



# Economic Development Committee

Town Hall · 40 Center Street · Fairhaven, MA 02719  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

2022 JUN -2 P 12: 55

PLACE OF MEETING: Town Hall and remotely via Zoom for the Public  
DATE AND TIME: Thursday, March 17, 2022 at 6:30 PM  
MEETING TYPE: Economic Development Committee

RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
FAIRHAVEN,  
MASS.

## Quorum and Attendance:

**Present:** Kevin McLaughlin, Chair; Travis Rapoza; Jessica Fidalgo; Bernard Roderick; Cathy Melanson; Eddie Lopez; and Bob Espindola.

Paul Foley, Planning Director, was also present.

Mr. McLaughlin called the meeting to order, reviewed attendance for a quorum, and read the open meeting law for the record.

## Review and Approve Minutes of the January 20, 2022 meeting

Mr. Foley forwarded the minutes from the December 16, 2021 meeting.

Ms. Melanson made a motion to approve the minutes and was seconded by Ms. Fidalgo; vote was unanimous (5-0), with one abstention from Mr. Roderick.

## Correspondence:

There was no correspondence for this meeting.

## Local Business Spotlight: Format and Process for choosing a local business

Discussions turned to better define the concept of a Local Business Spotlight along with outlining the process for finding businesses to feature. Mr. Foley suggested a two-track process – First, the committee would put out an article in the Neighborhood News to welcome new or renovated businesses to reach out, and the second Mr. Foley should independently monitor new business projects in town to invite to the committee.

One business discussed specifically is the new pharmacy set to open downtown, though Mr. Foley also brought up the new bar and the new eco-car wash.

Mr. Espindola put forth his concerns for a defined list of criteria for selecting a business for the spotlight along with asserting that any concerns brought to the EDC must be ones relating to their businesses rather than any personal opinions about town policy. To which, Mr. McLaughlin put forth the idea of an introductory format, asking why new businesses picked Fairhaven and asking existing businesses what they think they need to prosper.

Ms. Melanson offered her support for a form to help standardize the process. In the following discussion, several pieces of criteria were offered to create the basis for the form:

- Business name
- Owner's name
- Location
- Number of employees
- Summary of what the business does
- What the EDC should know about them.

Additionally, the spotlight should be restricted to only brick and mortar small businesses within the town. Whether the businesses owners reached out or if Mr. Foley reached out on behalf of the committee, the form would help to standardize the process.

Mr. Roderick suggested sending out the questionnaire directly to local small businesses. Mr. McLaughlin instead preferred the original two-track idea that Mr. Foley put forth at the beginning of the discussion. Even the act of reaching out on a case-by-case basis and welcoming businesses to forward information about themselves to be considered would help to generate goodwill between the business owners and the EDC.

Mr. Espindola offered to work with Mr. Foley to create a form/checklist based on the criteria discussed and for Mr. Foley to be the point of contact for receiving the information. Mr. Rapoza followed up that if there were plans for an article, then the town should also reach out via social media to create posts featuring local businesses highlighted by the spotlight.

**Action:** Mr. Espindola and Mr. Foley will work together to create a checklist along with an article in the Neighborhood News and a Social Media post about the Business Spotlight.

### **Business Journal Headlines & Trends**

Continuing from the last meeting, Mr. Foley summarized several relevant business journal articles for the committee.

The articles covered are as follows:

- (BBJ 2/4) The U.S. housing market has more than doubled in value since the global financial crisis, growing \$6.7 trillion in 2021
- (BBJ 2/7) Employees have significant leverage. Many want a four-day workweek.
- (BBJ 2/17) Investors accounted for a record share of 4Q home sales. (18.4% or \$50B)
- (BBJ 2/22) Lowe's, Instacart same-day delivery starting with Boston pilot

- (BBJ 2/24) Ukrainian businessman with Boston ties vows to stay in Kiev
- (BBJ 2/26) Prudential, Copley foot traffic has suffered more than suburban malls
- (BBJ 3/1) Russian invasion of Ukraine prompts Beacon Hill leaders to review Mass. investment ties
- (BBJ 3/1) How to reduce turnover risk when calling workers back to the office
- (BBJ 3/2) Developer details 2 new lab buildings next to Harpoon in Seaport
- (BBJ 3/3) Biden says it's time to return to the office. Will companies and employees follow?
- (PBJ 3/15) SBA extends deferment for Covid-19 EIDL loans.
- (BBJ 3/16) Will gas-price surge heat up industrial warehouse market even more?
- BBJ 3/17) Why experts say the role of managers must evolve for the hybrid workplace

