

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING – August 18, 2021, Called to order at 6:05pm

Attendees: Mike Champoux
Valerie Gingrich
Lilia Maselli
Miriam Nelson
Greg Maynard
Pat Giroux
Nancy Vallee
Carol Boisvert
Suzanne Sullivan
Jared Costantino
Robert Oliveri

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2021 SEP 30 AM 8:29
TOWN OF WILMINGTON, MA

- 1) **Pledge of Allegiance**
- 2) **Roll Call** - All present
- 3) **Welcome New Member, Jerry Constintino, to WEDC**
- 4) **Approval of Minutes of July 14, 2020 WEDC Meeting** - Approved
- 5) **ZOOM Call Visit w/ Tom (Rob's friend and brewery entrepreneur) to discuss his business site choosing process.**

Rob gave Tom an introduction. Tom opened the successful Wormtown Brewery in Worcester. Mike asked what he looks for when looking for places to open a business. Tom said he looks for median income to make sure the town can support what you're selling. He also looks for parking, and an attractive and affordable lease. Nancy asked about what Tom looks for when opening a brewery specifically. Tom says WEDC will likely be more interested in attracting craft breweries rather than larger enterprises like Wormtown. He also uses an example of Hudson, MA which grew a buzzing downtown—needs parking and diverse restaurant selection. Rob asked about funding for bringing businesses to come to town. Tom said landowners could offer a temporary reduced lease and businesses could improve the land. Lil asked what communities have done to reach out to him to get him to open a business. Tom says he hasn't gotten much but it can't hurt to reach out and say what you have. Jared: how far would you open a second location from a first successful location? Tom: It depends on the area's population. Nancy: Advice on how we can attract brew pubs? Tom: We need a marketing strategy. Approach the people who own the property and ask them what we can do to bring people to town. Possible ideas are a reduction in the lease for 2-3 years; get very heavily involved in social media. Rob: have you ever pursued or received tax incentives from a community? Tom: The incentives are predominantly from the people who own the property. Tom: All retail stores are facing a labor shortage and the second wave of Covid. Warns the committee to be aware of how these will affect our efforts.

Tom logs off the call. Rob: We should continue to solicit Tom in the future to get his input. Nancy: We should find a location to work with as he advised. Carol: The solutions he advised such as lowering the lease are possibilities. Suzanne: The town could be doing more to provide public parking, must find a way to create it. Carol: Could we use the MBTA parking when it's vacant if the other side of the street is developed? Nancy: How would we get a proposal approved? Lil: It would go to a town meeting. Rob will look more into what Hudson's Economic Development Committee has done to make them successful. Rob will look into starting a conversation with them. Mike: In order to move forward, we need to make use of our consultants, grant funding, etc. and create a brand. Suzanne: We should be mindful of obstacles that will come up.

6) Report from Planning office – V. Gingrich

Valerie: New filings for new development: New cabinet business at 442 Main Street, 841 Woburn Street business expanding parking lot, granite recollection business coming to West Street on Wilmington/Reading line, Amazon parking lot expansion near Shriners, dental office near Market Basket plaza. Daycares have also inquired about space at the former Rite Aid. 36 townhomes going in near AJ's Pizza. Nancy: EJs opened at the old Subway. Hair salon in that area is moving near old Elias. Interest has been expressed in developing indoor golf.

Nancy introduced template letter that we can send to businesses. Has reached out to a potential developer, will follow up with him.

Carol asked about Textron updates. Valerie: looking to subdivide the property into two, keep their portion and sell the other portion to national development for a warehouse. Nancy asked about Princeton properties. Valerie: It's under appeal.

7) Review MA Atty General Letter regarding Article 46 – Brew Pubs.

Mike introduced the letter, which has been sent to the town council to review and translate into accessible language, to be released soon.

8) Local Rapid Recovery Response – Project Update (Nancy, Valerie, Mike)

The program has been delayed at the state level. Had meetings with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) who sent a report to BerryDunn to incorporate into the draft proposal. Will meet with consultants again September 22. Assuming that the plan BerryDunn presents to us is something we agree with, will continue to move forward with the plan and present work and future plans to the Board of Selectmen in the future. Suzanne: What was the community response on the website? Nancy says it was a lot of beautification and marketing and branding that has come up in the past. Carol asked about funding. Valerie: We can use Covid funds if the businesses have been impacted and we have evidence of that. Possibilities of more grant money in the future.

Mike: There will be more updates on the project.

