



Regional Planning Commission & Economic Development
District

**North Country Council
Board of Directors Meeting
July 13, 2016
Mount Eustis Commons, Littleton, NH**

Board Present:

Bill Andreas, Randolph
Chris Thayer, Sugar Hill
Vicki DeLalla, Stratford (remotely)
Ben Oleson, Lancaster
Robin Frost, Gorham
Earl Sires, Conway
Bob DeAngelis, Dalton

Staff:

Barbara Robinson

Called to Order: The meeting was called to order at 9:33 am by William Andreas, Chair. The Minutes from June were then reviewed. Chris indicated two changes. *Bill entertained a motion by Robin to approve the June minutes as revised. Chris seconded, unanimously approved by all.*

Business Items:

Budget:

Ben made a motion to accept the budget for recommendation to the Board of Directors and Representatives. Vicki seconded.

Discussion: Earl asked for clarification that there is a Finance Committee that recommends the budget to the Board and then it goes to the reps for a vote. Bill affirmed and noted that the board has a treasurer which is Vicki who chairs the Finance Committee. Bill and Bob explained that the Finance Committee goes into much greater detail.

Bill then called for a vote. Approved by all.

Committee Reports:

Finance Committee

Financials were reviewed. Bob noted that Deb, Barbara and the team at NCC has done a great job and the reports that are coming to the Finance Committee now are very consistent, there is an agenda and all the detail needed—we are making really good progress in terms of the reporting.

Bill added that NCC hired Crane and Bell to advise us on policies and procedures and they have provided proposals for further involvement based on their recommendations. At this time it is a little too expensive to move forward but we certainly want to say we are very happy with the report they provided us. We are not going to retain them on a regular monthly basis at this point. Bob added that Barbara felt strongly to have another set of eyes to check the financials even before it gets to the Finance Committee so NCC engages with Rita (of Municipal Resources, Inc.) once a month to be that kind of second set of eyes to ask pointed questions— playing the role that we envision Crane and Bell could play. Barbara indicated she plans to continue the conversation with Crane and Bell going forward. Bill mentioned Crane and Bell had brought in a new associate to work with NCC. NCC was thinking we could have a longer term employee like Michelle McVetti and that did not happen. Not that there was anything wrong with the work but we thought we were going to get a more senior member of the firm.

Bill then noted the finance report compares May of last year and July through May of this year—our fiscal year ends June 30th so it is an 11-month statement. The only thing that came out of the Finance Committee meeting was some tweaking of accounts. Everything was accounted for and everything checked back.

Bill made a motion to accept the monthly financial packet. Vicki/Earl seconded. All approved.

Loan Committee

The committee reviewed the portfolio and had a discussion about NCC's continued interest in divesting the portfolio, if possible. Barbara is pursuing this.

Barbara will meet with Jon Freeman of NCIC regarding the transfer of the portfolio and also noted that after the CEDS meeting she had a conversation with Chris Wellington of the GEDC who also has a strong interest in the RLF and is interested in managing the portfolio in concert with the other EDCs in our region — if EDA approves. Bob added that Mike Scala of CEDC will also reach out to Barbara in this regard along with some other topics

Bill recalled NCC had pushback from EDA in terms of a transfer now since the portfolio was transferred previously from BEDCO to NCC 5 years ago. He noted in reality they cannot refuse, but what they can do is refuse to have it broken up into individual loans — but we do not know that will be the case at this time.

Bob commented that one fell swoop is preferable. NCIC has some experience with EDA.

EDA had issues transferring the individual loans as opposed to the package and that NCC had only had the loans for only 5 years. NCIC does not have an EDA Revolving Loan Fund but they have other projects with EDA.

Chris provided a little history and context noting it is a good thing that NCC is looking into those options that we have discussed before. He reminded the Board Members that the objective of the transfer of the RLF goes back to NCC's strategic planning—that NCC had an interest in finding the right partner to transition this revolving loan fund to so we could get back to the core focus of NCC moving forward. There are a variety of reasons for the transfer but there is a strategic reason as well.

