

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, January 18, 2024, at 6:30 PM

MEETING TYPE: Economic Development Committee

Chair's Welcome and Media Notification:

Mr. Carr called the meeting to order at 6:33 PM as Ms. Melanson was still on her way to Town Hall. As there was a new member, Nils Isaksen, joining the Committee that evening, Mr. Carr asked that all of the Committee Members introduce themselves.

Quorum and Attendance:

Present at the start of the meeting: Patrick Carr, Karyn Ferreira, John Hinds, and Nils Isaksen. Stasia Powers via Zoom.

Arrived during the meeting: Cathy Melanson, Chair.

Not present for this meeting: Suzanne Dwyer.

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

There were questions regarding the approval of the minutes of the November 30, 2023 meeting, but since a quorum of voting members was not present, the Committee decided to table the matter until Ms. Melanson arrived.

Correspondence:

There was no correspondence for this meeting.

2023 EDC Annual Report:

Ms. Fidalgo gave a brief overview of the EDC 2023 Annual Report, which outlined the actions taken by the EDC during the past calendar year with a focus on the after-hours business event, the turn-over of members and staff, and the work the Planning Department had made towards the adoption of a 40R Overlay district.

As Mr. Isaksen was a new member, he asked for further information on the 40R. Mr. DiGiuseppe covered his work with the 40R Working Group and consultants since he took over as the Director. Currently, the overlay district was focused on the Route 6 area and associated the commercial areas. Mr. Carr and Mr. DiGiuseppe elaborated further on the process, covering the approvals required by the state, the monetary incentives, and the necessary collaborations required with investors, developers,

and property owners. Ms. Powers noted that the process needed to be viewed as a long-term development project, requiring several years to be able to see major results and changes.

Ms. Melanson arrived at the meeting at 6:45 PM.

Continuing the conversation, Mr. Carr discussed a proposed housing development with the Committee and Mr. DiGiuseppe explained how the base zoning and the 40R overlay would both be considered for new developments.

At this point, Ms. Fidalgo invited the Committee to vote on the previously tabled minutes.

Review and Approve minutes of the November 30, 2023 meeting:

Mr. Carr made a motion to accept the minutes of November 30, 2023 and was seconded by Ms. Ferreira. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Isaksen abstaining as he had not been a member of the Committee at the time. (4-0)

Ms. Melanson then continued with the agenda.

Plans for the 2024 First Quarter Business Event:

Ms. Melanson wished to select the date for the next Business Event, and if possible, dates for further events. Ms. Ferreira suggested only having three events for 2024 for budgeting and planning purposes. Ms. Melanson presented the idea of the next event being a question-and-answer session, followed by mingling and networking.

With the Committee having decided on three events, Ms. Melanson suggested having the event in either March or April. After generally deciding on April, Ms. Powers noted that the originally suggested April 18, 2024 date would conflict with school vacations. After reviewing their options, the Committee settled on April 11, 2024 as the date for the next After-Hours Business Event.

As for the format, Ms. Melanson suggested finalizing the format and speakers at the February meeting. Both she and Mr. Hinds favored having a Question-and-Answer session. Mr. DiGiuseppe suggested inviting Mr. Joseph P. Lopes, executive director of MassHire as a guest speaker for the next event and Ms. Melanson made a note of speaking with MassHire on some feedback she had for the organization. Mr. Hinds also suggested advertising the event in the Neighborhood News and doing further advertising and social media outreach.

General Discussion on 2024 Plans:

Ms. Melanson wished to see the Business Events continue through the year. She also covered the work being done by Mr. Hinds, the Planning Department, and the Town Clerk to update the database of registered businesses and their associated email addresses. The plan would be to keep the database regularly updated and use it for communications with local businesses, including business re-registration.

She would like to see further work done to complete the 40R, with Mr. Carr giving further details on the previously mentioned proposed housing development where the investor would like to build it within a 40R overlay district. Ms. Melanson also noted the reopening of 508 Sneakers on January 20, 2024.

Mr. Hinds then passed out a set of notes on Trader Joe's and the company's requests for suggestions for new municipalities to develop in. He had spoken with representatives of the company on their site selection process and noted the closest locations in Providence and Warwick. He also went over the

metrics of Fairhaven as compared to neighboring municipalities, outlined the research requirements, and the creation of a survey to show community interest. At the next meeting, he would like to have plans for the survey and the advertising prepared. The Committee also discussed the local grocery stores.

Ms. Powers left the Zoom meeting at 7:16 PM

Ms. Ferreira made a motion for Mr. Hinds to continue his research into Trader Joe's and was seconded by Mr. Carr. The motion passed unanimously. (5-0)

Ms. Fidalgo suggested speaking with Mr. Derek Frates about running a Town-wide survey given his work with the Broadband Study Committee. The Committee then discussed both possible locations for a new Trader Joe's and the possibility for new developments in existing empty storefronts. The Committee and Mr. DiGiuseppe discussed investigating Whole Foods and Aldi as other possible grocery stores to court, comparing the pros and cons of all three options and the current landscape and demographics of grocery store access in the wider Bristol County area. They did consider welcoming Acushnet and Mattapoisett to also participate in the survey and would prefer to collect signatures to show support.

Mr. Hinds requested that his 12-item list of ideas being an item of discussion at the next meeting.

Ms. Melanson brought up the future opening of the vineyard on New Boston Road and their plans for catering and food truck events.

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

Mr. DiGiuseppe informed the board that he had been speaking with a consultant who had been working with the Town of Bridgewater about bringing similar services – such as small business workshops, consulting, and marketing – to Fairhaven. The consultant would first do a needs assessment before starting any training sessions. He was working with the consultant to receive an estimate of services and then seeking a grant focused on economic development to fund the outreach. The Committee discussed the legal issues and how they would ensure that no conflicts of interests would occur. When the question of funding via Town Meeting came up, Ms. Melanson favored seeking bylaw legal consultants as a use for Town Meeting funds.

Mr. Carr again emphasized the importance of pursuing adoption of the 40R overlay district and encouraging housing growth. He cited how even small increases in housing could encourage economic growth and development and that the Town would become more comfortable with the concept after the first project was completed.

Select Board member Keith Sylvia had joined the audience of the meeting partway through and Mr. Hinds asked his opinion on ways to encourage affordable housing. Mr. Carr noted the importance of having design standards as part of the 40R process and explained the metrics for affordable housing. Ms. Melanson brought up the issues with having enough land for apartment complexes. Mr. Hinds continued to bring up possibilities for small developments of multi-family housing and looking for appropriately sized parcels. Mr. Sylvia did mention several previous land auctions the Town had done. Ms. Fidalgo brought up the issue of needing to find lots that were already zoned for multi-family housing.

Mr. DiGiuseppe discussed how the Town would need adjust zoning and the bylaws to allow for redevelopment, citing changing regulations around Accessory Dwelling Units and parking setbacks as small changes that could be addressed. At Mr. DiGiuseppe's prompting, Mr. Hinds again outlined his desire to see if a small property could be presented to developers to encourage the construction of a

small multi-family development. Mr. DiGiuseppe and the Committee discussed ways to streamline the special permitting process to encourage smaller scale growth.

Ms. Melanson noted that she would have continuing discussions with Mr. DiGiuseppe and Building Commissioner Randy Bassett on the bylaw changes and would investigate the suggestions Mr. Hinds put forward.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for February 15, 2024.

The meeting was adjourned by Ms. Melanson at 8:09 PM.

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

Approved – February 15, 2024