9) Town Video Project – View and decide on next steps

Nancy: We need to figure out what the next steps are, does it need to be shown to the board of selectmen?
Lil: Could show it for the board to promote it, but doesn't need approval. Nancy: We can promote the video through different local media, the town website, local businesses, etc. Suzanne: We should go to the Selectmen first out of courtesy and so people are aware of it. Next Selectmen meeting is September 13.
Carol: The video seems useful as a recruiting tool for businesses that already exist here. Other places to send the video: realtors, any existing businesses.

Next steps: present the video at the Board of Selectmen's September 13 meeting.

10) Economic Development Professional Staff proposal review - Subcommittee

Suzanne reviewed the position description that the subcommittee put together. We're trying to move away from the "director" term because they would be working under the Planning Director. Valerie: We could call the position "coordinator" or something similar. Planning department does a lot of economic development work as it is already. Emphasized that whoever's doing the economic development position should really know the permitting process so that they're able to best help prospective businesses. Should have a single message and no disconnect between departments/positions. Since the Assistant Planner position is vacant currently, could possibly shift it from an "Assistant" to a "Planner/Economic Development Coordinator" and add more economic development responsibilities to the position. Would be ideal to have a one-stop person for both planning and economic development.

Jared asked about the current salary for Assistant Planner. \$50,000-\$75,000 range. Subcommittee suggests \$75,000-\$100,000 on the position description.

Pat: A combined position could have a good fit, but disagrees that they should be together. Looking for someone acts as a separate department within the department. Example: Burlington brought in an Economic Development department that made Burlington much more desirable by selling to potential planners. We need someone above a coordinator position, at least a manager position. There should be an economic development person and a planning person without meshing the two. If our only option is to combine the two, then go for that, but should have a separate position if we already have a salary allocated for that.

Suzanne: Burlington hired the Economic Development person recently, did a lot of their development within the structure before (albeit their structure is different than ours). Burlington had a goal for where they wanted to be, then got their zoning to match it, that's how they got to where they are. They understand a connection between the aesthetics of the community and attracting business. We need to create something we can market before we can market it.

Greg: Concerned about the position is bogged down by the other responsibilities. The purpose of the role is to bring in new opportunities. The role of the planning department would be, once the opportunities are brought in, can we close the deal? What if the "sales" side is put into the economic development position, thus freeing up the planning department to focus more on the permitting, etc.

Mike: The “sales” person should be aware of zoning, but not bogged down by it. However, concerned that the “sales” pitch won’t pass the finance committee. Pat: We would benefit from presenting the change. Mike: There are a couple paths to take: continue with the presented role or go with the assistant planner job. The second is more likely to be successful. Suzanne: Need to ensure that a plan doesn’t conflict with the current structure. Zoning is a huge component of what we want to do, we want to have an economic development person who is able to tackle that kind of challenge. We want someone with experience, and experience is going to come with a high-salaried position. Valerie: concerned about conflict between the roles or going with the “sales” pitch but then having a person who can’t deliver. The delivery is in the zoning expertise. Carol: The zoning is in the subcommittee’s description for the position. We can outline what we want the person to accomplish within a timeframe to make it very tangible. Nancy: How would a combo position alleviate the zoning issue? Valerie: Because the assistant planner is doing all the property work, they would already know what to do there.

Mike: Doesn’t want to interfere with filling the vacant Assistant Planner position, but also doesn’t want to prevent the creation of a full-time Economic Development person. Pat: Both individuals would be critical for the planning department. Recommends that the committee takes a vote tonight, to present to the Board of Selectmen soon. Mike: Carol had made a great point about how this position could conceivably pay for itself and more because of the revenues brought from new businesses.

Pat motioned to continue to pursue a sole economic development position and not combine it with an assistant planner position.

Motion accepted. Seconded by Greg.

Discussion: Mike: Don’t necessarily support the combined position at this time, still working toward the larger position. The subcommittee would need to gather again and refine the role into something that is presentable to the Board of Selectmen at the September 13 meeting, to illustrate that this position would be a generator of revenue and will work in cooperation with the planning department. Pat: If we want to see this town continue to grow, we need to have someone dedicated to growth. Suzanne: We might want to present this to the Planning Board first to avoid being adversarial at all. Mike: the subcommittee can decide on that.

Vote:

Valerie - abstain

Lil - abstain

Jared - abstain

8 yes, 3 abstain

11) New Business: Member statements & discussion agenda items for next / future meeting(s)

12) Public Comments - none

13) Next Meeting Date - September 20

14) Adjourn - motioned by Rob, seconded by Jared.

Respectfully submitted by Miriam Nelson, Recording Secretary

Miriam Nelson

8/19/21