



# Economic Development Committee

Town Hall · 40 Center Street · Fairhaven, MA 02719

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

PLACE OF MEETING: Town Hall for Members and remotely via Zoom for the Public

DATE AND TIME: Thursday December 16, 2021 at 6:30PM

MEETING TYPE: Economic Development Committee

### Quorum and Attendance:

**Present:** Kevin McLaughlin, Chair; Eddie Lopez; Travis Rapoza; Bernard Roderick; Jessica Fidalgo and Bob Espindola.

Mr. McLaughlin called the meeting to order, reviewed attendance for a quorum, and read the open meeting law for the record.

### Review and Approve Minutes of the September 19, 2021 meeting

The Board reviewed the minutes from the September 19, 2021 meeting.

Mr. Espindola made a motion to approve the minutes after editing out a redundant word and was seconded by Ms. Fidalgo; vote was unanimous (6-0).

### Business Journal Headlines & Trends

Mr. Foley presented a new item covering headlines from the Boston & Providence Business Journals over the course of the months between meetings, with this collection covering both November and December with a sampling of those headlines that may be of interest to the committee.

The following headlines and articles were discussed:

- These companies' values soared since the start of COVID-19 (BBJ 12/14)
- Supply chain disruptions aren't going away. Here's how businesses can limit their risks. (BBJ 12/14)
- Inflation, supply chain pain will linger, say Mass. Business leaders (BBJ 12/13)
- Furniture e-commerce giant Wayfair will get back into brick and mortar (Boston Globe 12/8)
- Office vacancies are high — and a lot more space is on the way (BBJ 12/2)
- Hotel property values continue to sink — and a new challenge may be on the horizon. (BBJ 12/2)
- As malls struggle, open-air shopping centers bounce back post-pandemic (BBJ 11/29)
- South Fork Wind wins federal OK, launching union jobs at ProvPort (PBJ 11/27)
- Construction-cost spikes may prompt some developers consider delaying/canceling projects (BBJ 11/25)
- Malls' future uncertain as e-commerce, Covid-19 push many to the brink (BBJ 11/25)

- The Great Resignation continues. These states saw the most workers quit. (PBJ 11/24)
- Supply chain woes are a holiday shopping opportunity for craft makers (BBJ 11/24)
- More workers are returning to the office, but there's a catch (BBJ 11/24)

In response to the articles, there was discussion about several trends such as Wayfair's move to brick and mortar as a good sign for Fairhaven's plans for mixed-use developments, changes to travel and restaurants patronage in reaction to the continuing COVID pandemic, and how the move to remote work affects office vacancies, collateral spending and shifts in public transit usage.

A side conversation formed as Mr. Espindola brought up the possibility of conducting an investigation into the trends of the Hotel and Meals tax during the pandemic. Mr. Foley also recounted his discussions with the owner of the Hampton Inn on re-working the building more towards apartments. Mr. Rapoza brought forward the concept of hotels as transitional housing, especially during the winter months, for the homeless population and specifically cited Seattle's CoLead Team and their JustCARE initiative. Similar local programs were noted such as Steppingstone Incorporated and NeighborWorks Housing Solutions.

Mr. McLaughlin and Mr. Espindola voiced their support for the article overviews as a regular item. As a follow-up, Mr. Espindola suggested the concept of a local business spotlight, using the Northeast Maritime Institute as an example as they have become a state center for ocean policy and economics, along with offering world-class online maritime training.

In the discussion that followed, Mr. Foley proposed to work with committee members to select businesses a few weeks prior to EDC meetings to invite the owners to come to meetings or to create a short presentation. Mr. Rapoza noted that New Bedford's EDC has a business directory as well as local business stories on their website, a concept that could also work very well for Fairhaven. Mr. Foley agreed and mentioned that annual or biannual updates to the GIS data on the town's businesses would be helpful for this purpose. He also noted that he would be meeting with the director of New Bedford's EDC on Friday, December 17th, 2021.

While discussing the creation of a business directory, several options were offered for how best to go about this process such as creating an internship opportunity, gathering information from the Assessor's Office list, the Fairhaven Business Association, the Fairhaven Improvement Association, and utilizing the Senior Work-Off Program.

After Mr. Rapoza suggested an increase in social media outreach for Fairhaven business, Mr. Foley offered the idea of working with the town Social Media department as well as The Neighborhood News to get the word out on any businesses the committee felt would be a good business spotlight candidate. Mr. Espindola also noted that letters could be included with the town water bills with information about the business directory.

### **Union Wharf Feasibility Study Proposal Update**

In 2020, Fairhaven was awarded \$50,000 grant from the Seaport Economic Council to conduct a feasibility study, and the town also put forth an additional \$10,000 as a local match towards the study to explore the expansion of uses and efficiency at Union Wharf.

