

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES

**February 20, 2013**

**Present:** William Plasko, Alan Slater, Tom Wynne, Scott Murphy, Stephen P. Costello, Pam McCarthy- Community Development Program Coordinator

**Approval of Minutes**

**Motion** made by Scott Murphy to approve minutes of September 5, 2012, seconded by Alan Slater.

**Vote Unanimous motion passed**

**Presentation of Vanderbilt Area Commercial District Strategic Plan.**

**Present: Stephen Cecil, President, The Cecil Group; Cheryl Rogers, Representative of Stakeholder Jim Shane and Member of Norwood Conservation Committee**

Stephen Cecil discussed the main topics of the Vanderbilt Area Commercial District Strategic Plan including goals, existing land use and regulatory framework, infrastructure, identity of area, marketing and implementation.

Steve Cecil first discussed the overall strategy. He said that through better coordination of infrastructure we can promote business opportunities. We can align regulatory issues so that what we are allowed to do in the park is easy.

Mr. Cecil stated that the area has an immense number of uses including office, industrial, retail and recreational facilities. Steve looked at whether the zoning/land use in the park makes sense. There are going to be some vacancies due to FM Global and Dedham Medical moving across the highway. There are less vacancies in the park than there would be if it was a highly specialized office park such as a high tech park in Middleboro.

Steve Cecil said that looking forward we need uses in the future that make sense. He said that there are a number of buildings that could have a range of uses in them – Flex Space. For example a manufacturer of medical equipment that also sells equipment on a wholesale basis (it is office, light industrial, retail and wholesale in the same business). Because of Norwood's current zoning businesses don't fit into classifications very easily. They have to go through the active process of getting approvals through variances or the rezoning process. Flexibility and the nature of the market are important. Norwood can lead the way by establishing zoning changes to make sure that the door is really open for these kinds of businesses. When businesses have the need to expand they don't have a lot of time. Businesses are shopping for a location that is ready to go.

As far as infrastructure in concerned there are no sidewalks in many locations and the roads are not striped. They need a more attractive look and feel for employees and patrons. The identity of the area is not clear from Route One. People don't know where to turn to get into the park. Places for people to walk are increasingly important. We should think about walking trails as part of the basic infrastructure improvements.

Mr. Cecil suggested a series of improvements beginning with signage at key intersections. Morse Street is the main intersection; there is no real possibility of breaking through Route One to create another intersection. We can have the boulevard feel that exists at River Ridge increase to expand to the rest of the park. We can have streetscape improvements like sidewalks. Over time we can extend in sequence a series of walking paths. We can create loops for people to get out to some of the features and walk along sidewalks to create access. Long term getting out to the green space and having access to the Neponset River is one of the distinguishing features of this park.

Another improvement would be making parking lot circulation work better.

Steve Cecil discussed the need for a stronger identity for the park. For example the entire area could be called Neponset River Business Park and places within the park like River Ridge could be called River Ridge at the Neponset River Business Park. Everyone in the park can have their own identity within the park. Gateway signage can indicate where major uses are.

A series of lighting improvements at a few key places for pedestrians would occur at intersections. Repetition would create an identity.

Mr. Cecil said that these are the kinds of things that you would be thinking about doing if you owned the entire industrial park. With the different owners you need to do this on a collaborative basis with all of the users reaching out to get public grants for these kinds of improvements.

We need to create a focused business association that would probably be an adjunct to the Chamber of Commerce which is located in the park.

We need to think about more collaborative marketing of the area including the trading of leads. Vacancies should be posted on the web to let people know about kinds of spaces for business opportunities.

Steve mentioned that deciding how to tie this into a series of grants and outreach will be a key part of the implementation. We can focus on the Massworks Grant Program which provides \$1-2 million per project.

Bill Plasko stated that the lead party is the Planning Board. He asked if we need an overlay district. Steve Cecil said that in general the zoning matches up pretty well but we can introduce more flexibility into the range of things that can happen to a building or a group of buildings as long as it is compatible internally.

