



## MINUTES

### FEDC Board of Directors Meeting

Tuesday – February 28, 2023

7:45a – 9:15a

Via Zoom

**Attending Board Members:** Mary Davis, Mark Malone, Candice Rinaldi, Nikki Yanok Schneider, Dan Bacon, Tawni Whitney, Sarah Tracey, Stefanie Millette, Leanne Barschdorf-Nichols, Becky Doten-Lizzotte, Jason Sulham, Becky Doten-Lizzotte.

**Not Attending.** Chip Gray, Peter Joseph, James Hendricks

**Others Attending.** Dan Piltch, Brett Richardson

#### **Consent Agenda Items**

- Minutes of January 31, 2023, were approved unanimously.
- Financial Report as of January 31, 2023, was approved unanimously.

#### **Hedgehog Mountain Management Plan / Mountain Bike Trail Update.**

Mary Davis provided an update about the Conservation Commission's proposed Management Plan for Hedgehog Mountain and the proposed mountain bike trail development spearheaded by the local Chamber and the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA). The proposed plan would prohibit mountain biking on the summit of Hedgehog. The Town Council was scheduled to approve the Management Plan later in the day at the 2/28 Council meeting. Mary shared that NEMBA would need access to the summit to fulfil their goals. The Chamber has advocated for the project to attract new visitors and support economic development for local businesses.

Councilor Dan Piltch provided context that the Commission has defined the summit as areas above 180 feet. Mountain bike trails could be constructed below 180 feet. The Council received input from the community and roughly 4 to 1 opposed mountain bike trails. Dan explained that its difficult to oppose the Commission's recommendations because they put in volunteer hours

to produce the plan and it's hard for the Council to go against a volunteer board or committee. Dan clarified that the proposed plan would allow trails below the summit.

Mary relayed that she expected NEMBA would not be interested in funding low-lying trails without access to the summit.

Stefanie Millette shared her experience watching the community conversation on social media and that when she had shared meeting minutes from previous discussions of the bike trails, that opponents to the trails seemed to be asking questions about Stef's qualifications and interests.

Mark Malone shared his experience from attending meetings much earlier in the bike trail planning process and that public support was overwhelmingly in favor of trails. Mark observed that vocal minorities are having success in Freeport in slowing down projects to the point where project proponents get exhausted and move on.

Dan highlighted the importance of proposed communication and observed that many opponents have expressed surprise about proposed projects, which drives them to suggest more public comment. Dan shared that determining how the majority of the community feels about a project can be difficult, and the Council feels a responsibility to follow the goals of the majority.

Mary offered ideas for how FEDC could help play a positive role to diffuse tension around controversial topics. Mary noted that FEDC's role is to help drive positive change, but change is hard. Mary suggested that community charettes about projects could be helpful because many members of the community will join a community brainstorm but do not feel comfortable attending a contentious public hearing.

In follow-up, Brett noted that FEDC has a draft goal to convene a Data Team and a Policy Team to compile information and inform community discussions.

### **Town Wayfinding Signage.**

Brett shared that the Town has expressed interest to remove the reference to the large Native American statue on Route 1 South and has requested FEDC approval. FEDC voted unanimously to support the removal.

### **Town Manager Update.**

Councilor Dan Piltch shared that Town Manager Peter Joseph accepted the position as Manager for the Town of York. Peter has provided six weeks' notice. Peter is interested in moving closer to family and a new challenge. Dan shared that the Town would appoint an interim and would likely engage a consulting firm to identify the next Freeport Town Manager.

Sarah Tracy shared that Peter has served the Town well.

Mark asked how FEDC could participate. Dan shared that hiring processes include public input and that FEDC was welcome to share the Board's perspective.

Sarah highlighted the need to evaluate the delegation of duties and that the Town Manager's role might be well served with an Assistant TM that could lighten the workload for the Manager.

