



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
3/21/23

Members in Attendance: Marc Romeo (Chair), Beth Pelick (Vice Chair), Brian Connor, Kevin Spendley, Donnell Murphy, John Shalbey, Patrick Deschenes (Community and Economic Development)

Members Absent: Harry Brousaides (Liaison/Non-voting Member)

Meeting called to order at 7:00 PM.

Minutes

Motion by Mr. Murphy to approve the minutes from January 19, 2023, seconded by Ms. Pelick. Motion carried 6-0-0.

2023 Business Forum

- *Review of Forum*
- *Planning Future Events*

Mr. Deschenes provided a review of the March 9th Business Forum. A total of 62 responses from the initial invitations and determined 60-70 people attended in total. He felt the speakers did a great job and asked for feedback from the EDC.

John Shalbey said the first speaker was great. The second speaker did a great job but his subject matter did not apply to all. Mr. Deschenes said he would work with Mr. Brousaides to get next year's speakers.

Donnell Murphy thought the event had a great outcome and thought the 3rd speaker was excellent. In the past there were speakers from the State present. He thought that by having speakers that connected directly with small businesses that it made for a more powerful event. The room at the Country Club and food were perfect for the event. Mr. Murphy added that at the end when Mr. Brousaides encouraged attendees to introduce themselves it became a great opportunity to network.

Brian Connor added he received positive feedback although he was unable to attend.

Mr. Deschenes agreed to Mr. Murphy's point that State Representative add value to these events but definitely thought the speakers chosen were impactful.

Mr. Murphy was happy to see a diverse group of business in attendance.

Mr. Romeo asked if there would be any follow up with the businesses. Mr. Deschenes said there were surveys posted at the event but there was not a lot of feedback. He has a record of all attendees email which he saved and would be a great resource going forward. Mr. Romeo suggested sending a follow up survey that could be answered anonymously.

Mr. Murphy said the group should begin to think about another date in 6 months to a year so businesses can save the date.

Mr. Romeo suggested the event in March could be an early morning event, but they could plan for an evening mixer event in the fall. By having a different style event, it could increase diversity. Mr. Murphy thought the Chamber already hosts evening mixers. Ms. Pelick confirmed they had not done them as often as years prior. Mainly there is a holiday event and at ribbon cuttings as they arise.

Mr. Romeo added that an evening event could include State Representatives.

Mr. Deschenes said he would follow up with attendees and get feedback regarding how often they would like to attend events. Mr. Romeo encouraged Mr. Deschenes to ask specific questions to get more specific answers.

The date March 7, 2024 was selected as the 2024 Business Forum date. There was an option to plan a fall event as well.

Main Street Live 2021

- ***Preliminary Discussion and Planning***

Mr. Deschenes thought this was the time of year when preliminary planning occurred for Main Street Live. He hoped to confirm a date and begin reaching out to food trucks for the event.

Mr. Murphy said the food trucks were the most important piece. Mr. Shalbey coordinated the food trucks for 2022.

Mr. Shalbey explained that he followed up with all vendors but could not reschedule because they did not have a 2023 date set. He reported that he received positive feedback from all vendors and believed they would agree to return for 2023. Mr. Murphy said there was a good mix of vendors with a wide variety of food.

Mr. Romeo confirmed the 2023 Main Street Live date was September 15 but needed to make sure no big events would take place at Gillette Stadium that day. Mr. Murphy asked Mr. Deschenes to confirm with Police as they would know of any conflicts.

Mr. Murphy suggested finding a food truck that served burgers. Mr. Shalbey said he would look into that.

Regarding entertainment for the event, Mr. Romeo said the stage was confirmed. He had not yet lined up any musical acts. Mr. Murphy thought last year's lineup was a success and thought it would be a good idea to have them return.

Mr. Deschenes asked for feedback on last year's layout. Mr. Murphy thought the layout worked. He wished there were more small businesses and another food station at one common. Mr. Shalbey said that he reached out to downtown businesses previously and they are too busy the night of the event.