Frank Mahady of FXM Associates as well as Susan Nilson and Patrick Rezendes of Foth Engineering have been brought on as consultants for the project and alongside Mr. Foley have been conducting interviews with a variety of local businesses. The Economic Development Committee December 16, 2021

of citizens and business owners who utilize Union Wharf. Interviews to date have been with Mike McNamara, Kevin McLaughlin, Lars Vinjerud, Eric Dawicki, Jeff Osuch, Jeff Pontiff, Bob and Charlie Mitchell, Heidi Hacking, and the Fairhaven Harbormaster, Police Chief, Fire Chief, and Town Counsel. Mr. McLaughlin suggested additional interviews with the wharf tenants among the scallop, lobster and fishing boats along with the seasonal and transit users.

While focused on Union Wharf, Mr. Foley noted that within the next 18 months work needs to start on updating the harbor plan and this study can be considered as the first step of that broader project. The main goals of the study are to maximize economic capacity, explore the feasibility of expansion of uses, and keep the resiliency of the wharf in consideration. With this in mind, Mr. Foley has requested that Foth Engineering conduct a full site analysis to assess the current state of the wharf both physically and logistically to help guide the feasibility study to find ways to meet the goals without adversely impacting the existing uses of the wharf.

At Mr. McLaughlin's suggestion, Mr. Foley received input from the Marine Resources Committee. They proposed the consideration of research and educational opportunities as well as the inclusion of fish stalls. They also requested an improvement of the parking situation as well as better enforcement of the wharf's rules.

Mr. McLaughlin reiterated that the wharf's commercial and industrial purposes as a designated port area should remain the main focus. He cited the current strength of the fishing industry in the area by noting that the 10 scallop boats which currently utilize the wharf, bring in a total of \$15 million worth of seafood annually. He also voiced strong support that the south face of the wharf remains open for as-needed usage for any boat in the harbor. However, he had some hesitancy towards extending extra electrical cabinets to the west side of the wharf due to the possibility of low usage.

The Committee then discussed the parcel land swap at Union Wharf as well as the grandfathered building footprint. It was also noted that any plans need to include a 50-foot wide channel for maritime access. Additionally, the Seaport Economic Council has been financing harbormaster buildings around the state and the discussion turned to how such a structure would work on Union Wharf. Mr. Foley laid out a plan based on the Plymouth building that could potentially have storage or vendor units on the ground floor, a multi-functional classroom or conference room on the second floor and harbormaster/public safety office on the top floor. When Mr. Espindola brought up his concerns as to if a harbor master shack would provide economic benefits. Mr. Foley explained that the consultant will be looking at financial considerations but that education and safety opportunities may also have value as a public service as part of overall considerations for improving the wharf.

Before moving on, as it had come up in passing during the discussion, Mr. Roderick offered his concerns about new plans for the lot on 67 Middle Street, the former location of Park Motors, particularly the possibility of contaminated land and restricted usage. Mr. Foley explained that the new owner was aware of the issues and had plans to develop the site with mixed-use commercial and residential.

#### **RT. 6/240/Opportunity Zone Redevelopment Study, Town Planner Update**

Mr. Foley covered the grant money that has been received to hire a consultant to help write the 40R Bylaws as well as the Transfer Development Rights for this project. These include the \$26,400 remaining from the April 2020 Best Practices Grant, \$75,000 One-Stop Community Planning Grant received in November 2021, and the EEA Planning Assistance Grants with \$20,000 for FY22 with a pledged \$6,000 in EDC funds as a local match and an additional \$25,000 for FY23. Mr. Foley's hope is that any additional local match can come out of ARPA funding.

All of these grants have time limits on them – the Best Practices Grant by April 2022, the Community Planning Grant by June 2023, and the \$20,000 EEA grant by June 2022, and the \$25,000 by June 2023. Additionally, the 1-stop for Growth and EEA grants are reimbursement grants.

Mr. Foley's original goal was to have the 40R Bylaws and TDR's completed ahead of the May 2022 Town Meeting but delays in hearing back on a number of these grants have complicated that process and these plans may now need to be approved via a special meeting in the autumn or 2023. Mr. Espindola suggested that Mr. Foley reach out to Ms. Wendy Graves and Mr. Mark Rees for assistance in writing an RFP for the consultants. Mr. Foley also mentioned plans to speak to representatives from MassDevelopment who would be visiting Roger's School about the next round of the One-Stop Community Planning Grant.

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

Mr. McLaughlin requested an update from Mr. Espindola about the progress on hiring a new town administrator.

The screening committee has been working with the Collins Center for Public Management out of UMass Boston. After interviewing four candidates out of approximately forty applicants for the Select Board's consideration, three withdrew from consideration. Thus, the interview process had to start over in order to provide a minimum of two and a maximum of four candidates for consideration. The hope is to have interviews in mid-January to keep the process moving forward.

Mr. McLaughlin brought up the company CivicPlus, which helps to provide better access to information to town residents by allowing them to opt-in to emails containing committee information such as agendas and minutes. CivicPlus offered an example city using this system—Paso Robles, CA, and their website, <https://www.prcity.com/>

**Action:** Add an agenda item for the next meeting on CivicPlus.

**Next Meeting:**

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for January 20, 2022.

Mr. Espindola made a motion to adjourn and was seconded by Mr. Rapoza. Motion passed unanimously (6-0).

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