

DRAFT

**THE MEETING OF THE EDA BOARD HELD ON NOVEMBER 18, 2021, AT 6:00 P.M.,
AT THE PRINCETON CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 P.M., by Genny Reynolds. Members present at City Hall were Charles Snustead, Carrie Petersen, and Thom Walker. Those present per Zoom were Victoria Hallin, Nicolas Taylor, and Stephanie Hillesheim (Comm. Dev. Manager). Staff present were Mary Lou DeWitt (Comm. Dev. Zoning Specialist).

Absent was Sharon Sandberg.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE REGULAR MEETING ON OCTOBER 21, 2021

HALLIN MOVED, SECOND BY PETERSEN, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF OCTOBER 21, 2021. UPON THE VOTE, THERE WERE 6 AYES, 0 NAYS. MOTION CARRIED.

BILLS AND COMMUNICATIONS:

Hillesheim said she has accepted a position with the City of Isanti and will be leaving at the end of the month.

REPORTS:

Hillesheim said there has been three new businesses that opened this month, Mike’s Discount Foods, Heavenly Fresh, and The Mark.

FORUM FOR IDEAS

Walker mentioned that he met with Pat Brigg’s who is the Developer for the two new apartments along First Street. He took Brigg’s to the south mall area downtown and showed him a concept that is on the Future Land Use Plan on developing the site with business on the bottom and residential on top. He would like to talk to the current owner of the mall and see what he thinks of this idea. Brigg’s thought it was an interesting idea.

Hillesheim said she would give Walker the contact information for the mall owner.

Walker said Brigg’s said a redevelopment grant would mean it would have to be a building in plight, energy problems and such. The building is approximately 40 years old.

Reynolds attended a MnDOT Area 3 meeting and there are federal funds available for Mille Lacs County to use for roads that Mille Lacs County has not taken advantage of the grants and she was thinking those funds could be used for sewer and water along 7th Avenue and also to build sidewalks along 7th Avenue.

Hillesheim said the City applied for Small City Funding for the sewer yesterday and was also planning to put some other funds towards it.

Reynolds said it is a 80/20 match with the federal funds.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

A. EDA Strategic Plan Process / Rural Taxing Narrative

Ben Winchester (University of MN Extension) and John Bennet (Educator with Northeast Minnesota) who work with Rural Trends and Happenings, attended the meeting per Zoom.

Faith Goenner (Goenner Consulting) was present at the meeting.

Winchester said he has worked in rural life and understands the rewriting of the rural narrative. There is a narrative that is written about small towns and we have to fast forward to show how the community has changed. If small towns are dying, why can't I find a house to buy.

Winchester presented a power point with data. The negative talk about rural areas extends to high school kids can't wait to leave the area, you live out of nowhere, it's all agriculture, and road and transportation needs improvement. Other items are the main street needs restructuring and schools are consolidating. We exist in a global world and not shopping the small town where things are close. Trends of restructuring are also in larger areas, but then the response back is the larger areas have more options to drive too. We define our narrative of what we had in the past. We need to get over the mental hurdles of what was in the past. Schools have to do that also. The school consolidate because of the birthrate change. We are still here and our homes are filled. The community is still viable where we can still live here, and yes stores have closed, but the towns still survive. Housing is filled with smaller amount of people. Half of the households move every five years. Who is moving out of the rural area is basically 20 year old and the 30-40 year old age groups are moving into rural areas and this is a regular trend since the 1970's. That is a positive influence. The reasoning is a slower pace of life, safety, security, and low housing cost.

The data shows; 25% have lived in the rural area before, 31% moved primarily for a job, and 91% have some extended schooling. If community is welcoming to new residents, you have 86% are happy to live in that community. True newcomers say it is important for welcoming them to reduce any anxiety they may have.

Do jobs bring people or people bring jobs. Jobs are what moves people. Resident recruitment to attract people to the region is important, show what a great community you have. Show the past graduates what a great town you have and how nice it would be to live here again. How do you support residents is through broadband to help remote workers, self-employed, business succession programs, spousal employment, and regional housing inventory. Another piece to be ready for is businesses turnover. Invite a new neighbor to help you volunteer at an event.

The other housing aspect is having places for seniors to want to move out of their home for the next phase of their life. 30% is 70 year old homeowners and 70% is baby boomers that need housing. The other item is the seniors usually do not update their homes.

The most important is residents need to talk positive about their town. Not about what was here in the past.

Reynolds mentioned she was from the west coast, Seattle, and they have a lot of condos available. They have not caught on in Minnesota and wonders if they would work well here since they are maintenance free. Does he believe they would flourish here.

Winchester is not sure. Communities should explore alternative housing with no stairs and such for the elderly. A conversation with seniors is needed to see what they want. What shape is the seniors house in. Rural people are proud to take advantage of available programs to update their house.

