



Town of Walpole
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Office of Community & Economic Development

JAMES A. JOHNSON
Town Administrator

Patrick Deschenes
*Community & Economic
Development Director*

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
11/16/21

Present: Marc Romeo (Chair), Brian Connor, Ken Fettig, Margaret Kundert, Kevin Spendley

Absent: Beth Pelick (Vice Chair), Donnell Murphy, Daniel O'Driscoll, John Shalbey

Also Present were Patrick Deschenes (Director of Community & Economic Development) and Harry Broussaires (Walpole Chamber Liaison)

Mr. Romeo opened the meeting at 5:06 P.M.

OPEN FORUM:

1. MINUTES (9/21/21):

Mr. Broussaires corrected his title in the minutes from "EDC Liaison" to "Walpole Chamber Liaison" and clarified that he is a non-voting member.

MOTION by Mr. Fettig and seconded by Ms. Kundert to approve the minutes from 9/21/21 as amended. The motion could not carry, as Mr. Spendley abstained and the group did not have a quorum.

Mr. Romeo decided to table the vote to approve the minutes until the next meeting.

BUSINESS:

1. Downtown Walpole Rapid Recovery Plan:

Mr. Deschenes announced that he emailed the members of the Economic Development Commission a link the full Downtown Walpole Recovery Plan and passed out a brief overview. In two weeks there will be a meeting with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to discuss funding options, project ideas, and next steps. Some of the projects being considered are technical assistance for small businesses, wayfinding, and zoning reform.

Mr. Romeo asked if the list of projects in the overview is in any particular order, to which Mr. Deschenes replied that they were not. The DHCD will be giving specific guidance on available grant opportunities.

Mr. Fettig asked if the plan had any direct input on the old town hall building (980 Main Street), to which Mr. Deschenes replied that he did not believe so.

Mr. Romeo asked if groups like the Master Plan Committee and Destination Downtown are working together with the Downtown Walpole Rapid Recovery Plan. Ms. Kundert stated that they would eventually, but that it was too soon in the process.

Mr. Romeo asked who writes the grant proposals, and Mr. Deschenes answered that his predecessor started and Mr. Deschenes himself finished writing this plan. Mr. Romeo asked if hiring a grant writer would allow the town to pursue and attain more grant funding for projects. Mr. Deschenes stated that he did not think that lack of time or manpower was preventing the Town from pursuing many other project funding opportunities.

2. Annual Tax Classification – FY22:

Mr. Deschenes gave a brief overview of the changes in the annual tax classification for the upcoming fiscal year. He pointed out that the tax rate will increase at a shift of 1.275%, which has consistently been the yearly rate increase since 2013. Fiscal Year 2022's total maximum allowable levy is approximately \$82,826,000. Commercial properties will see their taxes go down by an average of \$870 per year and industrial properties will see theirs go up by about \$454. Decreasing the tax burden on smaller businesses is an attempt to mitigate some of the hardships that have been placed on them due to COVID.

Mr. Deschenes asked for any questions, comments or recommendations from the Economic Development Commission about the annual tax classification changes.

Mr. Romeo said that he would have liked to hear input from some of the absent members, such as Mr. Murphy. He stated that the EDC typically approves the changes as is.

MOTION by Mr. Spendley and seconded by Ms. Kundert to draft a letter stating the Economic Development Commission's approval of the proposed FY22 tax classification changes. The motion carried all in favor 5-0-0.

Mr. Spendley asked for any updates on the Walpole Mall site. Mr. Romeo stated that an Aldi's grocery store is going to open in the site of the old Office Max next month (December 15).

Mr. Brousaides asked how NStar Electric is paying so much in taxes. Mr. Deschenes clarified that the utility company's power and telephone lines add to the worth of NStar's assessed value.

Mr. Romeo asked what the estimated cost of the override for the new middle school project is. Mr. Connor stated that the highest estimate is approximately \$78 million, but if anything it will likely come in under-budget.

3. Master Plan 2022:

Mr. Deschenes that the first of three Master Plan 2022 community forums will be held tomorrow to discuss potential group objectives for the future of Walpole.

Mr. Deschenes shared a document of recommendations from the 2004 Master Plan to give an update on what has been achieved so far.

Mr. Deschenes suggested that the members of the EDC participate in a Zoom meeting with the town's consultant from the Barrett Planning Group to discuss portions of the Master Plan related to economic development and growth.

Ms. Kundert asked which projects from the 2004 Master Plan have been completed so far. Mr. Deschenes clarified that the Barrett Planning Group has not yet determined the status of every recommendation.

Mr. Romeo asked the purpose of the examination of the 2004 Master Plan, to which Mr. Deschenes replied that it was simply to see how far we've come and what more we still need to do.

4. Department Updates:

The Commission praised the successful effort to keep the Siemens Healthcare location in Walpole.

Mr. Romeo expressed his desire for a town spokesperson to sell the town of Walpole to investors and developers. He asserted that simply waiting for businesses and organizations to approach the town will not yield the economic growth that the town needs.

Mr. Deschenes stated that a lot of that responsibility falls to him, and agreed that marketing is an area in which Walpole can and should improve.

Mr. Connor shared that he recently lost a potential client that liked Walpole because it is halfway between Boston and Providence, but the existing office space did not satisfy the client's capacity specifications.

Mr. Romeo stated that a more flexible zoning code would increase the number of new projects that will come to Walpole. Mr. Deschenes remarked that the lengthy process involving multiple boards/committees and the Town Meeting, as required by the Town's bylaws, may also impede speedy growth.

The Commission discussed the new parking lot potentially being built by the Krafts on the border of Walpole and Foxboro. Mr. Romeo stated that he hopes that negotiation between the Krafts and the town proves fruitful and that the project brings more economic development to Walpole.

ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION by Mr. Broussides and seconded by Mr. Romeo to adjourn.

The motion carried all in favor 6-0-0.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted: Kevin Sanderson