Downtown Master Plan came up with some
53 other ideas of things that could happen with this site, but they considered the EDI site to
54 be a difficult site to develop, and they recommended a feasibility analysis and an
55 implementation plan be developed. She said the feasibility study is estimated to be
56 around \$95,000.
57
58 Murray reviewed several conceptual designs in the Master Plan for utilizing Otter Creek,
59 such as a boardwalk off Bakery Lane, and other ideas that would enhance Main Street.
60 Most of them include a stormwater feature that could open up opportunities for other
61 stormwater funding, she said.
62
63 Seeley said these are all great ideas, but how much money and staff are needed to
64 keep all these areas maintained and looking great. Murray said that's a great question,
65 and these can be designed to require lower maintenance. Seeley said maybe she
66 needs to see a design that is considered high maintenance, and one that is designed to
67 be low maintenance. Brown said it's important to design a project that doesn't require a
68 lot of maintenance.
69
70 Murray then discussed the need for infill affordable housing development in the
71 neighborhoods around the downtown. She said we have limited room for development
72 and our downtown is fairly small. She said the Planning Commission is looking to
73 increase housing density in the downtown and went over the efforts underway to create
74 more affordable housing and the benefits of having a designated Neighborhood
75 Development Area (NDA) that she is in the process of applying for. One of those
76 benefits is an exemption from Act 250 regulations for qualified mixed-income properties.
77 She did note, however, that the EDI site will be excluded from the NDA designation
78 because it is within a state stream corridor.
79
80 She went over the proposed zoning district changes that would allow for more housing
81 units per acre than is currently permitted and said that they're hoping to create new
82 neighborhoods and not just piecemeal housing projects. She went over renderings of
83 potential areas for development in the downtown area prepared by the student intern
84 that worked in the Planning and Zoning Office this summer. Murray said she liked the
85 potential of developing future housing north of Boardman Street next to the Stonegate
86 neighborhood on the former Sabourin Farm property owned by Middlebury College.
87
88 Murray went over three possible courses of action for the Selectboard in regard to the
89 EDI project. Option 1 is to keep it alive but to set the project aside for now until the
90 Board is sure this is a priority. She said it would need to be evaluated against other

91 projects and we'd need to see how the library project develops. She said Option 2
92 would be to enter into negotiations with a developer looking to build housing at this
93 location, and she said there is an Essex Junction developer who is currently interested
94 in the EDI site for a housing project now. She said parking is still going to be an issue,
95 as it was with Nexbridge. Finally, she said Option 3 would be to develop the feasibility
96 analysis recommended in the Downtown Master Plan, which would need to be prepared
97 by a professional at a cost of approximately \$95,000, and she estimated it could take 4-
98 5 years to complete and prepare the site for development.

99
100 Carpenter said what he's heard from everyone is they want to provide economic support
101 for the town and to create additional housing. He asked Murray where the College is in
102 their discussions on developing workforce housing. Murray said they are excited to
103 develop something on the Sabourin site, and they've also been looking at a property on
104 Happy Valley Road, but that site would need to have water and sewer extended to it in
105 order for any kind of development to take place.

106
107 Artim, who had been on the original Business Development Fund Committee gave a
108 brief background on the site and how the parking lot was a "tertiary use in a primary use
109 space". He said there's a necessity to it, but it isn't a revenue generator for the town.
110 He said there was a design and massing study for the space done by Truex Collins that
111 included a riverwalk and some residential and light commercial. At the same time, he
112 said, there was some interest in building a parking structure and creating some
113 occupiable space in the Mill Street lot, and even some discussion of a hotel where
114 GMP's substation is located. He said they put out the RFP and 4 developers were
115 strongly considering it, but they started dropping off because they said that Middlebury
116 has a reputation for not being easy to develop and there wasn't enough clarity around
117 what was wanted on the site or how the ownership of the land would be structured, so
118 Nexbridge ended up being the only developer to submit plans.

119
120 Artim said he didn't like Murray's Option 1, because waiting 4 to 5 years isn't
121 acceptable, and these other projects are great and housing is necessary, but we have
122 to do some big thinking on the EDI site.

123
124 Brown said if housing is the priority, how does that fit into the EDI site, and how do we
125 pick our priority? Carpenter said he would like to see the Board promote that they are
126 interested in developing the EDI site and that he'd like to solicit ideas to see what can
127 be developed there. He said he liked Murray's Option 2 but was in favor of making it a
128 competitive process and then turning it over to the developer that is chosen. He said he
129 thinks there's enough interest in developing the EDI site, and we need to continue to
130 grow space for businesses interested in coming downtown. He said he doesn't want to
131 wait for the library's plans to develop or wait 5 or 6 years. He said we need more
132 density in the downtown and years ago the College was interested in helping with the
133 parking garage, but they were interested in putting it in Mill Street, so those talks would
134 need to be re-engaged. He said he was also in favor of talking to the landowners of
135 these parcels that the plans show potential for housing development and see if they're
136 interested in selling, and that the Town needs to be more proactive.

