

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
Wednesday, January 24, 2024 @ 6:30 pm
Cordaville Hall Senior Center | 9 Cordaville Road, Southborough, MA 01772

MEETING MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Chair RA called the meeting to order at 6:32 pm.

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

Town/Contract Staff present: EDC Coordinator Leah Emerson (LE)

Attendees present: None

2. Reports

a. Chair

New EDC member introduction | Rob Anderson (RA) invited new EDC member Khoi Nguyen (KN) to introduce himself. Khoi stated that he and his family have lived in Southborough for the past 10 years with three school age children. His training and education are in economics, having obtained an MBA, and he is now the Director of Data Management at Liberty Mutual in Boston, MA. RA welcomed KN, affirming the EDC's aims in attracting new business through a variety of perspectives, opinions, and input.

RA underscored that housing is a vital component of economic development that requires focus and attention, along with mixed use development along Route 9. RA concluded with an update on the committee size, approved from 7 to 5 members, giving the EDC more flexibility in meeting quorum going forward.

b. Members

None presented. KA was unable to attend the January meeting due Covid-19 at home.

c. EDC Coordinator

Application of FY24 budget funds | Leah Emerson (LE) said she and Karen Anglim (KA) had spoken between meetings about the application of remaining FY24 budget funds. This was in follow-up to KA's pledge to obtain estimates for a potential EDC event at a local restaurant or catered at a local facility, which KA will report on at a future EDC meeting.

LE qualified the potential remaining budget funds needed to cover work on the Route 9 wastewater feasibility under the state grant award, and how that pertained to 33 School Street, the solar and septic field owned by Tony Kwan, which is of interest to the Select Board as a potential option for wastewater management downtown. Originally, the installation was intended to service future development of residentially zoned properties owned by Mr. Kwan, although some of his property recently sold, including the adjacent Reliant Medical building at 24 Newton Street. A summary of current wastewater management options was recently provided to the Select Board, prepared by town consultant Paul Pisinski.

Wastewater field trip | LE then briefed the EDC on a site visit to Westborough's wastewater treatment facility attended by Select Board members Margarite Landry, Al Hamilton, herself, consultant Claire Reynolds, Town Administrator Mark Purple and DPW Superintendent Bill Cundiff the prior Monday, 1/22/24. Although impressive, the facility was far larger than what's needed or attainable for Southborough. Additionally, due to its organizational and operational structure with agreements for servicing commercial and residential properties in Westborough and Shrewsbury, and to a lesser extent Hopkinton, dating back to the mid-to-late 1980s, tying into the facility from Southborough isn't an option due to capacity limits imposed through MA DEP permits.

EDC developments, staffing, and attrition | In preparation of EDC's annual report, LE had been reviewing prior meeting minutes dating back to Marijke Munsiff's tenure as EDC Coordinator in 2022. Discussion followed about EDC membership turnover and prior efforts by past and current members to make the EDC Coordinator role a full-time position, which is also supported by the Select Board based on feedback at their 1/16/24 meeting. However, due to town-wide budgetary constraints, LE concluded that it's unlikely her position will be afforded full-time status in the near term. In the meantime, LE felt it necessary to reinforce the EDC's presence in the community through continued relationship building. EDC recruitment will also be required in the near term given MM and Chair RA's terms expiring at the end of June 2024.

1/16/24 presentation to Select Board | LE provided a summary of the materials she presented to the Select Board, per their invitation, at their 1/16/24 meeting. She went over a few figures from the previous decade since the EDC was established, with a subsequent committee budget provided for as of 2016, with its status as a standing committee granted shortly thereafter.

Since 2016 through FY 2023, the EDC expenditures were \$241k. Grant awards over that same period totaled roughly \$324k. The meals tax implemented as of 2022 resulted in \$220k in revenue for the town through the end of 2023 (sponsored by the EDC). There was a question from MN why this wasn't taken into account relative to making the EDC Coordinator role full-time, which LE, RA, and MM attribute to considerations under the Personnel and Advisory Board's purview. MM also added that grant monies aren't guaranteed from one fiscal year to the next. LE then outlined a number of her tasks to-date for the Select Board in bringing the EDC current. The Select Board in turn are in favor of making the EDC Coordinator role a full-time position.

EDC Annual Report, DBA form, business directory, and commercial property report | LE informed the EDC that they had a few more days to finalize their annual report. She promised to send a draft the following day for the EDC's review, revision, and approval before forwarding it to Town Administration for inclusion.

Discussion then turned to revising the town DBA form to address disadvantaged business enterprises (DBE), such as veteran-owned, minority-owned, and women-owned businesses. LE wanted to know if the EDC thought it was an important category to track relative to local businesses, specifically for follow-up on how interested parties can obtain DBE certifications, qualifying them for potential grant and state contract procurement opportunities. RA thought the State Supplier Diversity Office would consider it an advantage and that it would reflect well on Southborough to both track and provide information to local businesses when filing their town DBA certificate applications.