Several points made throughout the discussion the articles included the following trends:

- A growing proportion of real estate is done by investors rather than families looking for a home, both in real estate and short term rentals;
- Traffic in Boston has increased to pre-pandemic levels even though many people are not going to the office 5 days a week due to a combination of the return to the office alongside the reduced use of mass transit;
- Many workers do not wish to return to the office full time;
- There is a big shift to lab space and new residential buildings in place of tech or office spaces in Boston;
- Discussion of creating a SRTA shuttle that connects to the new train station planned for New Bedford;
- The trend of warehouses moving closer to towns to reduce their gas usage.

#### **Web and Social Media Responsiveness (Civic Plus, etc...)**

Mr. McLaughlin covered what he learned via watching the 45-minute CivicOptimize webinar forwarded to him by Mr. Foley. The webinar was broken down into segments that highlighted different use cases. The first segment covered the process for a town resident applying for their dog license to show how the CivicOptimize portal can streamline financial interactions with the town. The second segment focused on a scheduling function/matrix, to allow residents to be notified of what is going on in town such as committee meetings, town celebrations, etc. The specific case noted was a resident who wanted to become a recreational coach – they could submit their name and interests to be able to get information from the recreation department and generate an application which would then be forwarded to the right person in the recreation department. The final segment covered how to interact with town committees. The resident would be able to put in their email address and then be forwarded information about committee meetings such as schedules, agendas, and minutes.

Overall, the system seemed to be fairly intuitive and more user-friendly than the current website. CivicPlus already works on the current town website and while it is functional, both Mr. Espindola and Ms. Fidalgo brought up their concerns with optimizing search options and results. Mr. McLaughlin also noted that there was no mention of the financial cost of this system during the webinar.

Mr. Espindola mentioned that he had taken this information to the Select Board meetings to help formulate the goals for the town in the year ahead. Specifically, this would apply to Goals and Objective: #7 Civic Engagement, with civic engagement software as a point of focus for FY23.

Mr. Foley brought up speaking to the current IT team to see about upgrading and adapting what the town currently uses. Mr. Espindola agreed that an overview of the variety of systems used by different town departments – citing the systems already used by the Fire Department and the Department of Public Works – should happen along with consideration for implementing CivicOptimize for the town.

When asked to elaborate on the Select Board's annual goals by Mr. McLaughlin, Mr. Espindola explained that the Town Administrator would look at the resources on hand – for example, financial resources like discretionary funding – and then work with the department heads on the goals outlined by the Select Board. This work happens over the course of the year and is tied into other annual reviews to assess the progress made.

#### **Recent Assessments Update**

Mr. McLaughlin brought up the discussion from the January meeting about the increases to the assessed values of the local waterfront marinas which then raised their real estate taxes. After some discussions via email, he instead wished to bring up his concerns at this meeting.

Mr. McLaughlin looked through the meeting agendas for the Board of Assessors for mentions of marinas. However, in the corresponding meeting recording that he found, there was no mention of the marinas during the public session of the meeting. The meeting also included an executive session but detailed information of what was discussed was not made public given the closed nature.

After the re-assessments, he knows of several businesses that filed for abatement but not all of the businesses that he reached out to had responded yet.

#### **Conservation Commission proposed bylaw changes**

Mr. McLaughlin brought forth the changes to the Fairhaven Wetlands Bylaw (Chapter 192) being proposed by the Conservation Commission ahead of the next town meeting. This would add a new wetland value for resource areas that help mitigate the impact of climate change. It would also require additional notifications by applications made to the Conservation Commission to also contact the EPA if their plans would be within the confines of the resource area of the harbor. Mr. McLaughlin's concern is that a project could be denied even if met all other requirements (building codes, planning board, etc) if the Conservation Commission deemed that it could have an impact on climate change, which would put a high burden on businesses. Questions were raised about exactly how the bylaw would define "impact on climate change" beyond what is

defined by Chapter 91 and existing wetlands regulations – for example, would a project need to be carbon neutral? Additional requirements regarding the aesthetics of the project also could prove difficult to define.

Mr. McLaughlin set this agenda item after reading the Conversation Commissions meeting minutes since one of the goals of this committee is to preserve waterfront businesses. Mr. Espindola agreed that he would also like to study the issue further and that since Fairhaven is part of the Climate Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program, the town can apply for grants under that program. There is the possibility that this bylaw may have been inspired by other model bylaws established by a grant program.