137
138 Carpenter said we've just made a huge investment into the infrastructure of the
139 downtown, so we need to use that as a "springboard" to bring other investment into our
140 downtown that will add to our tax base and bring more people into town.
141
142 Murray said the Town could improve the infrastructure to support businesses, or they
143 can give the land to a developer to do something with, and Carpenter said that's what
144 he thinks could happen with the EDI site. He said we could barter the land for a say in
145 what would go into the development and oversight of the project.
146
147 Seeley said the Town has a limit to the number of projects we can do, and while she
148 likes the concept of "thinking big", she thinks there are limits, such as staff time. Brown
149 said we could hire someone, but Seeley said that takes a lot of tax dollars and we'd
150 have to raise taxes considerably to have enough money for more staff. Brown said he
151 recommends we shouldn't think about reasons we shouldn't do this, but rather we
152 should think about ways to make it work going forward. Carpenter said he agreed with
153 Seeley that we have limitations, but perhaps we could use some of the remainder of the
154 development funds to hire someone to do some of the work, but in the end, Murray will
155 be overseeing the permitting process and it's hard for her to do that if she's also having
156 to promote a project.
157
158 Fuentes-George said she felt that putting more housing density there would solve more
159 of our problems than the EDI project, because it will provide more work-force housing.
160 Carpenter said EDI is economic development, and so he didn't think we could afford to
161 do one or the other, we needed to do both. Murray said she thought that providing
162 workforce house does promote economic development, but Carpenter thought it meant
163 more storefronts downtown.
164
165 Seeley asked if there was a way to compare which type of development added the most
166 to the grand list. Ramsay said it would take some time, but it could be done.
167
168 Thomas thanked Murray for putting the presentation together and said it was very
169 helpful to her as a new Selectboard member. She said the dreamer in her is loving this
170 idea and she can see it happening, but she also thinks about staff time, and what would
171 that look like with everything else we have going on. She said she knows the Town
172 Manager is at the maximum capacity already, so she'd like to hear from Ramsay on
173 what she thinks is possible. Ramsay said we'd have to look at it, but it would mean
174 additional expense to the Town.
175
176 Artim said there are other towns that took chances and did projects that now makes
177 these towns the place you want to be, so he keeps thinking "go big".
178
179 Carpenter asked Murray why she felt a feasibility study was so important. Murray said if
180 there had been a feasibility study prepared the first time and an RFP had gone out
181 saying how large a structure that site could handle or what the public input was on what
182 type of design could be tolerated, there might have been a better response. She said a

183 feasibility study lets the developers know exactly what the Town and public want
184 designed for that site.

185
186 There was further discussion on the feasibility study and Carpenter asked what the next
187 steps would be and how would we fund it. Ramsay said there is about \$100,000
188 remaining in the Middlebury Business Development Fund (MBDF), which could be
189 used, but it needed to be understood that if we use that it will be the end of the MBDF
190 money and the Better Middlebury Partnership will be looking for more money this year
191 now that the funds from the Transportation Agency are coming to an end.

192
193 While the Board has not yet voted on the priority of projects, Carpenter said there's
194 general support on moving these projects forward, and he'd like to hear back from
195 Murray on the priority of each project and how much would be needed for additional
196 staffing. Fuentes-George said she'd like to hear from staff on how much they can take
197 on and what else is going to be put on the backburner because of these projects. She
198 said maybe we can do 2 or 3 of these projects and the other things that need to be done
199 as well, but what she's hearing in general is that staff is stressed. Khan said we have to
200 find a way to do it. Ramsay said she and Murray aren't even sure what it will take to
201 even get to the starting block on this project, so just to get there would be a huge lift, but
202 that once we find a developer there won't be as much for the staff to do with it, it's just
203 getting to that point.

204

205 4. Bourdon Property

206

207 Carpenter said he needs to get back to the State on whether the Town is interested in
208 this property. He said he doesn't see the Town taking this on to develop it, but he
209 knows there's some interest from the Addison County Community Trust (ACCT), but he
210 personally doesn't see putting housing on the first floor of a building on Merchants Row
211 and thinks it's a poor use of the space to do so. He said if the Town doesn't buy it, then
212 the State has to go through an FHWA process that opens it up to other parties, so he's
213 thinking if the Town purchased the property we could ask for proposals and re-sell it to a
214 developer that the Town chose and could have a say on how it would be developed. He
215 said he would hate to not purchase it and then leave it open to anyone to buy and
216 develop it in a way that is not in the best interests of the town. Carpenter said they can
217 talk informally outside of the meeting and then discuss it at a regular Board meeting.

218

219 Ramsay said the Board will all be invited to the Middlebury College South Street
220 Extension solar project groundbreaking ceremony on Tuesday October 12th at 10:00
221 a.m. She said the November 23rd regularly scheduled Board meeting is on the week of
222 Thanksgiving so did they want to move it, and it was decided to move it to November
223 16th.

224

225 The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m. upon motion by Brown, seconded by Khan.

226

227 Respectfully submitted,

228 Beth Dow