EDC discussion then segued to a future Southborough business directory, emphasizing the need to transition to an online version, since hard copies are quickly outdated. The committee also agreed that the same should apply to any future updated permitting guide. LE said she isn't in favor of implementing tools and resources that fall to the wayside when there's staff and committee turnover in the interest of continuity. She hopes to find an online directory platform that can be automated and updated to keep it both accurate and current. One of the challenges is that larger business entities, such as LLCs, partnerships, and corporations aren't required to register with the town, only smaller DBAs. The Secretary of the Commonwealth's Corporations Divisions tracks the former, while the town tracks the latter. Only the Town Assessor keeps track of all local businesses for the purposes of personal property tax. This doesn't include e-mail or other pertinent information, only business names, titles, and physical addresses. LE added that the Town Assessor had recently conducted their annual business visits to that end, while also tracking vacancies for tax purposes. This information may be reviewed by the EDC, with the understanding that the information collected remains proprietary and confidential, per the Town Assessor.

Preliminary MBTA Communities zoning overlays | LE updated the EDC on the preliminary zoning overlays selected by the Planning Board based on their criteria, as well as the input gleaned from public mapping sessions held in November 2023. The EDC was concerned that the selected overlays didn't include the potential for mixed use development and multifamily housing, since the overlays were placed on parcels already developed and otherwise fully utilized, overlooking and excluding other underutilized parcels. LE indicated that the criteria used by the Planning Board precluded 2021 Master Plan implementation goals that should have been considered as part of the process. It was also a point of concern that the EMC property was excluded from the proposed overlays, despite the existing road and sidewalk infrastructure, which is substantial. RA was particularly concerned that Westborough could develop parcels on their side of the town line, leaving Southborough's portion an afterthought, or worse: a parking lot for future development in Westborough. RA touched on a recent Zoom meeting organized by MassEcon, an economic development nonprofit in Boston with interest in the EMC property. He pledged to discuss the MassEcon meeting before the EDC meeting concluded.

GSA Inquiry for commercial office space | LE shared that she'd received an inquiry from the federal General Services Administration re: office space. She was preparing a list of viable properties and a letter of response to follow-up by their requested deadline.

120 and 250 Turnpike status | LE mentioned that she was able to coordinate a site visit on Tuesday 1/23/24 to tour the recently opened Beehive Pros Storage facility at 250 Turnpike, attended by herself, EDC member Mike Moorehead, and Select Board members Margarite Landry and Sam Stivers, kindly hosted by Ferris Development employee Aeriela Thornton. LE then briefed the committee on the property owner's application status for the additional use for contractor vehicle storage at the same address, as well as a brief status update on their 40B proposal at 120 Turnpike Road.

MMA 2024 annual meeting | LE briefly touched on her attendance at the MA Municipal Association's annual meeting the prior weekend of 1/19 – 20/24 in Boston, provided a few highlights, and promised to share information and materials of interest with the EDC over the following week.

MassEcon Zoom meeting | A 1/18/24 meeting was requested and organized by MassEcon via Zoom with Town Planner Karina Quinn, Planning Admin Colleen Stansfield, Planning Board Chair Meme Luttrell, EDC Chair RA, EDC member MM, and EDC Coordinator LE. RA is currently a MassEcon member through his principal role working for MassDevelopment. He wanted the EDC to consider joining MassEcon as members, however MM and LE felt the \$1k annual membership wouldn't be warranted given the lack of large commercial properties currently available for MassEcon to market in Southborough. The takeaway from the meeting with MassEcon was that the EMC parcels are already spoken for, with current or soon-to-be finalized confidential purchase and sale agreements, per Select Board member Kathy Cook's contact at Dell-EMC, Paul Fitzgerald. Without other comparable properties in town that can be marketed by MassEcon, the EDC declined to vote to join as members.

One Stop grant program | The EDC meeting concluded with RA touching on the One Stop grant cycle soon to be underway, with expressions of interest (EOI) accepted as of 2/9/24 through March and applications accepted through the end of May 2024. Several ideas were put forth, with RA contending that if Town Administration wasn't interested in submitting an application, that perhaps the EDC could assist businesses in town, if such applications prove viable and appropriate. LE was hoping to get more clarification through meeting with Town Administrators Mark Purple and Vanessa Hale, and researching further where One Stop grants are a fit for current needs. LE had inquired with DPW Superintendent Bill Cundiff if his department had an interest, but Mr. Cundiff declined in favor of other grant pursuits by DPW for the time being. LE said her inquiries with other town departments, including

137 Planning, hadn't gotten much of a response. She attributes this to staff working at or beyond capacity and hopes
138 that staff focus and attention can be redirected after Town Meeting on 3/23/24.

139 **4. Public Comment**

140 None.

141 **5. Administrative**

142 A. Approve 11/29/23 and 12/20/23 meeting minutes – tabled to following meeting.

143 B. Schedule next meeting – 2/28/24 (cancelled and rescheduled to 3/20/24).

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145 **6. Adjourn**

146 **MOTION:** RA moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:48 pm, and seconded by MM.