Regarding providing additional support staff, Mr. Shalbey suggested connecting with the High School to see if any students would want to volunteer. Mr. Murphy said that the National Honors Society requires students to volunteer. He noted that as the event did not get completely cleaned up until around 2 AM it might not be the most appropriate environment for teenagers.

Mr. Romeo suggested offering small sponsorships to businesses in exchange for manpower to run the event. Mr. Shalbey thought that would be a high cost to small businesses.

Mr. Murphy noted the hardest part last year was the ticket sales. They need to have quick people servicing those stations. Mr. Romeo said he could create a hotspot so the common could have WiFi. Mr. Murphy said Venmo was a success at the Friends of St. Pat's event.

Mr. Spendley asked that all states for tents be painted a bright color for safety.

Mr. Murphy asked that this agenda item be on all agendas for the next several months so the Commission could discuss any updates.

Other Business

- *Spring Town Meeting Zoning Articles*
- *Old Town Hall Status*

Mr. Deschenes asked if there was any feedback on the Zoning Articles. Mr. Shalbey said he did not have comments on the in-law article, however he strongly agreed with reducing the side yard setback as well as height requirements. He also agreed with four car garages being allowed under the Table of Uses.

Mr. Shalbey asked for more information regarding two and three families allowed by right. Mr. Deschenes explained this use was only allowed in the GR Zone. A majority of the lots were already built out with not many available lots that would qualify for this allowance. The rationale was to help facilitate diversity in the housing stock. The 20,000 square foot lot requirement excludes many of the lots in the zone.

Beth Pelick had to leave the meeting.

Overall the commission felt positive regarding proposed changes.

Mr. Deschenes explained that Zoning changes were always needed from time to time and he hoped to get a comprehensive zoning rewrite in order to modernize the bylaw and remove any inconsistencies. Warrant articles needed sponsorship by either the Planning Board or Select Board, with the exception of a citizen's petition. He explained other changes that were originally proposed that the Boards expressed concerns with so those bylaws were scaled back.

Mr. Romeo asked if the change in height requirements would make the hotel project at Applebee's viable. Mr. Deschenes confirmed that would now be viable.

Mr. Shalbey felt that all earth removal should be deemed incidental and did not believe there should be limits. He believed the language was contradictory. Mr. Deschenes agreed and explained that this bylaw was remanded back in order to address discrepancies. Mr. Shalbey explained the process he went through for his business.

Mr. Murphy asked about parking regulations and if there were any changes on the 3.5x residential rule for mixed-use within the Central Business District. Mr. Deschenes explained they were working to revise through the MBTA zoning and that would require working on establishing multi-family by-right potential at these properties. Mr. Shalbey said parking would be a driving factor. Mr. Deschenes added that two cars per dwelling did not work when applied to areas in close proximity to public transit. Mr. Murphy added that it could cause problems with downtown buildings that the Town should encourage owners to renovate. In some cases parking could prohibit a third floor.

Regarding parking, Mr. Romeo remembered that parking had previously been an issue in Walpole center. Now that the two buildings downtown were completed, he did not know if it was still problematic. Mr.

Murphy believed the pandemic had a lot to do with it. Lots of residents now have the ability to work from home and train was not as busy as it was previously. Mr. Deschenes added that alternative train times helped as well.

Mr. Murphy noticed lots of first floor vacant commercial spaces and additional signage that was installed downtown was very helpful.

Mr. Romeo noted that the West Street Bridge was very low and often time trucks would have to turn around as they could not make the clearance. He suggested better signage be installed.

Mr. Deschenes touched on Article 18 which would allow RTM to sell the Old Town Hall. He did not have a lot of information but an RFP would be required to sell the building if passed at town meeting. The Commission was surprised by this article given the previous discussion with the consultant regarding re-use of the building.

Adjournment

Motion by Mr. Romeo to adjourn at 6:02 PM, seconded by Mr. Spendley. Motion carried 5-0.