Bennet said he is here to support Winchester. The next steps to proceed with this he could discuss with Hillesheim or Goenner.

Taylor asked what the Extension Program would assist with.

Bennet said leadership and civic engagement. He has worked in Princeton before about 10 years ago. He has worked with communities to figure out how to be a more welcoming community. Business retention is important, but the most important piece missing is to encourage people to move here. There are a number of programs to help the community.

Hillesheim said hearing Bennet and Winchester is motivating and they give possibilities on what is available for Princeton. She thought ideas could be shared at a public engagement.

Winchester said the map with people coming in every day does not include those that commute to Princeton. They could be future residents and even tourist could become residents of Princeton.

Taylor said the learning curb to facilitate the data would be a good idea to try to figure out which direction to go.

Walker said the timing is important and when that should be, maybe January. It could be at the Civic Center.

Hillesheim said the PAC Center at the high school would be a good place, it is larger. The School Board could come. She is working with them right now so that might be a good place.

Hallin commented the Chamber should be invited to it.

Reynolds said the amount of people that came before was 50-75 and it was held at a church. The Civic Center would be a good place to have the meeting and exchange ideas.

Hallin agreed.

Taylor said what about having the meeting also where someone can zoom to it also, and Reynolds liked that idea.

Bennet said 50-100 people is a short time to plan for it. It would need more time for data to be collected. Maybe push it out later than January. Presentation would be on the shorter end so you have more community involvement. Data needs to be put together to show what you are looking at before the community meeting.

Walker suggested a white board area during the Business Expo with the Chamber.

Hillesheim said there will not be a Business Expo this year. January there is a Career Expo in the malls so maybe there. Keep the conversation positive. Positive outlook even on comments on Facebook are helpful. January 19th is the Job Fair.

Petersen suggested a survey monkey could be put up. It could be put on the City webpage with a link.

Hillesheim said to formulate questions on what kind of things you want to see.

Bennet said he would be happy to talk about putting surveys together and they are a lot of work. This is a short time frame. Holidays are here. It would be best to be push it out a few weeks.

Hillesheim said she has the survey from the Age Friendly Group that would be good to use.

Bennet said it should be an overall survey of where the public wants to go.

Taylor said direction of what is needed, business incubator, housing and such. Less open ended questions.

Bennet said with the hiring of Hillesheim's position maybe waiting until the new person is on board would be a better idea.

Reynolds said also consider the snow birds are gone for 30-60 days in regards to more public comments.

Walker asked if there is market research on housing that works and easy to build.

Hillesheim does not know. We do have two housing studies in 2020 from both regions and take that information and see what is needed. It is on our website and OnBoard on the research section.

Bennet asked on business retention he did about 15 years ago and what is the relationship with the City and businesses.

Hillesheim said a strong relationship. It would be ideal to get out with them more and meet and greet them.

Bennet said business retention is through a community engagement. It is where leaders in the community get concerns from the business owners. He could come to a future meeting.

Reynolds suggested more discussion needs to be on the community involvement.

Walker said what he heard tonight is totally different than last month. Now it is speaking of if we need housing and retail.

Hillesheim suggested take the top seven things and finding smaller things and putting them under the seven things.

Snustead asked how many daycare facilities Princeton has and their compacity.

Hillesheim is not sure, it seems good.

Taylor looked it up on the internet and seen 18 in the area so there is a variety of daycares.

Petersen said there are eight goals narrowed down to seven. If we get the community involved and have the seven groups and have community to put down in those groups of what they would like.

Reynolds suggested having the community engagement in March might be better.

Taylor said let's continue this with the new person and invite Bennet.

Walker agreed.

Goenner said the meeting last month was to dream big. Focus was to think beyond with no barriers and funding. She is part of the Chambers leadership and they talked about the overpass of Highway 169 and not stopping in Elk River anymore. Highway 169 design will really be a change.

Taylor said move in the direction of going back to the previous discussion and having a February meeting to reassess the direction of this.

Reynolds agreed. Maybe a meeting in December for discussion and then a February meeting.

Walker said really look at the questions being asked and the vision.

Hillesheim said define the question to be bigger or broader. What do they like about living in Princeton and have it more positive. Instead of what do you want Princeton to have.

Bennet said he worked with the City of Ely and they put a video together with new residents and what they have to say about the area. Perception is very important.

Reynolds said for the December meeting reach out to their friends and see what their thoughts are. Bring four or five ideas to the December meeting.

NEW BUSINESS:

Hillesheim said there was ground breaking for 21st Avenue South.

HILLESHEIM MOVED, SECOND BY WALKER, TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. UPON THE VOTE, THERE WERE 6 AYES, 0 NAYS. MOTION CARRIED. THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 7:46 P.M.

ATTEST:

Genny Reynolds, Vice President

Mary Lou DeWitt, Comm. Dev. Zoning Specialist