



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

**JAMES A. JOHNSON**  
*Town Administrator*

**Patrick Deschenes**  
*Community & Economic  
Development Director*

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**MINUTES**  
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**  
**9/21/21**

Present: Marc Romeo (Chair), Beth Pelick (Vice Chair), Brian Connor, Ken Fettig, Margaret Kundert, Donnell Murphy, Daniel O'Driscoll, John Shalbey

Absent: Kevin Spendley

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

Mr. Romeo opened the meeting at 5:02 P.M.

**OPEN FORUM:**

1. MINUTES:

**MOTION** by Mr. Murphy and seconded by Mr. Fettig to approve the minutes from 9/7/21.

The motion carried 5-0-3.

Mr. Connor, Mr. Fettig, Mr. O'Driscoll, Mr. Murphy, and Mr. Shalbey voted in favor.

Mr. Romeo, Ms. Pelick, and Ms. Kundert abstained.

**BUSINESS:**

1. Main Street Live Review:

Mr. Romeo expressed satisfaction with the recent Main Street Live event. Though attendance was not as high as in previous years, everyone behaved well and had a great time.

Mr. Murphy stated that he believed that attendance was equal to or higher than in previous years. He also stated that despite an issue with some food vendors cancelling, everyone still got enough food.

Mr. Murphy stated that electronic sales at the event were higher than expected, totaling about \$1300.

Mr. Romeo suggested bringing a portable ATM to the next Main Street Live so patrons can have easier access to cash. Mr. O'Driscoll agreed, since they lost some money due to credit card reader malfunctions.

Mr. Fettig mentioned that they ran out of certain alcoholic beverages (such as High Noon and White Claw) very quickly.

Mr. O'Driscoll stated that many patrons were confused about having to pay extra for premium drinks after buying a beer ticket. Mr. Romeo suggested charging only one price for drinks in the future.

Mr. Romeo admitted that part of the reason that they lost money is because he could not get as much in sponsorships as usual, while expenses rose quite significantly.

Mr. Murphy stated that he thought Middlesex Savings Bank had not yet delivered the money that they had promised, but Mr. Romeo said that they already sent it to the town.

Mr. Shalbey asked why the stage cost more than in previous years, and Mr. Romeo stated that a lot of stage companies went out of business, so demand is higher.

Mr. Murphy observed that expenses keep increasing and revenue keeps decreasing, so finding more sponsorships is going to be vital and concession prices need to rise.

Mr. Romeo stated that future years are likely not going to have as much uncertainty about live events, so obtaining sponsors will be easier. Additionally, in the past they stuck with local sponsors, but they might expand their scope next time.

Mr. Murphy stated that there will need to be a conversation on what to do with the funds raised to best benefit the downtown area, such as a digital sign. A real impact will encourage more people to attend.

Mr. Murphy observed that demographics were younger than usual, with more families in attendance. He also stated that all the nearby businesses benefited from Main Street Live, as always.

Mr. Brousaides suggested including more sausage vendors at the event. In general, the group decided that more food vendors will need to be in attendance.

Mr. O'Driscoll asked if the event was advertised as much as usual. Mr. Romeo said it was not, and they could have done a more thorough job, especially on social media.

Mr. Romeo mentioned that there was one incident during the event where a woman fell in the bathroom and the fire department had to rescue her, but she was fine.

## 2. Public Open House: Downtown Walpole Rapid Recovery Plan

Mr. Deschenes announced that there will be a community public forum on September 23<sup>rd</sup> regarding the Downtown Walpole Rapid Recovery Plan, a submission for a grant to help downtown Walpole recover from COVID and build new growth. The proposal is almost complete, and after it is presented at the public forum, the final plan is due on October 8<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Romeo asked what happens after the proposal is submitted. Mr. Deschenes stated that there are about 130 other communities submitting for the grant, and if Walpole receives the money the project will begin.

Mr. Romeo asked how they can best ensure that substantive change will take place, and Mr. Deschenes explained that he is actively applying for capital grants, as that is the only way projects will get funded.

Mr. O'Driscoll asked if receiving this grant will open the door to more grants, and Mr. Deschenes stated that it likely would.

Mr. Romeo asked about how large these grants would be, and Mr. Deschenes stated that it depends on the project, but items can be anywhere in the range of \$50,000 to \$150,000.

Mr. Murphy asked what steps besides a study can be looked into to increase the likelihood of earning grants. Mr. Shalbey explained that certain grants will be geared towards areas with certain demographics or at certain socioeconomic levels, so a proposal tailored with the right criteria will be more successful.

Mr. O'Driscoll asked if the town has a firm writing grant proposals for them, and Mr. Deschenes stated that he usually writes the proposals for the grants that apply to the Economic Development Commission.

Mr. Romeo asked what the town has done with the grants that they have been awarded. Mr. Murphy mentioned that some were funding studies, so their impact is less visible to the community.

Mr. Romeo asked what happens if Walpole does not receive any grants. Mr. Shalbey explained that many towns make their zoning bylaws more profitable to developers, which brings in more projects. Some of Walpole's zoning laws may be partially inhibiting growth.

Mr. Romeo stated that the Economic Development Commission needs to figure out how to bankroll significant projects even without receiving grant funding, as other towns seem to be able to do.

Mr. Brousaides stated that the Master Plan Committee is currently working on a master plan update that will include some zoning reform that may help with economic growth. Mr. Shalbey suggested working with Mr. Deschenes to come up with zoning reform suggestions for the Master Plan Committee.

Ms. Kundert proposed a separate meeting to discuss the issues related to zoning impeding economic growth in Walpole. Mr. Romeo suggested talking to developers to see specifically which limitations may be preventing them from investing in the town. Walpole has a reputation for not being developer-friendly.

Ms. Kundert asked what specifically the Commission would like to see downtown, and the group suggested more variety in businesses, like a bookstore, hardware store, and a grocery store. Mr. Brousaides stated that the town needs more establishments that are attractive to young people.

Mr. Connor suggested that Stone Field could be better used as land for new businesses or parking. Mr. Romeo stated that the townspeople value the field and a lot of people would hate to see it disappear. Mr. Connor suggested moving the farmer's market to Stone Field

Mr. Romeo asked if the Master Plan Committee has a timetable, and Mr. Deschenes said that they have 365 days from initiation of the contract and that the consulting portion would need to wrap up by late spring / early summer 2022.

Mr. Brousaides suggested constructing a scale model of the downtown Walpole project to get more people on board. Mr. Deschenes shared that when he worked in Norwood they used digital renderings to present projects to the public, which worked well.

### 3. Department Updates

Mr. Deschenes reported that he won the town a \$24,000 grant to improve and beautify the town's streetscapes and pedestrian pathways.

Mr. Romeo suggested working with local artists to display art along the walkways. Mr. Deschenes said that this was actually one of the items that he is already looking into.

Mr. Deschenes announced that the recent 55 Summer Street 40B decision regarding the building's height was appealed by the applicant and went to mediation to reach a compromise. This project is allowing the town to build hundreds of new units of subsidized housing.

### **ADJOURNMENT:**

**MOTION** by Ms. Fettig and seconded by Mr. O'Driscoll to adjourn.  
The motion carried all in favor 8-0-0.

The meeting adjourned at 6:16 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted: Kevin Sanderson