

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
Wednesday, May 15, 2024 @ 6:30 pm
Cordaville Hall Senior Center | 9 Cordaville Road, Southborough, MA 01772

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Chair RA called the meeting to order at 6:44 pm.

EDC present: Rob Anderson (RA), Khoi Nguyen (KN), Michael Moorehead (MM), Michael Nordstrom (MN)

Town/Contract Staff present: EDC Coordinator Leah Emerson (LE), Consultant Claire Reynolds (CR)

Attendees present: Selectman Sam Stivers (SS), Planning Board Member and MPIC Chair Debbie DeMuria (DD), Conservation Commission and Stewardship Committee Member Kevin Farrington (KF), and resident Bonnie Phaneuf (BP)

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2. Reports

a. Chair

Term end, One Stop, Route 9 and Life Sciences | Rob Anderson (RA) reminded the EDC that his term was ending at the end of June 2024. He [emailed his concerns to the Select Board](#) about his disappointment with the Town's lack of interest in the pursuit of [One Stop grants](#) and underscored the importance of the Master Plan for economic development. Having recently attended a Worcester Business Journal (WBJ) life science event in Worcester, RA mentioned that John Weaver from MA Biomedical Initiatives emphasized the need for long-term planning and commitment to attracting businesses and talent. Despite Southborough's lack of wastewater treatment capacity, RA further emphasized the importance of housing as a component of an economic development strategy to attract companies like Moderna. RA underscored that housing is a vital component to economic development along with the need for mixed use development along Route 9.

b. Members

Data collection and MTC's 2024 Community Satisfaction Survey | Khoi Nguyen (KN) reported on his consultation with Matt Probst, Chair of the Town's Municipal Technology Committee (MTC), to analyze the data from the latest [Community Satisfaction Survey](#). KN discussed the survey structure employed by Survey Monkey, with the goal of tracking trends year-over-year. KN will assist the MTC as time permits. MN added that collected data is only useful inasmuch as it's utilized and applied.

As a data manager for a firm in Boston, KN expressed surprise at the lack of automation capabilities for business data in Southborough. KN [created a table with current sources](#) of business data / information and reviewed the limitations of each. As LE explained, the Town Clerk only collects 'doing business as' applications for issuance of [DBA certificates](#), the Town does not collect information from larger corporate and other legal business entities. That information is submitted to the Secretary of State William Galvin's [Corporations Division](#). The Corporations Division website database has -0- capabilities to search entities by Town / zip code.

Another resource is the State Dept. of Economic Research ([DER](#)) [Employer Locator](#), which is sometimes inaccurate and outdated, as well as the Town Assessor's tax roles. The latter's information is limited to name / address, with email, current phone numbers, contacts and web URL addresses **unaccounted for**. This makes compiling local business information and keeping it complete, up-to-date and accurate more time intensive and challenging. RA volunteered that the state is implementing a new 'front door' business database, and although incomplete and a work-in-progress, it could be another resource to contribute up-to-date business information.

c. EDC Coordinator

Being the first EDC meeting since Town Meeting, LE reported that the [EDC FY25 budget](#) passed without debate for EDC members who were unable to attend. LE then mentioned her outreach to Southborough regional planning agency (RPA) Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to ensure Southborough's data is included in reports, when applicable, going forward. LE felt that Southborough's needs have more in common with Central MA Regional Planning Council (CMRPC) work and culture, rather than their assigned RPA MAPC, which is heavily focused on greater Boston.

MBTA Communities | LE briefly mentioned upcoming public meetings being held by the Planning Board re: MBTA Communities and thanked Planning Board member and Master Plan Implementation Committee EDC liaison Debbie DeMuria and her husband Kevin Farrington for attending the EDC meeting.

Trottier Civics Student Proposal | LE shared that she and Selectmen Al Hamilton and Andrew Dennington met with 8th grade Trottier civics students to discuss a student project proposal they wanted to pitch to the EDC, which they [sent via email](#). During and shortly after her meeting with the students, LE provided alternatives and suggestions for the graduating students' proposal, but they were settled on a business fair in concept. Unfortunately, they were graduating and unable to assist in planning and executing the endeavor. RA thought utilizing social media to reach a wider audience through a virtual business fair might provide more benefit. The group then discussed the need for local workforce development, particularly for youth, and the need for employees in the life science industry and in municipal government. KN thought that high school students would be well suited to take on a project and follow through with it, and suggested hosting a future job fair at a school campus, inviting local industry leaders to speak with students along those lines. KN and the group expressed interest in exploring that idea further, while demurring on the student proposal for a spring 2025 business fair due to lead time and limited capacity.

