

NOTES FROM LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2015
SRC-TV Plains Road, Hollis, ME

Members present: Dana Gray, River Payne, Len VanGaasbeek Jr., Ken Davis, and Jack Rogala.

Others present: Kathy Harriman, Dave McCubrey, Martha Huff. Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC) representatives Paul Schumacher and Chuck Morgan

A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order at 7:15 PM by Chair Dana Gray, at the Saco River Community Television Studio. The agenda and task list were reviewed. The updated task list was approved as presented 5-0-0.

Mr. Gray reviewed the two warrant articles that were approved by voters in June 2015, Articles 20 and 21. These authorized the town to spend up to \$20,000 from the TIF on updating the town's Comprehensive Plan, and up to \$20,000 from the TIF on amending the TIF agreement.

Paul Schumacher, (SMPDC), addressed the history of the town's Comprehensive Plan. He noted that this plan was developed and approved by the voters of the town of Hollis with the help of SMPDC, was then submitted to the state for review, and then revised by the town so it is consistent with state law. He stated that the town's zoning needs to be consistent with the town's legally adopted Comprehensive Plan, and thus with state law. At this point the Plan needs only to be updated, not completely rewritten from scratch. He noted that other towns are also going through the same process at this time. He stated that SMPDC's Lee Jay Feldman has recently completed working on the town of Fryeburg's Comprehensive Plan. He suggested that it's a good idea to review and update the Comprehensive Plan approximately every ten years – more often if there has been a lot of growth.

Mr. Schumacher suggested sitting down and looking at the plan's goals, policies, and strategies, determining what worked and what didn't, what was accomplished and what was not. What didn't happen, and why not? He recommended not spending as much time on the inventory section, which deals with data and facts, such as growth rate, which are not negotiable.

He recommended focusing on goals that are important, realistic, and achievable. He noted that one of the difficulties is determining how to finance the various projects that the town desires, such as public services, public safety issues, public facilities, economic development, road construction, etc. Some people are uncomfortable talking about finances.

When asked if it is necessary to have the Comprehensive Plan reviewed by the state, he replied that it is a good idea to have a letter from the state indicating that the Plan is consistent, in case the town ever needs to go to court. In the case of a lawsuit against the town regarding a land use issue, the judge will look for the letter from the state. Such a letter was received by Hollis following the completion of the 2005 Comprehensive Plan.

Chuck Morgan, SMPDC, discussed the town's TIF and Credit Enhancement agreement with Poland Spring. The creation of a TIF freezes Poland Spring's property at its valuation prior to the project taking place. He noted that a fairly large number of TIF's are amended, and the town of Eliot is now doing the same thing. Growth rates change, priorities changes, population changes. He suggested that the TIF is basically a general plan – do you want to spend some TIF money on economic development, some on infrastructure, some on road construction and improvement, etc. He noted that the state does not want to see a TIF amended multiple times, so he recommended that we include all changes into one amendment.

In response to a question regarding whether Poland Spring has to sign off on the amended plan, Mr. Morgan answered yes. All parties are required to agree and sign off on it. The Select Board may adopt the amended TIF. It does require a public hearing, with documentation for the public record, but it does not need to be placed on the town warrant for the residents to vote on it. He emphasized that the TIF is by and for the town. The TIF is initiated and approved by the town. Towns can even initiate a TIF without a business in place.

Mr. Morgan noted that the maximum term for a TIF is 30 years. Since the Hollis TIF was originally written for 25 years, the amendment can include a five-year extension. This would extend the town's ability to shelter the property valuation from school and county taxes for another five years.

In discussing possible uses for the town's TIF funds, Mr. Morgan suggested the possibility of creating a revolving loan fund for small businesses, providing grants and loans in various amounts, with no strings attached. This would not be restricted to Hollis businesses, but could be available for surrounding towns as well. A revolving loan fund could be administered and underwritten by a bank or other hired consultant.

Another possible use would be the investment in broadband access, such as the Three Ring Binder. He noted that Sanford is in the process of putting in its own broadband system. Broadband access would also make Hollis more attractive to business. A community building would not fit into the TIF plan – any TIF funded project must have an economic development component - how will Hollis and surrounding towns benefit? Currently, TIF funds are approved and available for economic development planning, studies, consultants.

Mr. Gray asked Mr. Schumacher and Mr. Morgan to discuss what happens to the town at the end of the TIF. How can the town minimize the impact on the potential tax rate hike? Not having a long range financial and strategic plan is lacking for the town at this time. One possible suggestion is to accelerate building and repairing roads over the next ten years, so there will be no major road projects still pending at the end of the TIF. By expending TIF funds for roads may free up tax funds to upgrade the town's facilities such as a Town Hall, community buildings, etc. that may not be financed by the TIF. A professional should be hired to be a part of this effort to look at the numbers and come up with a plan to ramp up the tax rate gradually, to minimize the impact to the town at the end of the TIF. The TIF spending already approved by voters would be sufficient to pay for such a consultant as part of this effort to update the Comprehensive Plan, to amend the TIF and to provide a financial spending strategy.

The concluding discussion focused on the need to; (1) update the Comprehensive Plan, (2) Amend the TIF and (3) develop the a long range financial strategy that dovetails with the updated Comprehensive Plan, Amended TIF and financial impacts of the TIF ending. The SMPDC representatives indicated that the funding approved by the town voters would cover this effort. Mr. Morgan emphasized that Hollis is in a unique position, with funds available to be spent now. He and Mr. Schumacher agreed that SMPDC is available to help with this

When asked if a retirement community would fit into the TIF guidelines, the answer is yes. This would have to be planned to encourage economic development that would also benefit surrounding towns, such as generating jobs and benefiting residents in other ways. Simply hiring Avesta to build housing would not be appropriate. A medical professional office building\complex would also be appropriate, as it would also benefit surrounding towns.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) from SMPDC will be forthcoming for the town to review. The MOU will be available for committee members to review prior to the next meeting, scheduled for the third Tuesday in January, the 19th, at 7:00 PM. Location to be determined.