Pam McCarthy stated that the Planning Board voted to endorse the plan. They are behind the drafting of a flex space zoning bylaw for Town Meeting allowing for flex space in the limited manufacturing area.

Bill Plasko asked how the Town can be involved in making this successful. Steve Cecil said that the Town needs to be the sponsor of the infrastructure improvements. They need to get the work done on the streets and get identity signage and way finding signage into place. The Town should be involved in creating the walkways and trail system and improving the Neponset River edge.

Cheryl Rogers stated that GZA (an environmental engineering firm that just became a tenant in the park) is willing to assist with walking trails. They can work with conservation and landholders to connect and trails and possibly down the road get another canoe launch. Cheryl spoke to Jim Shane, a major stakeholder in the park; and there is a way to connect off the back of one of his properties because there is a great clearing in the fowl meadow that you would be able to launch canoes from too.

Steve Cecil stated that there will be utility improvements of power lines. There will be access roads created to do the work. The idea is to tie all of these things together and go after financing through DCR. DCR won't do it on their own. We need to show that there is a public/private partnership. We need to work with the Chamber of Commerce and the businesses to make meetings happen.

Mr. Cecil said that we will have to spend some money to chase some money. The Town needs to have preliminary design work done before they can apply for a Massworks grant. The State looks to see if the Town has stepped up. The Town needs to come up with their own money to do a preliminary concept of what specifically needs to be done so that the application is taken seriously.

Steve Cecil stated that this study was meant to be broad; to look at all different topics.

Pam McCarthy stated that the Planning Department will seek private donations to prepare for a Massworks Application.

Tom Wynne asked if the streets have to be accepted. Pam McCarthy stated that Mark Ryan has begun a preliminary evaluation of the condition of the streets. Steve Cecil commented that he is not sure if streets have to be public ways. For a Hingham Shipyard project that he worked on there was all private land but a public easement was created. The Town would not put money into the project unless there was a guarantee that the infrastructure would be preserved and replaced as needed.

Steve Costello said that the plan discussed options A, B and C and asked Steve Cecil which option is being recommended. He also commented that the Flex Space seems to have a greater vacancy rate than the office and retail space in the study. Steve Cecil said that you have to look at what pays the highest rate per square foot vs. flex space.

Steve Cecil stated that office is pretty quiet everywhere and this will become industrial/specialized and retail will be part of the area. He said that as far as future absorption is concerned there will be a positive absorption of flex space but current zoning doesn't permit it. He said that flex space is another component. We already have retail, office and light industrial as categories.

Mr. Cecil said that Frank Mahady is saying that across the suburban 128/495 corridor and in Boston these unusual companies are cropping up all over the place that are looking for space quickly. This is expected to be a big part of the regional demand over time.

Steve Cecil said that with a big user like GZA coming in to the park near the end of the recession we can be pretty optimistic that the FM Global/Dedham Medical vacancy will fill.

Steve Costello asked from a priority stand point with a limited number of dollars do we have to choose between nature walks or walkways. Steve Cecil responded that you would do regular walkway first for curb appeal. He said that curb appeal is important for marketing. Curb appeal relates to the question of what employees want it to look like and where do they want to go to work. Walking to and from places they can eat and walking around within the park is important first.

Bill Plasko commented that it is all about eye appeal. Not only employees go out for walks in nice parks but people from other areas of Town come there to walk. Nature walks will be a nice addition after we upgrade the regular walkway. Mr. Cecil commented that there will be two different pots of money to go after that may not come at the same time. There may not be a conflict between regular walkways and nature walks.

If a company is looking for space here and we can say that we have an infrastructure grant and that we are working with GZA on nature paths people will pick up on the fact that we are doing something here. It will gain momentum.

Tom Wynne asked if Steve Cecil sees retail extending further into the park? Steve Cecil stated that it is reasonable to think that it won't. There are too many competing places for retail like Legacy Place in Dedham and Westwood Station (now called University Station). Sooner or later someone will take advantage of the frontage on Route One where the Volvo dealership is planned. Mr. Wynne stated that with that one exception there is not much space for retail.

