



Falmouth Economic Improvement Committee

Wednesday, December 17, 2014 Minutes

Attendance:

Name	Present	Name	Present	Name	Present
Sandra Lipsey	√	Phil Bixby	√	Janice DeLima	√
William Lunt III	√	Anne Theriault	√	Dimitri Balatsos	√
Pam DiPietro-Hale	√	Chris Wasileski	√	Luc Walker	√

Council Liaison: Charlie McBrady
Staff present: Nathan Poore, Theo Holtwijk
Others present: Rachel Selsky, Cathy Renault, Jim Damicis

Theo called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM.

1. Welcome

Theo welcomed the committee and the consultant and everyone introduced themselves.

2. Review of Draft Minutes of December 3, 2014 meeting

Janice noted that at the last meeting the committee discussed the importance of full committee attendance as the strategic plan project is ramping up. She was happy to see full attendance today. The draft minutes of the December 3, 2014 meeting were approved as written.

3. Review of Agenda and Goals for the meeting

Theo gave a brief overview and turned the meeting over to Rachel Selsky of Camoin. Rachel showed a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed the goals for the meeting.

4. Review of Revised Demographic and Economic Base Analysis

Rachel reviewed the highlights of the major takeaways of the base analysis which pointed to growth opportunities, assets and skills in the community and growing industry sectors. She clarified that “commercial” uses included office uses, but not retail. Sandra stated that it was important to clarify that for the public.

There was a discussion on innovative activity and how that is measured. The level of activity was listed as “significant” and the committee asked what that meant. Cathy responded that the level showed potential opportunities, but that companies take their business outside Falmouth. Dimitri wondered to what extent patents result in business activity. Cathy’s sense was that the majority of Falmouth patent holders are employed by Fairchild and that that company does capitalize on them.

The notable worker inflow into Falmouth (exceeding outflow) was discussed. Phil wondered how it compared to that of Cape Elizabeth.

5. Discussion of Key Themes

Camoin reviewed four key themes that they found based upon the work completed to date. This work included review of Falmouth data, Falmouth reports, and 18 business interviews.

Theme 1: Attitude Around Business and Economic Development

This theme speaks to a community's personality. Camoin that typically there is always a need for more communications by the municipality, but Falmouth's needs go beyond that. Jim discussed the business-unfriendly perspective that various interviewees commented on and also noted the dichotomy of some business owners who do not want to much development activity themselves either. Dimitri asked what the profile of the interviewees was and if this response was universal. Jim and Cathy said it was a universal response. Janice asked which communities were doing a better job at this. Jim cited some examples where the customer service attitude is: "These are our standards, but how can we help you?" He stated that businesses do not want any controversy and go elsewhere to avoid it. They want reasonable and predictable review processes. If a vote can go either way, that gives uncertainty. He cited some examples of zoning challenges in Falmouth. Dimitri asked if any positives were found in this theme. Jim felt that a commitment needed to be made to an ongoing, meaningful dialogue on these issues and recommended to let the community work its way through that.

Cathy added that people do not perceive a crisis by driving around Falmouth, but that businesses do vote with their feet. She felt that this issue is actionable at the present and that other communities have more difficult economic conditions. Sandra noted the comparison with Cumberland where there seems to be an urgency to build up the commercial tax base. They appear "open for business" and seem to say: we want you to be here. Sandra felt that those deals probably should be in Falmouth. Bill added that Cumberland has made significant infrastructure investments.

Nathan noted that he has been in Falmouth for 8 years and has heard the same discussion for all this time. He recognized the sensitiveness of past events and the ill will that some have caused and the tendency to study issues for long periods. He felt the next steps were: what are we going to do, how do we do it, and what do we say. Bill Lunt commented on the CBI report and felt that several recommendations in it were not addressed. Nathan gave an example how he has tried to be more proactive, but that the various roles needed clarification.