Mr. Lopez brought up his concerns on how past requirements from the Conversation Commission had affected projects in town.

Following up on that point, Mr. Lopez made a motion to invite the conservation agent to explain the bylaw so the committee can stay informed. Mrs. Fidalgo seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

**Action:** Mr. Foley will reach out to the conservation agent, Whitney McClees, to invite her to the next EDC meeting. Additionally, Mr. McLaughlin plans to attend the March 21st Public Hearing on the Bylaw updates – though as a property owner, not as a representative of this committee.

Before moving on, Mr. McLaughlin pointed out that even if the bylaw change passed the Conversation Commission, it would not go into effect unless it passed the Town Meeting.

#### **Union Wharf Feasibility Study Proposal Update**

Mr. Foley presented updates from Foth on their different proposed improvements for Union Wharf. Due to McClain's Seafood previously being built on the wharf, there is a small grandfathered building area that could be utilized. Currently, there is a proposal to use that building area for a public safety building with three variations.

Some basic improvements are part of all of the plans such as rearranging the parking spaces and updating the electrical station. A \$500,000 grant was already awarded and used for upgrading sections of the sheet wall, but Foth estimates that further replacements would require an additional \$5 Million. Mr. Foley is already planning to apply to the Seaport Economic Council for further grants to help cover renovating the north wall. While the original stone harbor supports have lasted since the 1800s, the dredging that occurred in the mid-2000s necessitates the use of metal sheet walls to maintain the foundation and allow larger boats to utilize the wharf. Mr. Foley would like to maintain the old granite blocks on the north side closest to shore where the water is shallow.

Mr. Foley will continue to work with Foth to move this project forward as it needs to be completed by June, which is when funding will run out.

#### **RT. 6/240/Opportunity Zone Redevelopment Study, Town Planner Update**

In covering the grants overview, Mr. Foley first noted that he will need to request an extension on the Best Practices grant originally awarded in April 2020 which he has been leveraging to help cover the costs of some of the other projects.

The Site Readiness grant from March 2021 has so far funded five Phase 1 environmental assessments around the target area. The remainder of the money along with some ARPA funds will be used for a Phase 2 study at the site at 194 Bridge St., covered in detail later in the meeting.

The \$1 Million from the Transportation Bond Bill is going to the area of Bridge Street between Route 6 and 240. A follow-up grant will be applied for to fund a design for that area after using site-readiness grants for the former drive-in, the property next to it, and Koopman Lumber's expansion to create a drive-through hardware option.

Complete Streets funding has gone towards the bike path on Alden Road with plans to finish that project this year.

The DLTA/EDC funds are being put forward towards a marketing study on the industrial options in the area incorporating the work of the economic study by Frank Mahady.

For the 1-Stop Growth for Community Planning Grant and the EEA Planning Grant, Mr. Foley is putting out two separate RFPs in order to find the consultants to help develop a 4OR with good graphic design standards. He would like a thorough planning process that includes graphic designs for the look of the 4OR area. The plan is to get the RFPs out by Monday the 21st and for the grants to be spent by July.

A number of properties included in the 4OR already had Site Readiness Phase 1 ESA's conducted. The properties noted include – 172 Bridge St, 180 Bridge St, 194 Bridge St, 114 Huttleston Avenue, 120 Alden Road, 14 Plaza Way, and 4 David Down Boulevard.

Special attention was paid to 194 Bridge St. property which was originally a part of the landfill. The Phase 1 reviewed earlier studies that showed over 30 different test sites that tried to define the different waste areas and investigate the types of waste. A Phase 2 study will follow up to make sure that there isn't any dangerous waste in the soil and there are hopes to remediate and develop the area into something new such as a public safety complex. The plan now is to work with the Department of Environmental Protection to do a deeper review. If the waste areas could be reclaimed, they could serve as the new location for the recycling center which needs to be relocated due to the expansion of the water treatment plant.

Beyond the Plaza Target Area 4OR and Route 6 4OR, there are other redevelopment areas sited for improvement such as Benoit Square, Downtown Mixed-Use and Sconticut Neck Road. The concept would be to allow for denser residential or mixed-use properties. A follow-up conversation covered marking the exact boundaries of Fairhaven's Designated Port Areas as defined by the state on the maps used for these projects.