Bill added that one of the big points of the initial transfer from BEDCO was NCC had such a great relationship with EDA on other projects so we really thought we could get it recapitalized. Unfortunately, this did not happen and in order to make a revolving loan fund profitable we need enough to make it worthwhile. In order to afford a person to actionably administer the fund around 3 million dollars in paying outstanding's is needed and that isn't going to happen. Another point is EDA has only funded four RLFs in the past several years and all four have been either an Indian tribe or as a result of Hurricane Katrina. So it is not economical.

Personnel Committee

Chris reported: the committee met the end of June and continued to look at the organizational charts that Barbara has drawn up for the front office, for operations, as well as the program areas of transportation, local and community planning, and economic development. Barbara supplied handouts in a positive direction in terms of stabilizing the staff and aligning the needs that we have as an organization. We also covered relatively briefly confirming the fact that NCC is a municipal entity and opportunities this may provide. One of the challenges in NCC's benefits package in both attracting and retaining staff here has been a retirement program that is a benefit to the employee and affordable for the organization—so, by virtue of the fact that we are a municipal entity Barbara made a connection and received a very preliminary proposal that will be flushed out more for a 457b retirement program moving forward. Improving the retirement program was also one of the goals of our outgoing executive director. Goals, but also reminders for us that it was the negative benefit that everyone was grumbling about from a staff perspective. Potentially, we have a good solid proposal that would be a huge improvement to the benefits but have neutral costs to the organization. The committee reviewed the preliminary information. It is exciting because it moves us in that direction that we want to improve financially as an organization but we want to move forward for the benefit of having a path for people who want to work here and who want to stay here as well. Barbara mentioned that

employee benefits was a topic of discussion at the RPCs annual meeting the previous week and she plans to delve into this further with some of the other RPCs.

Barbara also mentioned there is the intention for NCC to align health care benefits with the fiscal year starting in June of 2017. She reached out to Health Trust regarding this change and the only way she would not pursue this change is if the insurance pool is not desirable. Earl asked if NCC would be in the under 100 pool and Barbara confirmed this is the case. Barbara will compare the two pools. Health Trust will do the stats and get back to her. Earl inquired if the employees were eligible for the state retirement program. Barbara noted that NCC did not used to be but might be now. However, Ben remarked it would cost significantly more and there would be more reporting involved—which NCC does not have the capacity to handle. The NCC team would be looking for something more flexible and meaningful and if this is offered they might participate more. Barbara then presented a simplified chart of the organizational structure and indicated lead employees in each area.

The project tracking component of NCC's activities was also discussed. Barbara mentioned that at the staff meeting the previous day the NCC team began to explore how to make that process happen. She also noted that when a sound process can be put in place and is supported by all staff it will be much easier to manage for all parties involved and will help make the front office be more efficient and able to maintain itself with strong part-time staff.

Chris added that Barbara has said this over and over and is absolutely right that by instituting those types of systems it will become easier and more accepted. We understand that is hard for people to 'get out of their box' because they have been doing things a certain way for however long—you look at it as an organization. It will help in reporting to state and federal entities and it will make it more efficient in talent reports. There are multiple layers. The ripple effect can be huge.

Bob remarked that by streamlining the processes we are saving resources. Barbara affirmed that if we can instill that enthusiasm and goal orientation that should help us stay financially healthy. There is efficiency and there are best practices.

Kaela Grey, NCC's new planner then joined the meeting briefly and was introduced to the Board. Afterwards Bob congratulated Barbara on the quality of new staff and the identification of roles and responsibilities within the organization. Barbara provided an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the planners. Bob asked about management skills, and Barbara responded that we do not have anyone in that role at this point and those skills will need to be developed through training and experience. People management skills and training skills will be developed over time and through outside programs.