Theme 2: Commercial Business and Professional Attraction, Creation and Retention

Jim felt that the Route 1 north corridor had many like businesses and could be developed as a brand. He saw real opportunities there. He noted a good intersection of target industries that were also mentioned in a recent MTI report. Phil wondered if this was a zero sum game as it would businesses from elsewhere. Pam brought up the former Shaw's space vacancy. It was recognized that this was part of the gateway to Falmouth when coming off I-295. Janice did not see any comments on home businesses. Jim stated that that was not considered a specific industry sector. Sandra wondered if the plan should focus on these sectors in the plan. Jim felt that the Town should be aware of them and gain knowledge about them as what special needs they may have, but that it should not ignore other sectors. He felt that

laboratories could be treated flexibly in the zoning ordinance. Phil asked if the recreation sector could be attributed to the golf courses in town. That is indeed the case. Sandra noted the potential for bike shops and hostels along the East Coast Greenway. Janice commented that recreation is already part of Maine's brand. Jim gave some examples what is occurring in other communities. Phil wondered how the new beach access in Cumberland could play into this.

Cathy suggested that rolling out the red carpet for a corporate headquarters on Route 1 north could be the first domino of such type of development. Making connections from that area to the amenities that the town already has would be another component. Anne commented on the lifecycle of residents, the importance of the school system as a reason to be here, and what they feel is missing in Falmouth. Jim commented that the national trends seem to favor urban areas and not suburban ones.

Theme 3: Retail Attraction, Creation and Retention

Cathy noted that there is limited demand for hotel space in Falmouth and that there was more communication needed on Route 1 construction. Some businesses had reported that their business has been off in a significant way. Nearby housing will help to bring increased business activity. A 24/7 shopping area and health/gym center could be useful. Jim stated that people want a mix of activity, so they do not have to drive to each one separately. Cathy suggested that a high-end shopping experience with Maine brands, such as Thomas Moser and Angela Adams, could be pursued. Sandra felt that first Route 1 businesses need to be brought back to where they were. Cathy noted that this was a long-term strategy suggestion. She felt that the Route 100 area drew upon a large area and had a good location, but that there seemed constraints on the amount of available land. Nathan commented that efforts are under way to free up more developable land on Route 1 near the Turnpike ramps.

Theme 4: Innovation Community

Jim stated that the Town should not lead any effort to stimulate innovation, but can be a part of it. Janice asked how home businesses could be helped to scale up. Jim mentioned the rise of co-working spaces to assist home business owners.

6. Discussion

Phil felt that a key aspect is to figure out how to respond to Falmouth's demographic profile. He felt the town needed to decide whether to work with it or rebalance it in some manner. Theo asked what role affordable housing played in stimulating economic growth. Dimitri asked what the time line that gave rise to businesses in Falmouth. Chris mentioned that national developers of senior housing take an interest in what is happening in this area. Sandra felt that education of the committee and the business community was important. Nathan was interested to learn what businesses Falmouth may have lost to other communities. Janice wondered if there is a synergy that could be developed with other towns. Anne felt that first Falmouth's business community needs to come together. Sandra spoke the need to have each Falmouth business feel they are a partner to help any vacant space and this should not be put on the back of the Town. Bill felt that the zoning ordinance needs to be fixed. Dimitri thought that an arts focus at the Falmouth Shopping Center might help revitalize it. Bill commented on the Tidewater permit history and how much time that took.

The committee discussed the draft vision that Camoin had prepared. Issues that came up were: high wage jobs vs. any jobs, adding something that addresses the culture/attitude in Falmouth and giving a signal on zoning code matters.

7. January 13 Public Forum

Possible formats for the forum were discussed. A total of 90 minutes has been allotted. The sense was to do little or no presentation, but try to hear as much from the audience as possible. A simple question could be put to the group and, depending on attendance, various smaller groups could be formed. The draft vision could also be tested. Theo will work with Camoin to come up with a possible program.

8. Next Meeting

The committee's next meeting is January 7, 2015 at 3:30 PM.

The committee adjourned at 4:50 PM.

Draft minutes prepared by Theo Holtwijk, December 19, 2014