One Stop grant EOI and app update | LE sought to address community concerns about stockpiled material on a vacant lot downtown and learned the material was leftover from the Town's street improvement project along School Street, suggesting some culpability for remediation, removal and disposal by the Town. LE had discussed potential grant opportunities with Town Administration for downtown improvements. She also suggested bundling Flagg School with 21 Highland for a more competitive future grant application once the newly formed 21 Highland Use Committee is further along in their plans for the property. RA reiterated that multiple [expressions of interest](#) (EOI) and grant applications can and should be submitted, and expressed frustration with the Town's lack of engagement in the process, with the EOI window since closed. RA said that the Town should have submitted an EOI and explained the reasons: 1) It lets the State know that the Town is looking to take advantage of the One Stop program 2) it is non-binding 3) the Town receives feedback and 4) it gets the application process moving. RA and CR discussed potential zoning changes to support economic development and considered it a missed opportunity to submit an EOI for a grant to review zoning along the Route 9 corridor. RA insisted that a corridor study similar to one prepared by RKG Associates in conjunction with MassDevelopment for [Rt. 138 in Canton](#) should be conducted for Route 9.

Master Plan Implementation Goals | LE suggested taking a fresh look at activities and master plan goals beyond zoning and sewer capacity that the EDC can turn their focus on in the interim. MN again wondered why zoning along Route 9 wasn't being optimized. He repeated his request for an EDC tracker to prioritize tasks based on importance. LE explained the challenges in tracking developments due to the non-linear nature of Master Plan goals and other objectives with complex interdependencies. LE emphasized that these things may change based on feedback from the Planning Board and others. LE asked MN to help create and maintain the tracker, given his request, then reiterated that the implementation goals may shift, and she may not always have time to explain the

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changes to the committee given her half-time position. Despite that, LE pledged to work on pulling together a draft tracker for the EDC's use at future meetings. RA noted LE's frustration with varying weekly but limited hours to meet the job's ongoing demands and requirements. RA advocated for a full-time person for economic development and grant writing. RA believes a single person should handle both roles for maximum efficiency. SS agreed while CR expressed doubt that this would happen anytime soon. KN asked who the EDC needed to speak to and lobby to make that happen. RA suggested KN and MN speak to Alan Belniak, who also advocated for a FT EDC coordinator position, and who could provide valuable insights based on his experience.

Remaining EDC FY24 budget funds | LE proposed using EDC budget funds for committee member training, given RA and MM's departure. Chair RA is a longtime economic development professional and MM is a licensed architect. She pointed out that newer members with different professional backgrounds need support and resources to get up to speed and suggested having a focused Zoom meeting to discuss the application of remaining FY24 EDC budget funds. RA and LE then referred to a potential EDC recruit and hoped that Sam Stivers (SS) would be hearing from them and potentially interviewing them soon.

4. Public Comment

Resident and former Selectman Bonnie Phaneuf (BP) expressed frustration with the lack of progress in addressing housing issues, despite having potential solutions and resources. LE asked if BP could introduce her to members of the housing authority to better understand their perspective and work together to that end. LE said that Al Hamilton and SHOPC had been working long and hard to bring more affordable housing to Southborough and were also frustrated with the lack of progress.

Resident Claire Reynolds (CR) asked RA whether there are 13 agencies involved in administering the [One Stop grant program](#). RA clarified that there are 13 grants, not 13 agencies, involved. RA further explained the simplified expression of interest (EOI) process for grant applications, with potential for multiple submissions, and that it was a disadvantage not to submit an EOI to gain feedback to better prepare a full grant application, due the first week of June 2024. CR stated that she had spoken to the Select Board (SB) in May 2023 when she was acting as the interim EDC Coordinator. The SB said they would apply the following year, May 2024. Their reason for delay was that they wanted to start the process earlier and get more boards and committees involved. CR said the SB gave the same reason for not submitting an EOI as they did in 2023, begin earlier and involve the Planning Board (PB). CR reiterated that this never happened, even though LE, on behalf of the EDC, [presented to the PB](#) in Dec 2023 to request working with them toward Master Plan goals related to zoning changes on Route 9.

5. Administrative

A. Approval of 11/29/23 and 12/20/23 meeting minutes

MOTION: RA moved to approve the meeting minutes from 11/29/23 and 12/20/23, seconded by MN.

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: M Moorehead-Aye, M Nordstrom-Aye, K Nguyen-Aye, R Anderson-Aye (4-0-0)

B. Scheduled next meetings – Wed. 5/22/24 at 11 am and Mon. 6/10/24 at 6:30 PM

6. Adjourn

MOTION: MM moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:51 pm, and seconded by RA.

M Moorehead-Aye, M Nordstrom-Aye, K Nguyen-Aye, R Anderson-Aye (4-0-0)

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REFERENCED ITEMS | DOCUMENTS at 3/20/24 EDC Meeting

- 1) [R. Anderson Resignation, dated 5/14/24](#)
- 2) [MA One Stop for Growth grant program](#)
- 3) [MTC 2024 Community Satisfaction Survey](#)
- 4) [K. Nguyen Business Contact email](#), dated 4/2/24
- 5) [EDC DBA List](#)
- 6) Secretary of the Commonwealth [Corporations Division website](#)
- 7) Dept. of Economic Research [Employer Locator](#)
- 8) [EDC FY25 Budget](#)
- 9) [Trottier Civics Student Business Fair Proposal email](#), dated 4/22/25
- 10) Community One Stop for Growth [Expression of Interest](#)
- 11) [Route 138 Corridor Study SAMPLE REPORT](#), 2020
- 12) [Aspirations for Route 9](#), presentation to Planning Board, Dec 2023