

EDC Meeting Minutes 5/20/26

Approved

8:00 am to 9:00 am

Chairperson: Rich Pelletier

Vice Chairperson: Keith Cobbett

Commission Members: Riché Colcombe, Kim Opperman, Bob Nash, Jennifer Schamel, Keith Cobbett

Town Administrator: Laura Buono

Planning Director: Robyn Payson

Planning Board: Susanne White

Chamber of Commerce: Amanda McDonald

Supt of Schools: Jennifer Crawford

Select Board: Rich Pelletier

Water/Sewer Dept: Dana Clow

Excused: Bob Nash, Jennifer Crawford

Public: None

Guest: None

Chairman Richard Pelletier opened the meeting with introductions around the Board.

Minutes 4/15/26 Susanne White made a motion to approve the minutes. Laura Buono seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

EDC Economic Development Plan

Chairman Robert Nash read from the 2009 Town Meeting minutes establishing the Commission.

Current Direction

Chairman Richard Pelletier asked the Board if they were pleased with the current direction of the Commission.

Laura Buono said we are implementing the Economic Development Plan which is huge and she thinks the Commission is doing a great job. She said she and Robyn Payson have been sitting on the Commission since we came and sometimes the Commission has struggled because they really didn't have projects. She said we tried to work with the Chamber, but they reorganized.

Kim Opperman said that besides having people on this committee that are interested in the Town and helping it, he thinks having Mike Tardiff and the Regional Planning Commission help us, he can tell us what other towns are doing, the grants. He said he thinks the Planning Commission is working ten times more than whatever we are paying for them. It's phenomenal.

Laura Buono said the Town must be happy because it is in the budget and what we are doing was called out.

Susanne White said having been on this Commission back in the day as a Chamber rep when the Chamber was not very active we got nothing done. There was a lot of discussion of ideas and then it was like “Oh the Chamber can do it”. Well the Chamber is a volunteer organization with no staff, they couldn’t. They did a survey of all the businesses in Town. She said they did get things done but not on a larger scale. She said the EDC has been very productive.

Robyn Payson said the EDC was strong with the Business Retention and Expansion Program, the Plan NH Charrette. She said we were great at initiating these projects, but implementation was not something we could do, and that was the important part of doing these things. CNHRPC has guided us and look at what we have accomplished; the TIF the ERZ’s we are working on publicizing the tax incentives that we have. If you compare it to before the Economic Development Plan was adopted this committee didn’t do much. She briefly discussed the downtown parking issues. She said there is progress and that we are going in a great direction.

Susanne White said she liked having Brian Groth from the state to get the word out about Hillsborough and what it has to offer on a higher level. That’s our next challenge and she wasn’t sure if there wasn’t going to be a lot of development.

Kim Opperman said not for a while but businesses are looking for town’s that meet them with open arms, and that’s what we’re doing with the TIF and our attitude.

Robyn Payson said that is also being done with improvements to the website.

Kim Opperman talked about his experience traveling the country for hotel development. He said the first thing they would do was see the planner and ask about the zoning and having them say “what can we do for you” and then when he moved to Connecticut all they would do is tell you what you can’t do. He said when he came here he got the “how can I help you” approach and that’s why I’m here. And for a business that’s everything.

Laura Buono said if development is going to slow we have to shift to “how do we support the businesses we have”. She talked about an award to be given out at Summer Fest to the most green businesses and that is economic development.

Kim Opperman said they should promote the people who are putting that festival on.

Susanne White said as long as she’s been here since 2009 she didn’t think there has been the cooperation between Water/Sewer and the Planning Board and the Economic Development Commission as much as there is currently.

Rich Pelletier said everyone seems happy in the direction we are going in.

Jennifer Schamel said it was good to hear people reflecting on the positive changes.

Rich Pelletier handed out excerpts from the Town Report showing previous years Economic Development reports. He asked if it was up to the Board of Selectmen to decide if we should do something like this. He asked if there should be a yearly report in the Town Report from the Economic Development Commission.

Robyn Payson said definitely.

Riche' Colcombe said 100%

Robyn Payson said over Covid the EDC report was merged with her report. It used to have it' own stand-alone report, and it should go back to that.

Kim Opperman said it was about writing down your goals for the year.

Riche' Colcombe said she joined around 2021 and we've come a long way since she started. She said one of the things that stood out to her when she was going through these has to do with parking. She talked about the diagonal parking in front of Tookey's. It stood out to her because in the 2021 timeframe there was discussion about paving that and taking that away. She said that was counter intuitive to what the Economic Development Commission was trying to accomplish.