### **Downtown Vision Update**

Mary & Dan Piltch shared the positive feedback from the Town Council on February 7<sup>th</sup> for the initial tranche of Vision projects as proposed by various project leads from throughout the community. The Council supported all the projects, and the next step is budgeting.

Dan highlighted that all the projects are lead from different community champions, rather than a top-down directive. Dan noted that the projects presented on 2/7 are affordable and should not lead to significant tax increases or controversy.

Mary recapped a call with Russ Preston and Vanessa Farr from Principle Group. Principle reviewed the initial projects and highlighted the importance of elevating the catalyst sites in the DTV for additional planning and investment.

Mary noted that the Downtown Vision and other special initiatives have maxed out workloads for many Town staff and additional support would be helpful.

Leanne identified the potential benefit of streamlining the Board structure relative to Planning and Project Review. Mark noted that having two separate Boards is a unique structure in Maine and that the separation of roles between setting policy and interpreting policy can create hiccups. Ongoing Board member education should be considered. Adopting measurable standards that minimize subjectivity during review would be good for all involved.

### **Annual Goals & Budget Planning Process Discussion.**

- 2022/2023 Mid-Year Review of Goals & Milestones. Brett provided a recap of FEDC's accomplishments over the first half of the year. Mary congratulated the Board on good forward progress and the positive impact of the energy and engagement of Board members. Mary also noted that Brett has been with FEDC for a year and that she would be reaching out for a one-year performance review.
- 2023/2024 Draft Goals. Brett noted that many of the goals for the next year are centered on executing what FEDC has kicked-off. Board discussion of the draft goals followed. Comments are incorporated in the attached updated FY2023/2034 Goals.

Mary highlighted the need to prepare to present goals and budget to the Town Council.

Dan P. noted that last year, the Council and FEDC had a special workshop specific to FEDC.

All agreed that an FEDC-specific workshop was appropriate during May 2023.

- 2023/3024 Projected Budget. Brett described the budget as a 3% increase over the previous year. The Board was supportive.

Stef inquired about metrics FEDC has identified to track goals in the past. Mary shared that FEDC used vacancy, visitation, and sales tax revenues in the past.

### **Data Team Update.**

Leanne provided a recap of the Data Teams kick-off meeting the day before. The Team discussed identifying the key metrics to track, particularly the asset classes in Town that support the tax base. Leanne noted that Maine attracted 30,000 new residents, but Freeport is not currently positioned to attract new residents. Existing residential and commercial layered with projected development will be helpful. **The data will be goal driven and specific in a way to drive policy.**

Stef shared that the data will be an important tool for putting projects in the context of desirable growth to contribute to the community conversation before issues arise or debates grow pointed.

Leanne shared that the data team will meet again in March and the goal is to develop a simple data gathering process to allow the data to be updated regularly and conveniently.

Dan and Mary discussed the benefits of FEDC sharing the latest data with the Town Council during the May FEDC workshop and wedding the data to policy recommendations.

### **Metrics.**

The Board reviewed the vacancy data.

Stef shared the potential for FEDC to develop a “look book” to sell Freeport that includes surrounding attractions and elevates the vibe of Freeport. Stef will look for an example to share.

The Board appreciated the idea. Mark shared that the look book is a common practice and would work well for Freeport. Mary offered that the look-book would be a good use of FEDC’s funds.

Mark shared that Freeport has relatively low level of inquires from retailers compared to other areas in the State. Mark continued that Freeport also has a low level of repeat visitors,

meaning visitors are content with one visit and don't come back. Freeport's strength is that visitors come from a large geographic area.

The group has established a goal to incorporate Freeport into MEREDA presentations.

**Code of Ethics / Conflict of Interest.** Brett asked Board members to sign and send over the Code of Ethics pledge.

Updated DRAFT

## 2023/2024 Freeport Economic Development Corporation Goals

FEDC's mission is to partner with the community to promote sustainable economic growth that strengthens and diversifies the economic base and enhances the quality of life and unique character of Freeport.