Steve Cecil stated that the retail area can look a lot better with landscaping, signage and lighting. If the area where the planned Volvo dealership is gets transformed and there is a nicer entry into the Park at Morse Street it goes a long way to rebound the area.

Scott Murphy said that the details need to be worked out but it doesn't hurt to adopt that plan now. This was originally an Economic Development Committee idea but the Planning Board wanted to get involved to deal with zoning. He said that the Planning Board already approved the plan. Down the road there is more to do such as leveraging private funds but if we approve of the concept we can vote.

Bill Plasko asked how will plan and concept be implemented; by pushing private owners?

Tom Wynne asked if we need to make the approval conditional on public road acceptance.

Bill Plasko asked why Steve Costello is going to the Selectmen with the plan.

Pam McCarthy commented that Steve is trying to build a consensus and show that the Town is behind the plan.

Scott Murphy said that we don't have to put the condition of public roads in because we are looking into this.

Pam McCarthy stated that we will have more detailed plans to go in with the Massworks application.

Bill Plasko said that if the Town didn't get the funds the plan can still be what someone needs to do.

Steve Costello asked what exactly is the option. Scott Murphy said that we are not there yet; this is more a strategy to develop individual plans.

Pam McCarthy said that this is called a plan but we are asking to accept it as a strategy.

Alan Slater said that it is a bunch of concepts.

Scott Murphy said that he likes walking trails but it is not likely.

Cheryl Rogers stated that trails will start when they are working on the utility poles. Norwood Gardens had to do paths to the rear.

Pam McCarthy stated that individual property owners will start working on walking trails.

Steve Costello said that to get anywhere we will need to work on a number of things in parallel fashion to get anything done. The follow up will make priorities.

**Motion** made by Scott Murphy to accept the Vanderbilt Area Commercial District Strategic Plan as submitted and recommend that the Board of Selectmen accept the plan as the Vanderbilt strategy, seconded by Alan Slater.

**Vote Unanimous Motion Passed**

**Request for Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for Applied Plastics Co., Inc.**

**Present: Hal Davis, Consultant; David Ring, President of Applied Plastics Co., Inc.**

Hal Davis began by stating that Applied Plastics is a business in the Endicott area. It has been in Norwood for quite a while. It is a manufacturing business that is growing by leaps and bounds. They have started the permitting process with the Town for a 15,000 s.f. foot print building with a 5,000 s.f. mezzanine. The new building will be used for warehouse, some production and some office space. There will be 10 new jobs created, conservatively. This project should be well received by the State. 85% of the product is exported to other states; 40% of the product is exported overseas. Mr. Davis stated that he assumes that Norwood would like to see an existing manufacturer in town expand. They are here to see if they can get an exemption on some increase in valuation. They have already filled out the preliminary state form.

David Ring said that the company was started by his father, Frank Ring. It has been in Norwood since 1954; in the existing building since 1981.

Mr. Ring showed samples of his primary products and explained their uses. He explained that their primary interest is in the medical field. Two of their major accounts include Boston Scientific in Natick and CFR which was formerly in Billerica and is now in Ireland. They also ship their products to Germany, Italy and Singapore among others. They produce tubes that are used in the cardiovascular industry to deliver stints.

They coat their titanium product with nickel which prevents it from bending. It goes through the highway system in the arteries cleaning them out and delivering stints to the heart.

David Ring explained that their business never slowed down during the recession.

Mr. Ring stated that they need all custom built equipment to produce their products which will be produced by a Massachusetts company.

Bill Plasko asked if the land for the new building has been purchased from Norwood Commerce Center. Mr. Ring stated that it has been and they have done all necessary testing at a cost of \$100,000.

David Ring explained that the current building is 50 years old and is filled with equipment already. Every time that they want to add something they need to take something away. Now they will have a nice clean building with a clean room area for medical people. The equipment is not small but it is quiet.

