

Economic Development Committee

Town Hall · 40 Center Street · Fairhaven, MA 02719



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

PLACE OF MEETING: Town Hall for Members & remotely via Zoom for the Public

DATE AND TIME: Thursday, September 28, 2023, at 6:30 PM

MEETING TYPE: Economic Development Committee

1. Chair's Welcome and Media Notification:

Ms. Melanson called the meeting to order at 6:31 PM. The media notification is now listed on the agenda for the EDC so it did not need to be read aloud.

2. Quorum and Attendance:

Present: Cathy Melanson, Chair; Karyn Ferreira, Patrick Carr, John Hinds.

Not present for this meeting: Stasia Powers and Suzanne Dwyer.

Also present for this meeting: Director of Planning & Economic Development, Paul DiGiuseppe, and Recording Secretary, Stephanie Fidalgo

3. Review and Approve minutes of the August 24, 2023 meeting:

Ms. Ferreira made a motion to approve the minutes of August 24, 2023, and was seconded by Mr. Hinds. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Correspondence:

There was no correspondence for this meeting.

Mr. Carr arrived at the meeting at 6:33 PM.

5. EDC Committee Assignments: Broadband Study Committee:

Ms. Melanson relayed a request from the Broadband Study Committee to appoint a representative from the EDC. The Broadband Study Committee is working on expanding the municipal broadband network, with the current focus being on adding the public housing residences managed by the Fairhaven Housing Authority. The eventual goal of the committee would be the creation of a municipal light plan that offered municipal broadband to residents.

Mr. DiGiuseppe recently attended a meeting on regional broadband coverage, noting that increasing speed and coverage was a wide-reaching goal for the region. Municipal broadband would also create another option for internet access as there are only a few choices available locally such as Comcast, Verizon, or T-Mobile.

Ms. Melanson welcomed the committee members to let her know if they were interested in serving on the Broadband Study Committee and if so, she would pass on their information to that committee's chair.

6. Business Social:

Mr. Hinds had suggested that the EDC arrange a Business Social, inviting local business owners to come to Town Hall and socialize. Ms. Melanson put forth November 16, 2023, as the date, with the business social being scheduled in place of the EDC meeting for that month. To help cover the costs of the event, the committee would request to use some of the remaining FY23 funds. Ms. Melanson also outlined the changes that the Town Clerk was making to the business license renewal process, as part of the planning for this social involved reviewing the list of active businesses in Town.

As for the structure of the event, Ms. Melanson pitched it as a casual social meet & greet with the committee members mingling with local business owners in the Town Hall auditorium. She had invited Fairhaven TV to record footage of the event to create a video to share on the website and social media and planned to reach out to the Fairhaven Neighborhood News with a press release ahead of the meeting.

There was discussion on the exact nature of the event, with Mr. Hinds suggesting some way to gather feedback from the business owners, such as a survey. Ms. Melanson wished for this first meeting to focus more on building connections between the committee and local business owners, with Mr. DiGiuseppe mentioning having run similar casual gatherings. Ms. Fidalgo offered the idea of creating a survey via Google Forms which could then be available either in printed form or as a digital form that allowed for an easy way to review the responses. Ms. Ferreira chimed in to suggest encouraging attendees to bring in business cards, flyers, or coupons to share.

Mr. Hinds made a motion to move ahead with the Business Social as described and was seconded by Ms. Ferreira. The motion passed unanimously.

7. Use of the EDC FY23 Funds:

The EDC still had some FY23 funds left over, and Ms. Melanson wished to appropriate \$1,000 of those funds to cover the costs of the Business Social. The rest of the funds would then go towards paying the 40R consultants.

Mr. Hinds made a motion to set aside \$1,000 of the FY23 funds for the Business Social and was seconded by Ms. Ferreira. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Hinds made a motion for the residual funds to go towards the 40R with any funds left over to revert to the Economic Development Committee and was seconded by Mr. Carr.

Before the vote could be taken, Mr. Carr asked for an estimate of the remaining funds. Mr. DiGiuseppe gave a rough estimate of \$6,000 to \$7,000 and promised to forward the exact figures to the committee.

The motion passed unanimously.

