

**Minutes
Business Advisory Committee**

April 18th, 2012

Newton Depot - 1123 North Main Avenue

The Business Advisory Committee met at 11:30 a.m. on April 18th, 2012 for a lunch meeting at the Newton Depot.

Members

Present: Jerry Hodge
Jeremy Petty
Tom Warlick
John Stiver

Members

Absent: Luke Walling
Judy Smith
Eddie Haupt
Neal Powell
Javier Chavez

Others Present: Mayor Anne Stedman
Andy Wells and Tony Jarrett – The Prism Group

Staff Present: City Manager Todd Clark, Rob Powell, Commercial Development Coordinator
Chris Bartleson, Planning Director

Item 1:

Chairman John Stiver opened the meeting and Rob Powell introduced the speakers for the real estate market presentation, Mr. Andy Wells and Mr. Tony Jarrett of The Prism Group. Mr. Jarrett and Mr. Wells described the industrial real estate market and the commercial real estate market for Newton and the surrounding area. Mr. Wells and Mr. Jarrett fielded many questions from those in attendance and made these summary points:

- Many of the vacant industrial buildings in the area have ceiling heights that are too low for today's needs and don't have up-to-date sprinkler systems.
- Tipping fees for construction waste and the cost of demolition often makes it uneconomical to tear down an unusable building to replace it with a modern building.
- Manufacturing companies will go where there are ready-to-use buildings or at least sites ready for construction.
- The quality of life here is very good and we need to do more to promote our area.
- Business leaders from prospective companies want to see a well-kept town with a progressive appearance and a financially-stable local government.
- When looking for new sites, companies look for local governments that can make the permitting and construction issues flow smoothly and are responsive to inquiries. Time is of the essence.
- Retail chain stores look for high traffic counts when searching for a new site.
- A good economic development or city web site is more important than having good printed materials when recruiting new businesses.

City Manager Todd Clark provided the Committee with handouts on a comparison of Newton water and sewer rates to other North Carolina cities. The water and sewer rates “dashboard” is available from the UNC School of Government Environmental Science Center web site. The Committee discussed several ideas generated from the discussion such as reduced tipping fees for construction debris, re-cycling of construction debris to reduce costs, publicizing the city’s favorable water rates, and ways to make the City of Newton even more business-friendly.

Item 2: Minutes and Real Estate Update

Chairman Stiver opened the business portion of the meeting. The minutes of the March meeting were approved after a motion by Mr. Hodge, seconded by Mr. Petty.

Rob Powell provided comments about recent Newton real estate news and noted that the Rack and Roll building on the Courthouse Square was for sale. City Manager Todd Clark advised the Committee that Visionaire Jets was establishing a sales office at the Hickory airport, but that they would continue to occupy their headquarters office on North Main Avenue in Newton.

Item 3: Wayfinding

Chairman Stiver briefly reviewed the Committee’s discussions on branding and wayfinding from the February meeting. Rob Powell provided some images of wayfinding signs from other communities along with photos of Newton’s welcome and city limits signs collected by Chairman Stiver. Rob also presented some preliminary cost data on wayfinding from other area cities. The Committee again discussed the need to make some near-term, visible progress on a project that would improve our general image, and the Committee still felt that wayfinding improvements would do that. Chairman Stiver suggested that the Committee might want to encourage the City to investigate getting wayfinding sign “renderings” done by a professional. Mr. Petty stated that quick action on branding was in order before any wayfinding design work was done. Rob Powell stated that, from the data from other cities, design work for wayfinding could cost from \$10,000 to \$20,000, and a complete multi-year project might cost over \$100,000. City Manager Todd Clark stated that he would determine if Council was interested in funding wayfinding during the upcoming budget discussions.

Item 4: Business Tool Kit

With time being short, **Chairman Stiver** delayed the discussion of the Business Tool Kit to a future meeting. The Committee was reminded of the special date for the May meeting – Thursday May 10th at 11:30 am. Hickory Communications Director Mandy Pitts will present the Hickory Branding Study at that meeting. Copies of the Hickory Branding Study were provided to the Committee members.

Item 5: Adjournment

With no further business, Chairman Stiver adjourned the meeting at 2:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rob Powell
Recording Secretary