One extra grant discussed was \$686,236 from the Community Development Block Grant to cover the Hedge Street Phase 3 plan for the construction of streetscape improvement on Hedge between Main and towards Adams Street. This will cover drainage, sidewalks, and roadway improvements. Mr. McLaughlin and Mr. Foley also discussed streamlining the signs along the street.

**Any other business reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the posting of this meeting**

Moving into the end of the meeting, Mr. Espindola brought up his meeting with SRTA (Southeastern Regional Transit Authority) in regards to Route 11, which is the bus route that runs through Fairhaven. The nighttime Economic Development Committee March 17, 2022

service has previously been funded via a grant, but that money has run out. According to SRTA's revenue model, there is an \$860,000 cost of the service with the town assessing that residents pay \$36,000 in fares annually. The Town would need to contribute \$60,000 to keep the nighttime service running with New Bedford also contributing. Route 11's nighttime service has been fairly successful compared to several other lines. SRTA also noted that Fairhaven has been assessed lower than it should be in recent years. As such, Mr. Espindola requested information about what other communities pay relative to their assessment and their total cost in order to make better comparisons. As part and parcel to the discussion of Route 11, Mr. Foley would like to see the bus line or another shuttle connect the Route 6/240 area to the up-coming train station in New Bedford.

Mr. Roderick then turned the discussion towards the development of the wind farm on the harbor, its potential multi-million dollar economic impact in New Bedford, and the possibility for Fairhaven to also benefit.

Mr. McLaughlin explained that most of the economic impact will be in the creation of parts for the wind farm which would require a 150 – 250 acre waterfront construction site, which Fairhaven cannot sustain. There is some amount of impact from the laydown facility at the south terminal with the research boats paying the dockage fees and service businesses benefiting from their purchases of food, fuel, and supplies. It is possible that service boats to the windmills could also dock at the harbor, but those would be large 300-400 foot ships. Thus, the New Bedford side of the harbor where there is room for larger ships would most likely benefit. While Fairhaven could make space for such ships, it would require displacing the fishing boats that currently use the wharf. There is also the fact that a good deal of the loading and construction of the windmills will happen in Canada which possesses better infrastructure to support such projects.

Mr. Foley noted that while there was discussion about Fairhaven being a backup option for bringing power on shore, he was concerned about how the power would be routed through the bay and would want to see a concept plan first. Mr. McLaughlin also brought up his concerns that the big utility companies that will be working on and around these windmills will poach skilled trades workers such as machinists and electricians from the local businesses, something that has occurred with the solar industry. Building off that point, Mr. Foley noted that SRTA said something similar and are seeing their bus drivers receiving offers from UPS and Amazon. There is already a shortage of workers for the waterfront which is a critical situation as Fairhaven is one of the last commercial fishing ports and fishing is one of the biggest industries on the South Coast. There are also concerns that there could be pay-offs offered to fishermen in order to build in historic fishing areas.

Following that discussion, Mr. McLaughlin then moved on to discuss the Rogers School Reuse project. Eight weeks ago, an RFP was issued with the deadline for responses being Friday, March 11th. Four proposals that were received can be reviewed on the town website under the Reuse Committee's page. Mr. Foley and Ms. Graves will meet on the week of March 21st to assess the proposals against a multi-point rubric. Afterward, a spreadsheet would be presented to the voting members of the Reuse Committee to allow them to be graded via a matrix. Afterward, a quantitative analysis will be used to review the grades and select a proposal to forward to the Select Board. The Select Board has plans for a preliminary discussion of the project at one of their upcoming meetings with a public hearing to be scheduled thereafter. One of the four proposals is fairly incomplete so it might not be considered in the end, and regardless the other three proposals need to be evaluated first.

As the final piece of business, Mr. Espindola covered the hiring of the new Town Administrator, Angelina Lopes Ellison, who is slated to start work on April 4th. That happens to be Election Day for the Town which means that her first meeting with the Select Board will be with the new five-member Select Board. She will be coming to Fairhaven from her current job in North Adams. Covering the screening process, the committee originally had 20 candidates from which they had selected three candidates. However, two of the final candidates withdrew their applications, only leaving Ms. Ellison. After a special vote to rescind the original requirement of bringing forth at least two candidates to interview, Ms. Ellison was interviewed and found to be a good fit for the town.

**Next Meeting:**

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 21, 2022.

Ms. Melanson made a motion to adjourn at 8:40 PM and was seconded by Ms. Fidalgo. Motion passed unanimously (6-0).

Respectfully submitted,  
Stephanie A. Fidalgo  
Recording Secretary,  
Economic Development Committee