



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
REMOTE MEETING
3/19/24

Members in Attendance: Marc Romeo (Chair), John Shalbey, Brian Connor, Briana Pinheiro, Patrick Deschenes (Community and Economic Development)

Members Absent: Beth Pelick, Donnell Murphy, Kevin Spendley, Harry Brousaides

Meeting called to order at 5:05 PM by Mr. Romeo.

Minutes

Motion by Mr. Connor to approve the meeting minutes from February 20, 2024, seconded by Ms. Pinheiro. Motion carried 3-0-1 (Romeo – aye; Pinheiro – aye; Shalbey – abstained; Connors – aye).

Mr. Romeo acknowledged that both Mr. Connor and Mr. Shalbey's time on the Board was nearing an end and neither of them would request reappointment. He thanked both of them for their service to the Town and appreciated working with them.

Spring Business Forum – status update

Mr. Deschenes estimated there would be 55 people in attendance for the Spring Business Forum between business owners, EDC and Town Staff. A week before the event the Country Club would need a final count.

Mr. Romeo asked about how attendees were notified for last year's forum. Mr. Deschenes said he utilized the DBA list from the Town Clerk which had 300 businesses. Mr. Romeo asked to look into how many people were attending again this year to gauge success.

Ms. Pinheiro asked for the general charge and goal of the forum. Mr. Shalbey explained the first part was a networking event followed by speakers. The idea was for it to serve as a conference for local business owners. Mr. Deschenes added that last year many people came that did not RSVP so there could be a dozen more attendees than currently estimated.

Mr. Deschenes went over the speakers and theme. There was a brief discussion over streaming the event.

MBTA Zoning Bylaw – EDC Discussion

Ms. Pinheiro asked if the MBTA Zoning had been implemented in other communities. Mr. Deschenes explained the deadlines for the various communities based on their group. He also explained the Town Meeting process for the article.

Mr. Shalbey said there would be a time crunch if the Zoning did not pass in the fall and would require a Special Town Meeting.

Mr. Romeo asked if anyone had looked into what would happen if the Town passed the Zoning and the SJC ruled in favor of the Town of Milton which was currently in litigation with the State. Mr. Shalbey explained the process and clarified what could happen procedurally.

Mr. Romeo believed that the proposal would not make a large change to the existing characteristics of downtown Walpole. He asked what would happen if the MBTA removed or added a stop. Mr. Deschenes used the example of the Foxborough Station and explained how they were previously an adjacent community. Their status was changed to a commuter rail community when the stop at Gillette Stadium began being utilized full time. The Town would need to comply with developable station area if changes were made.

Mr. Shalbey talked about the phased approach in Norwood.

It was explained that the MBTA zoning is a theoretical build out of these units. There is no legal requirement for the units to be constructed. Mr. Deschenes added that while new multifamily development would be allowed by-right, projects would still need to go to the Planning Board for Site Plan Review.

Commercial Vacancy and Business Recruitment

Mr. Romeo stated that he believed that other Town's had staff that would actively try to recruit businesses. Mr. Deschenes stated the not all Towns have that type of staff capacity, including neighboring towns. Mr. Shalbey added that some landowners were not motivated to lease.

Mr. Romeo noted that this could help unmotivated landowners. Mr. Shalbey cautioned against having the Town act as a commercial broker.

Mr. Deschenes stated that the main way to incentivize certain new business would be either through a TIF or to amend overly restrictive zoning. Mr. Deschenes further stated that larger communities may have the option to do more in terms of business recruitment but that he did not believe this was a good direction to focus energy. Ms. Pinheiro stated that recruitment usually work better in a pro-development community.

Mr. Deschenes summarized the ongoing MAPC TAP (technical assistance) application to review the Town's industrial and commercial zoning in order to determine on how to best utilize these locations area and identify the best uses.

Mr. Romeo asked if there had been any research done on vacancies within the downtown. Mr. Deschenes stated that Staff could look into ways on how to centralize that information. Some Towns had a standalone Economic Development webpage and Staff could look into that as an option Mr. Deschenes further noted that there was only so much a Town could do when it came to commercial vacancies as it's typically a private property matter.

Ms. Pinheiro suggested having an event at a vacant commercial space in order to highlight that space. Mr. Romeo suggested brainstorming ways that the Commission can positively impact the Town.

Mr. Shalbey suggested a rezone of Route 1 and assess how the market reacts.

Mr. Connor asked if the EDC could be more of a mentor to new businesses and guide them through the process and possibly connect them with resources. Mr. Deschenes stated there was already an internal process for applicants and new businesses to have a review meeting with Department Heads prior to applying to a regulatory board.

Mr. Romeo noted that there was a difficult time with Commission attendance. He asked how other EDC's were tasked in other Towns.

There was a brief discussion over connecting with a commercial broker and possibly hosting a reception with local commercial agents.

Adjournment

Motion by Mr. Shalbey to adjourn at 6:18 PM, seconded by Mr. Connor. Motion carried 4-0-0 (Romeo – aye; Pinheiro – aye; Spendley – aye; Shalbey – aye).