There was discussion about how the angled parking was problematic and how that led to the change.

Laura Buono said the parking wasn't on behalf of the Economic Development Commission

There was further discussion about parking.

Chairman Rich Pelletier said there was discussion in the previous Town Report was talking about marketing the town.

Susanne White said that Brian Groth suggested getting realtors together and she said she didn't know how to invite the realtors that deal with businesses.

Kim Opperman said you just invite them all. You have a meeting and invite all the realtors and the ones that care will be there and the ones that don't won't.

There was discussion about attracting realtors.

Laura Buono asked if a mailing would be a good idea.

Kim Opperman said if we did one page about our TIF and about our town and about our trails and about how wonderful this place is we could get lists of realtors. He said he would call ten brokers and then you get their e-mail and you send it to them. Just getting that in the top of someone's head is how you do it.

Riche' Colcombe suggested inviting Mark Laliberty back to discuss retention

There was further discussion about the materials to be handed out and posted on the website. There was further discussion about attracting business to Hillsborough. There was discussion about attracting another grocery store to town.

There was discussion about demographics.

There was discussion about pharmacies.

Additional Projects

Rich Pelletier asked if any more work should be taken on by the EDC right now. He said from the last meeting, we should be working on marketing the town.

Kim Opperman said he has never seen a town that decides that the Sewer and Water has to make its own money. To him a water treatment plant, water lines, sewer lines just like firetrucks, police cars and municipal buildings. Somehow, we have got to help the Water and Sewer incorporate into this town. We need to work with this department and get them some financial help. When rates come down we maybe need to be pushing bond issues.

Laura Buono said the Board of Selectmen have been talking about that.

Kim Opperman said that we have to talk about it and if we are going to have a vibrant waste water treatment plant.

Dana Clow said unfortunately we all know there are infrastructure challenges and he has been hearing that those challenges have been off putting to small businesses because it costs money to make the necessary upgrades in order to be able to resolve the issues. Raising money means raising fees or creating programs that require contributions by new potential customers. And that is off putting especially for small businesses. He said he has been hearing that people cannot move forward because of the cost that is required. He said he didn't know how to resolve that. The reality is that as a system we have an obligation to make certain changes or improvements in order to keep the system operational. The result has been an increase of fees for the providing of those services. What's being said is that they can't handle the fees that the system is requiring.

Riche' Colcombe said they have a very small number of people on that service and that is a huge burden to put on them. It's got to be town supported.

There was discussion about water/sewer funding and the town's role in that.

Laura Buono said the Water and Sewer department can't fund this on their own. She said if a business can't pay it and they go somewhere else then Water and Sewer gets nothing. Laura continued to discuss Water and Sewer's challenges.

Susanne White said if people want to support growth that that is something that the EDC can focus on.

Robyn Payson said whether it is fair or not Water and Sewer has a reputation that businesses are not able to come in because they couldn't pay the fees. It's hard because when you are trying to promote the town people are very interested in public utilities and if the word is out; just like the little bar and grill, that couldn't afford the fees and left. And it would have been nice to have that Volvo building turned into something. It's a bad reputation that gets out there.

Dana Clow said his observation as an engineer who spent 45 years in developer's interests what he found was someone who wanted to develop a project, they went to the town and were told you had to make

infrastructure improvements and development costs. It seemed in Massachusetts they understood that and bit the bullet and paid. He said his observations here is that people who are expressing interest in doing projects don't seem to understand that it costs money to do development. The reluctance to bear those costs is the problem. Operating an infrastructure system the money has to come from somewhere.

Riche' Colcombe said you cant compare NH with Massachusetts

Rich Pelletier said why would a company choose Hillsborough NH over Henniker, Antrim or any other town. If we are charging three or four times what they are charging to put that business in because of the infrastructure costs why come here? That's the problem.

There was discission about attracting business to Hillsborough and challenges with Water and Sewer.

Kim Opperman said there are people moving to Texas and Florida and we have a much better quality of life.

Jennifer Schamel said she never considered investment in the Town and infrastructure as "pay to play". If people have that viewpoint then maybe it's about how the narrative is framed and being clear on what the cost is and the purpose of the cost is and the benefit to that business and to the town.

There was further discussion about the costs of developing in Hillsborough.

Susanne White said one of our projects should be identifying all of the barriers to entry.

There being no other business, Susanne White made a motion to adjourn. Riche' Colcombe seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned 9:00 am

Respectfully submitted,

Robyn Payson, Planning Director