### 1. Implement the Freeport Downtown Vision Plan

**Execute Phase I projects as directed by Town Council to remove barriers for appropriate development.** Collaborate with Council, the Downtown Vision Task Force, and residents to advance community goals, including:

- Ordinance updates to streamline project review and permitting process;
- Sewer District collaboration to address connection fees; and
- Downtown parking requirement assessment relative to infill transit-oriented development.

**Be the economic development voice on Steering Committee.** Help drive Vision implementation.

**Be the Town's source for relevant economic data.** Leveraging work of FEDC Data Team, collect and share relevant market data and trends with partners and Town policy makers to help guide implementation priorities and resource allocation.

**Help facilitate transformative projects at DTV catalyst sites.** Champion capital improvement planning that integrates potential/anticipated private investment with Town investment to leverage resources (for example, Mallet Drive, Freeport Village Station, L.L. Bean Flagship at Bow Street, etc).

### 2. Diversify the Economy & Fill Vacancies

**Focus collaborating with commercial brokers to fill open spaces with high-quality tenants that are unique, experiential, locally or regionally owned, and fit with rebranding the Town as elevated in the Downtown Vision.**

- Generate leads and support new businesses through relevant Town approvals.
- Stay in touch with property managers to facilitate matchmaking. Maintain regular contact with commercial owners, brokers, and managers to make introductions and understand opportunities and barriers.

**Facilitate development of downtown residential projects.**

- One project breaks ground in 2023
- One more project receives approvals.
- One more project in development

**Advance a public/private partnership opportunity at a catalyst site.** Convene stakeholders, and initiate planning and fundraising for a transformative project that leverages integrated public and private investment.

**Identify financial incentives, policies, and programs to support public policy priorities.**

Appropriate building retrofits, upgrades, and conversions as prioritized in Comp Plan and Downtown Vision.

### 3. Remove Barriers to Development

**Implement recommendations from the Town Council appointed Sewer Connection and Capacity Committee.** Collaborate with the District and partners to seek funding to finance system upgrades and identify resources to support appropriate projects.

**Execute Downtown Vision policy projects to reduce barriers.** Update ordinances, streamline review processes, and identify parking strategies to enable infill development.

### 4. Advance Strategic Planning.

**Establish Board subcommittees to track priorities and brainstorm recommendations.**

- FEDC Data Team. Champion data-driven analyses to help the Town prioritize goals and initiatives, such as fiscal impact and market analyses.
- Policy Team. Support economic development-focused capital improvement planning and identify financial incentives to support appropriate growth, including Town TIF program updates.
- Route 1 South Team. Convene business and property owners to understand goals and opportunities to facilitate appropriate mixed-use development.

**Be a trusted source of relevant data for Town's Boards, Committees, and community conversations.**

### 6. Ongoing Annual Goals

**Respond to and track progress on development opportunities.**

- Respond to inquiries regarding development in Freeport.
- Act as informational and support, activism to support development.
- Track all activity, report monthly to board on metrics.
- Retain contact database for periodic communication.

**Setting Direction**

- Manage annual strategic planning in first quarter of year.
- Set annual goals, bring to board for approval in first quarter of year.
- Work with town, council, and constituencies to communicate goals, influencing as needed to achieve goals, ongoing.
- Track progress to goals quarterly and report to board.

**Board Management**

- Set calendar annually. Manage monthly agenda, visitors and meeting each month.
- Deliver board materials to board 5 working days prior to each meeting.
- Report appropriate metrics and achievement to goals quarterly.
- Inform board and president of appropriate information and involve as needed.
- Manage fiscal budget to goals and report monthly.

**Public Communication**

- Continue Improving perception of FEDC; Monthly council update; FEDC website, every other month community newsletter.
- On ongoing basis, communicate with the public, business entities and constituencies to support the ongoing mission of FEDC.
- When possible, leverage press to broadly communicate mission.
- Reach out to developers and real estate professionals quarterly to understand current state of market, Freeport challenges and opportunities.