

FARMINGTON PLANNING BOARD

**153 Farmington Falls Road
February 13, 2023 – 6:00 p.m.
Minutes**

Planning Board members present: Lloyd Smith, Clayton King, Craig Jordan, Gloria McGraw, Mike Otley and Jeff Wright.

Alternate members present: None.

Members unable to attend: Judith Murphy, Michael Macneil, and Troy Luther.

Others present: Code Enforcement Officer, Steve Kaiser; Code Assistant, Kate Foster; Jon Buck of Best Western Hotels and Mellette Pepin - Office Manager of Mt. Blue and Colonial Hotels.

Mr. Smith opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Designate alternate members, if needed

No designation needed.

3. Review minutes of January 9, 2023

Mr. King made a motion to approve the minutes of January 9, 2023 as written.
Mr. Wright seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5 – Affirmative 1 – Abstain
Motion carried.

4. Rick Collins

Wilton Road / U34-6-1&2

80-bed hotel concept presentation by Jon Buck of Best Western Hotels

Jon Buck of Best Western Hotels introduced himself and stated that Best Western has 700 hotels of 18 hotel brands in 100 countries and territories such as Best Western Premiere and Best Western Plus. He said they just opened a Best Western SureStay in Lewiston and a Best Western Plus in Rumford and are working on a Best Western International in Caribou. Mr. Buck said Best Western is a 77-year-old non-franchise cooperative network of hotels that are member-owned and currently the only non-profit hotel chain, and he joined their development team about a year ago.

Mr. Buck said he got in touch with Mr. Collins a few months ago about buildings a 70-75 room Best Western Plus and they have been working on plans and researching whether there's sufficient demand to make a location here economically feasible. He added that the property is currently under contract, and their consultant has confirmed the feasibility here.

Mr. Buck played a video to show the layout and amenities provided at Best Western hotels. He said this location will have a pool, fitness facilities, on-site laundry, and complimentary breakfast, and they have loyalty and reward programs for frequent customers.

Mr. Buck closed his presentation by stating that the Best Western Plus in Rumford is very successful, and Best Western has the largest chain hotel footprint in Canada. He said the local demand is currently displaced to other hotels an hour away, and the local market could recapture this loss if it had the rooms available.

Mr. Jordan asked where it would be located.

Mellette Pepin replied that it will be out back between the old Family Dollar and the Hair Salon on property that was previously approved for apartments. She added that there aren't enough rooms locally to meet the demand from travelers and project workers.

Mr. Buck said he will be lucky to find a room tonight after the meeting and the prices up this way are double - \$200/night at the Comfort Inn here - what they are in Portland due to supply and demand. He said this is why they do dual branding – to accommodate both short and long stays.

Ms. Mellette said the Comfort Inn has to turn many people away due to lack of vacancy.

Mr. Wright stated it is an exciting project and well needed here.

Mr. King stated the Hilton Hotels are between \$85-\$110 a night and asked what the pricing would be here.

Mr. Buck replied that the owners decide the pricing based on demand - with the help of a computer algorithm. He said Spark By Hilton is their entry into the small hotel market, and said the Best Western here will be a mid-scale hotel.

Mr. Otley said it is a fantastic opportunity for Farmington.

Mr. Smith asked about the memberships.

Mr. Buck replied that because it was not a franchise, Mr. Collins would become one of the owner members. He said consumers can become members of their loyalty programs.

Mr. Smith asked when they think they'll be ready to come in for Planning Board review.

Mr. Buck stated that they aren't sure at this time, they're currently helping Mr. Collins access development resources.

Mr. Smith asked about the infrastructure already in place.

Mr. Buck replied that he is aware that sewer and water lines have already been installed at the site.

Mr. Kaiser asked if in addition to the amenities already mentioned would there be a conference space.

Mr. Buck replied they've planned a 600 SF meeting room with a capacity of 30 people, but they can make it bigger if the town feels it is needed.

Ms. Pepin asked Mr. Kaiser what he felt the best size would be for a meeting facility.

Mr. Kaiser replied that a multi-purpose room for 60-100 would be great for celebrations like anniversaries, birthdays, weddings and for workshops, conferences, etc.

Mr. Buck stated that the demand must be here for that, and suggested the Board look at the Best Western Plus in Rumford since this will be similar. He said an interesting fact is that small hotels thrived during the pandemic while big downtown hotels suffered.

Mr. Smith asked if there is a rough target date for completion.

Mr. Buck replied that they've started the application process, done research, are working on surveys and design, and are putting together financing – and they're anticipating 18-24 months start to finish. He added that it's important to Mr. Collins to have an attractive building façade.

Mr. Smith and the Board thanked Mr. Buck for his presentation.

Mr. Kaiser told the Board that since sitework was done by CEI on the hotel site, DEP has told Mr. Collins that those site permits can be transferred to the new project once they receive the hotel plans – which will shorten their review process. He also said power transformers have also already been installed for the site.

Mr. Kaiser said he's advised Mr. Collins to contact water, sewer, fire [emergency access], and highway [driveway] departments now to get their input, and that there needs to be complete stamped plans before submitting for review.

Mr. Smith asked if there should be a letter from the water company as well.

Mr. Kaiser replied that will be a part of the review process.

Mr. King asked Mr. Kaiser how many units were previously approved for that location.

Mr. Kaiser replied it was approved for 24-units.

Mr. Jordan said he recalled a total of something like 40 bedrooms among those units.

5. Other Business

Code Office updates:

- Normand Martin is working on his architectural and site plans and when he is done he'll come back to the Board.

There being no further business or discussion Mr. Smith called for a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Jordan made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. King seconded the motion.

VOTE: 6 – Affirmative

Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Kate Foster.

Planning Board

Date