Other Committee Reports

An updated chart indicating committee membership and the chair of each committee was shared with the Board.

New Hampshire Association of RPCs (NHARPC)

Annual Meeting for the NHARPC took place on June 30th. The association is where the heads of the regional planning commissions come together plus representatives/commissioners from their commission. They meet once a month in Concord at the Municipal Association. NCC has an open position at this time. Ben is interested in attending a meeting to see if he would like to take-on this role. Barbara suggested Ben join her in attending the September meeting.

Connecticut River Joint Commissions (CRJC)

Chris noted that there was no update at this time.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

A CEDS meeting took place at NCC July 8th in the Large Conference room. Andy Whitman, Director, Sustainable Economies Program at Manomet, made a presentation on the "Triple Bottom Line" with an emphasis on engaging

students to stay in the region was well received. NCC is exploring collaboration opportunities with PSU and Manomet and is planning to write a pilot grant. Barbara noted that NCC is in the early stages of working with PSU and UNH to develop a program where business, students, and other stakeholders can look at the environment and other parameters at a lot of different levels plus foster the sustainability of businesses. Bob recommended Barbara speak with Mike Scala about this as well since the CEDC is about to engage with score in a project with business services.

Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)

No report. TAC will meet in the following week.

Dartmouth Regional Technology Center (DRTC)

A celebration for the opening of a bridge between the two DRTC buildings will be held in August. Barbara anticipates receiving \$25,000 to \$30,000 of the approximately \$100,000 that it owes NCC in FY17.

Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund

Advisory Committee is currently dormant. There will be no update until the 2017 grant writing funding cycle Nov-Dec. There is the intention for the fund to spend itself dry, but there are still significant monies available. It was suggested that this may be a good committee for Ben to consider.

Rail and Transit

No report. Ben will reach out to Rob Nadler from Albany who is currently the NCC Representative on this committee to get an update.

Informational/Questions/Other Business:

Board Membership updates

Barbara provided Board Members with outreach packets for their use in cultivating interest and attracting Board members. Prospective Board members are invited to attend the board meeting in August.

Bill asked for the members of the board to be thinking about new membership as well as officer positions since Bill and Chris will be coming off the BOD by the end of the year.

Bylaws

Vicki questioned the verbiage regarding filling vacancies on the board. The Board agreed to remove the word "temporarily" from the text. Bill entertained a motion to accept the proposed bylaws at the next commissioners meeting. Chris made the motion to accept the proposed bylaws at the next commissioners meeting. Ben Seconded. All approved.

Annual Meeting

Barbara has scheduled the Annual Meeting for late October. The intent is to have a compelling agenda in keeping with a reasonable budget where Representatives/Commissioners will meet staff and the new Executive Director. Staff profiles will be highlighted.

Financial Services

NCC will be working with Rita on an ongoing basis and Barbara will reach out to Crane and Bell to explore future opportunities.

HR Services

NCC will be moving forward with Michelle Gray of HRSynergy on a monthly contractual basis starting in August to ensure compliance with new laws and ensure the efficacy of current HR practices.

Chris noted that it is these nuggets of change and employee development that will be valuable for the Representatives presentation so they will understand what NCC has been doing and why we are doing it. We need to be compliant but we also need to be an efficient organization and as such we have made these determinations—So, if you are a town Rep that makes sense. Transparency and Efficiency—Easy to re-convey NCC's efficient approach to the selectmen who are interested in the efficiency of government and the efficient use of membership dues.

Robin noted: That with all the constant changes at NCC: HR, Health Insurance, and all of these things—you really need someone who knows the details at a high level.

**Bill called for a motion to Adjourn. Robin/Ben so moved, Vicki seconded. Approved by all.
Meeting Adjourned at 10:30 a.m.**

Respectfully Submitted

Barbara Robinson
NCC Executive Director

Approved with corrections 8/10/16