David Ring stated that the quality of their products is consistent and they keep a phenomenal amount of inventory. He said that the TIF that they are requesting would only apply to the new building.

Bill Plasko commented that some items on the TIF are incomplete such as the current value. Hal Davis stated that he is waiting to get information from the Assessor who has been out of the office due to health issues. For the agreement he used the purchase price of the lot to have some idea but he still needs the estimated value of the new building.

Bill Plasko mentioned that there was a provision on the last TIF that the EDC did for Personal Property. Hal Davis stated that we don't need to put anything in due to the fact that the business is manufacturing (not even zeros). Hal Davis stated that the old rule was that Personal Property taxes were exempt if you were in an Economic Opportunity Area. Now the Town can negotiate unless the business is manufacturing.

Bill Plasko asked if there are parts that are not manufacturing. Hal Davis stated that the Department of Revenue classifies you as manufacturing. If that is your classification you pay no personal property taxes. It doesn't matter if part of the business is office.

Steve Costello asked how the requested percentages compare with the percentages given on other TIFs. He thought they seemed high.

Hal Davis said that he was not involved in the last TIF but he believes that it was in a good location on Route One and they needed less incentive. This is on Endicott Street and the owner will have some remediation expenses that normally a business won't have. He also thought that we would want to encourage manufacturing. For these reasons Mr. Davis thought that we should give more favorable treatment to this business than the other ones.

Scott Murphy stated that their standards are to pay attention to the valuation. He wants manufacturing to stay in Town but he thinks that the numbers should stay closer to others.

Bill Plasko stated that Campanelli had mixed numbers.

Steve Costello said that he 100% wants to give a TIF to Applied Plastics but he is not sure about the numbers.

Hal Davis said that he is not including anything on the base building. It is unusual for an addition to be on another assessor's parcel. The TIF would typically have been given on the whole thing. Ideally they would have liked the TIF to be on the existing building too but they are not doing that.

Scott Murphy asked if there is still a 5% investment tax credit from the State. Hal Davis said that it depends on the number of jobs created and whether or not it is in a gateway area. He said that they should get something from the State.

Scott Murphy stated that they will have a serious amount of trouble selling these numbers.

Hal Davis asked the EDC to be as generous as they can with an agreement that can be warranted and defended.

Pam McCarthy said that she will get the numbers that are missing from the Assessor. She also asked if there should be a street address as part of the Economic Opportunity Area designation. Hal Davis stated that right now it is part of a larger parcel. The purchase and sale agreement has been executed but there is no address yet. The legal description can be used to be site specific.

Steve Costello suggested that they come back after they further review.

Bill Plasko was concerned that we can't help quickly enough. Hal Davis stated that he is planning on presenting the TIF at the Spring Town Meeting and at the June Economic Assistance Coordinating Council meeting.

David Ring said that construction of the new building will begin as soon as they get the final permits.

Bill Plasko said that there is a potential problem that someone will ask why we are giving a TIF.

Pam McCarthy commented that the company did not have to stay in Norwood or even in the State.

Hal Davis said particularly because this is manufacturing.

Pam McCarthy said that she can give the EDC a breakdown of the percentages given on previous TIFs. She also stated that on March 15<sup>th</sup> the EDIP reports are due to the State which will show the jobs created and taxes forgiven on all previous TIF agreements in the town. She said that she can e-mail this information to the EDC as soon as it is available.

Bill Plasko made a motion to table the vote until we can get the additional information which can be provided via e-mail. The Board can then vote on the TIF at the end of March. This should give enough time to get the TIF agreement before the Board of Selectmen. The Economic Opportunity Area can be voted on at the same time. He stated that the Committee is inclined to support the TIF but needs to work on the details.

### **Other Business**

Bill Plasko informed the Board that due to the passing of EDC member Jack Moynihan the committee needs to notify the Board of Selectmen that there is a vacancy on the Economic Development Committee. Pam McCarthy said that she would forward a letter to the BOS.

Minutes submitted by,

Pamela McCarthy