8. Update from the Planner:

Mr. DiGiuseppe outlined some of the recent meetings he had with local maritime organizations and businesses, such as the Fairhaven Shipyard, the Steamship Authority, Marine Safety Consultants, and Scandia Propeller Service. He also had plans to meet with the New Bedford Ocean Cluster and the Port Authority in the future. His goal was to work with the different organizations and businesses to find ways to sustain the port and keep it thriving as a major economic sector in Town.

Continuing, Mr. DiGiuseppe also covered the work he was doing with the Nasketucket Vineyard on New Boston Road to help them achieve their plans for opening by next year. He outlined the permits they were still seeking and noted the grants he suggested to them, both those for more general business development as well as those focused on agriculture.

At Mr. Hinds' suggestion, Mr. DiGiuseppe reached out to Dartmouth on their current economic development strategies. Mr. DiGiuseppe and Ms. Fidalgo also covered the updates they had made to the Organizations Helping Business Grow in Southeast Massachusetts page on the EDC's website, adding a dozen new organizations to the list to help connect local businesses with more resources.

One organization in particular Mr. DiGiuseppe wanted to highlight was EforAll as he had recently met with executive director, Samia Walker. EforAll offers both free business accelerator programs and pitch contests to help new entrepreneurs. The group was invited to the upcoming business social and Mr. DiGiuseppe encouraged EforAll to run events in Fairhaven.

9. Any other business reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the posting of this meeting:

Mr. Hinds wished to have his suggestion of reaching out to invite new businesses to Fairhaven be a discussion topic at a future meeting.

Ms. Melanson noted that she wished to invite the Select Board to the business social and, if it went well, investigate running other events quarterly, such as job and business fairs.

Ms. Ferreira inquired about recently opened businesses, and Ms. Melanson mentioned Olivia's was planning to open and that Mey Breakfast had recently opened. When the question of grand opening and ribbon cuttings came up, Ms. Melanson suggested that they reach out to the Planning Department or

that the department could also make contact. There was also a quick discussion of the letters that were handed out when business licenses were approved.

Mr. Carr asked Ms. Ferreira to compare her experiences with opening the Tropical Smoothie Café originally with the current process of relocating the restaurant within the Town. She noted a current issue with trying to contact the appropriate departments and get her calls returned, with Mr. DiGiuseppe suggesting scheduling a specific meeting if possible.

Mr. Carr then requested further information on the Nasketucket Vineyard, with Mr. DiGiuseppe outlining the research he had conducted on the state laws regarding locally-based agricultural businesses. There was the possibility that the vineyard would be exempted from certain bylaws and the need to obtain a special permit from the Planning Board, but he would need to verify that information. With that in mind, he briefly touched on the plan to revamp the Town's bylaws, specifically on the criteria that triggered a special permit. Mr. Carr also voiced his support for the Nasketucket Vineyard.

For the next question, Mr. Carr asked if anything was being done regarding housing as he considered that to be an important aspect of economic development. Mr. DiGiuseppe went over how he was restarting the 40R project and working with the consultants on creating the standards. He specifically covered the 40R building height allowance and residential density as one avenue to pursue.

The committee also covered possible changes to the bylaws regarding accessory dwelling units. Ms. Melanson was very supportive of the idea. Mr. DiGiuseppe also covered the rising housing costs within Bristol County and the possibility of more multi-unit housing. In discussing success stories with increasing affordable housing, Mr. Carr cited Morrisville, VT and his hopes to have increasing housing be a role of the Town's economic development. As the discussion turned back to accessory dwelling units, Ms. Fidalgo suggested looking at Salem, MA as a community that had fully embraced the concept. She also covered the rapid increase in housing prices over the last seven years, with current prices at around \$400,000 being more than double what a family making 80% of the median local income could afford. Mr. Hinds suggested working with local contractors to either build new units or renovate existing buildings.

Ms. Melanson reminded the committee that the Planning Board would be voting on hiring a bylaw consultant at their October 10, 2023, meeting. On recent Planning Board decisions, Mr. Carr and Ms. Melanson discussed the Starbucks approval and how work had been done to streamline the process by having a department head meeting ahead of the first public hearing. They hoped that improvements in the business center of Town would invite more businesses into Fairhaven.

10. Next Meeting:

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for October 19, 2023.

The motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Carr and seconded by Ms. Ferreria.

The meeting was called to a close by Ms. Melanson at 7:41 PM.

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

Approved – November 30, 2023