

## **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)

## 10      **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

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

**c. EDC Coordinator**

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

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

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

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

53

54 **1/16/24 presentation to Select Board** | LE provided a summary of the materials she presented to the Select  
55 Board, per their invitation, at their 1/16/24 meeting. She went over a few figures from the previous decade since  
56 the EDC was established, with a subsequent committee budget provided for as of 2016, with its status as a  
57 standing committee granted shortly thereafter.

58

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

66

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

70

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

78

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

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

103

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

107

108 **120 and 250 Turnpike status** | LE mentioned that she was able to coordinate a site visit on Tuesday 1/23/24 to  
109 tour the recently opened Beehive Pros Storage facility at 250 Turnpike, attended by herself, EDC member Mike  
110 Moorehead, and Select Board members Margarite Landry and Sam Stivers, kindly hosted by Ferris Development  
111 employee Aeriela Thornton. LE then briefed the committee on the property owner's application status for the  
112 additional use for contractor vehicle storage at the same address, as well as a brief status update on their 40B  
113 proposal at 120 Turnpike Road.

114

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

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119 **MassEcon Zoom meeting** | A 1/18/24 meeting was requested and organized by MassEcon via Zoom with Town  
120 Planner Karina Quinn, Planning Admin Colleen Stansfield, Planning Board Chair Meme Luttrell, EDC Chair RA, EDC  
121 member MM, and EDC Coordinator LE. RA is currently a MassEcon member through his principal role working for  
122 MassDevelopment. He wanted the EDC to consider joining MassEcon as members, however MM and LE felt the  
123 \$1k annual membership wouldn't be warranted given the lack of large commercial properties currently available  
124 for MassEcon to market in Southborough. The takeaway from the meeting with MassEcon was that the EMC  
125 parcels are already spoken for, with current or soon-to-be finalized confidential purchase and sale agreements, per  
126 Select Board member Kathy Cook's contact at Dell-EMC, Paul Fitzgerald. Without other comparable properties in  
127 town that can be marketed by MassEcon, the EDC declined to vote to join as members.

128

129 **One Stop grant program** | The EDC meeting concluded with RA touching on the One Stop grant cycle soon to be  
130 underway, with expressions of interest (EOI) accepted as of 2/9/24 through March and applications accepted  
131 through the end of May 2024. Several ideas were put forth, with RA contending that if Town Administration wasn't  
132 interested in submitting an application, that perhaps the EDC could assist businesses in town, if such applications  
133 prove viable and appropriate. LE was hoping to get more clarification through meeting with Town Administrators  
134 Mark Purple and Vanessa Hale, and researching further where One Stop grants are a fit for current needs. LE had  
135 inquired with DPW Superintendent Bill Cundiff if his department had an interest, but Mr. Cundiff declined in favor  
136 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.

APPROVED