

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, August 24, 2023, at 6:30 PM

MEETING TYPE: Economic Development Committee

Quorum and Attendance:

Present: Cathy Melanson, Chair; Karyn Ferreira, Stasia Powers, John Hinds.

Not present for this meeting: Suzanne Dwyer, Patrick Carr

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

Ms. Melanson called the meeting to order at 6:31 PM and read the open meeting law and explained the closed captioning functionality for the record.

Welcome to New Planner, Paul DiGiuseppe:

Ms. Melanson welcomed Mr. DiGiuseppe, the new Director of Planning and Economic Development for Fairhaven. Mr. DiGiuseppe looked forward to working alongside the Committee to encourage Fairhaven's growth and economic development.

Review and Approve minutes of the June 22, 2023 and July 20, 2023 meetings:

Ms. Melanson made a motion to approve the minutes of June 22, 2023, and July 20, 2023, and was seconded by Ms. Ferreira. The motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence:

As mentioned in the previous meetings, Mr. Hinds had written two letters to the rest of the committee covering his thoughts on different directions and actions that the EDC could take. He considered them to be preliminary concepts to be further discussed and explored.

His first concept revolved around reviewing the process for establishing a new business in Fairhaven to find ways to streamline the process. When notes about a business checklist, Ms. Fidalgo and Ms.

Melanson noted that the Town Clerk had created a preliminary checklist for filing a business certificate with the town.

Mr. Hinds then suggested reaching out to businesses that had considered but ultimately declined to open or expand into Fairhaven as well as opening lines of communication with both other municipalities and as well as internally with other department heads. He also brought back his concept of working with property owners in town to find ways to beautify their properties. He also had the suggestion to seek out specific businesses, realtors, and developers, and invite them to Fairhaven with an easily accessible list of available commercial properties.

Ms. Melanson noted that the next part of the discussion would combine the next three agenda items.

Possible Business Outreach Plans:

Ms. Melanson had previously spoken with the owners of the larger plazas in Fairhaven and was aware of their vacancies. Mr. Hinds had mentioned soliciting retailers such as Whole Foods and Aldi's, but he noted that the grocery chains did not choose Fairhaven due to demographic preferences.

After an aside as to what business vacancy listings could consist of, Ms. Powers suggested seeking guidance from Mr. DiGiuseppe given his work and experience in Middleborough, and that the committee should act in support of the Town's staff and the projects they wished to pursue.

After Mr. Hinds requested a review of the different suggestions he had made, a discussion followed regarding the relationship between the Committee and the new Planner with Ms. Melanson assuring that everyone was broadly on the same page. Mr. DiGiuseppe agreed with that point and with the suggestions that Mr. Hinds had brought forward, though he suggested framing it more about finding items to prioritize. For example, on the vacancies, he had been researching undeveloped land that was already zoned for businesses.

One extra item he suggested was to better support existing businesses by connecting them to available support groups and grant opportunities. Mr. DiGiuseppe also outlined taking a comprehensive look at the bylaws to find items that were hindering both new developments and redevelopments.

Returning to the suggested list of ideas, the Committee aimed to break it down by long- or short-term projects. On discussing supporting businesses in the process of opening, Ms. Fidalgo prompted Mr. DiGiuseppe for information about the Middleborough Business Center and the services it provides. He outlined that the Business Center offered free consultations with various mentors on subjects like business plans and accounting.

On connecting businesses and property owners, the Committee and the Director alike agreed on the challenges of helping to make those connections, even with offering additional resources such as vacancy listings. Ms. Ferreria brought up the additional concerns of franchisee owners, who often have

additional conditions that corporations want them to fulfill before opening or relocating or certain restrictions on where they can open or relocate to. She suggested focusing on smaller, independent businesses, as franchises and corporations often had their own development plans. Additionally, supporting smaller businesses and creating a welcoming environment would eventually attract larger businesses to the Town. Ms. Melanson concurred and emphasized the importance of assisting newer businesses and developers to make their way through the process as painlessly as possible. She also praised the recent redevelopments around the intersection of Alden Road and Huttleston Avenue as the type of growth she would like to see.

Going back to the vacancy listings, the committee agreed that they would need to make connections with commercial realtors in particular. As for speaking with other Towns, Mr. DiGiuseppe noted his recent outreach to the New Bedford Economic Development Council and wished to iterate on some of their ideas. After some discussion, he did agree that Mr. Hinds could assist in the process and reach out to other municipalities such as Dartmouth to gather further information. Mr. DiGiuseppe also covered how the staffing situation had been slightly different in Middleborough, where he was assisted by a grant writer and an outreach specialist who specialized in economic development.

To formalize the earlier decision, Ms. Melanson made a motion for Mr. Hinds to contact other neighboring municipalities and seek information on their plans to encourage business, keep businesses, and any other business-related initiatives, and was seconded by Mr. Hinds. The motion passed unanimously.

Regarding reaching out to businesses that had decided not to open or expand into Fairhaven, the Committee agreed that it would be difficult to track that information and that there would be many factors outside of the Town's control that could affect such a decision. Mr. Hinds also suggested meeting with a wider range of stakeholders in local businesses to solicit their thoughts on doing business in Fairhaven. Mr. DiGiuseppe built on the conversation by suggesting reaching out to some of the local employers and finding out their needs, citing the relationship between Middleborough and the Christmas Tree Shop as an example of a mutually beneficial relationship. When Mr. Hinds requested a vote on business outreach, Ms. Melanson instead outlined that such actions were part and parcel to the normal business of the Planning and Economic Development Department and didn't require a special vote.

In terms of contacting specific businesses the Town would like to see in Fairhaven, the Committee concluded that a better investment would be to focus on establishing Fairhaven as becoming more business-friendly overall. Otherwise, there were too many factors that the Town could not control for that affect a business' choice to expand into Fairhaven. Shifting slightly, Ms. Melanson noted her plans to work with FairhavenTV to spotlight newer businesses in Town and do what she can to promote Fairhaven as welcoming to businesses and residents alike. Mr. DiGiuseppe encouraged the Committee to consider themselves as ambassadors for the Town.

Updates to the EDC Webpage:

Ms. Fidalgo pointed out some of her work with updating the EDC webpage for better visibility of upcoming meetings and her desire to collaborate with whoever is maintaining the Town's Business sections. She would also like to find a way to archive certain older items. At Ms. Ferreria's question about the Business Spotlight, Ms. Fidalgo and Ms. Melanson outlined the previous businesses spotlighted and Ms. Fidalgo suggested adding any businesses that Ms. Melanson featured on Fairhaven TV to the page along with links to the recorded meetings of previous spotlights.

Ms. Ferreria asked if there was any way to replicate some of the work of the New Bedford Chamber of Commerce, and Ms. Melanson agreed with the idea of supporting businesses with their grand opening via ribbon cuttings and social media. Mr. Hinds also suggested having social events for business owners, though Ms. Melanson stated that she would prefer to create something different from the previous Fairhaven Business Association. Ms. Ferreria outlined reaching out to the next businesses to open and plan for a grand opening celebration and the Committee noted to Mr. DiGiuseppe's question about working with the local paper that the Fairhaven Neighborhood News was well known for promoting local business openings. Mr. DiGiuseppe also noted his plans to talk to the One South Coast Chamber of Commerce.

Business Vacancy Listings:

As this had been discussed in the main meeting discussion, it was not taken as a specific item.

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

There was no other business for this meeting.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for September 21, 2023. It was noted that this was listed incorrectly on the meeting agenda as September 20th, but the 21st was the correct date.

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

The meeting was called to a close by Ms. Melanson at 7:47 PM.

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