

**Fairhaven
Economic Development Committee
Thursday, October 14, 2020 – Via Remote Zoom Platform
Minutes**

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1. Present: Chairperson, Kevin McLaughlin, Cathy Melanson, Robert Espindola and Eddie Lopez

Absent: Todd McGregor, Bernie Roderick and Geoff Haworth

FAIRHAVEN,
MASS.

Town Planner, Mr. Paul Foley was also in attendance.

Frank Mahady and Dianne Tsitsos were present of FXM.

2. Review and Approve Minutes of September 17, 2020:

Cathy Melanson made a motion to approve the minutes of September 17, 2020 and was seconded by Eddie Lopez. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Correspondence: None.

Presentation from FXM-2020 Update. Frank Mahady and Dianne Tsitsos of FXM Associates.

Mr. Mahady stated that he was asked by Mr. Foley to update the statistics in the Economic Development Plan from 2017 for both the Town as a whole and the target area for redevelopment. He said there are a few different tasks to complete with for the final report. They are going to update the summary findings of 2017 and report which of the goals stated in the plan are still valid.

The 2017 Plan said the Town should focus on retaining current businesses such as the working waterfront and expanding successful businesses and restaurants. In 2020 this it is now more important than ever to help local businesses survive and grow.

The 2017 Plan said opportunities exist in shared workspace units. In 2020, Frank notes that office space is taking a big hit in Boston due to Covid-19, and that is likely to continue after the State of Emergency. It appears that a lot of people that commute to Boston have no intention of returning to the office commute five days a week. Many people have found that they can work just fine from home. They may go in to the office 1-2 days a week and work from home the other days. This is bad news for Boston, but for suburban areas like Fairhaven, where the rents are a fraction of what they are in Boston, shared workspaces in places like Fairhaven, if they are done right, may become the new office after the Covid-19 crisis.

The 2017 plan said prospects for reuse of vacant or underutilized buildings and buildable spaces will most likely realized with zoning changes for Mixed-Use retail and residential. In 2020 it appears that is still the best way forward for these spaces. Fairhaven is lucky in that its Big Box Stores are doing relatively well compared to some other markets.

Frank then reviewed the Route 6/240 target area with a chart from 2019 that shows a net gain of almost 200 jobs in Town but with losses in restaurants and retail. There have been strong gains in Health Care. Manufacturing is strong in Fairhaven as well with the working waterfront. Unemployment rates in Fairhaven, peaked in mid-April (as New Bedford region did as well). In Fairhaven, it peaked to 20% unemployment at the height of the State of Emergency in April but has come down and is currently about 10% unemployment. This is better than the state at 11.2% and 13% in the New Bedford area. They are all down as of the end of August from the peak unemployment in late March, early April. Ms. Tsitsos added that she thought that it may peak again in the winter. Restaurants may close in the winter without being able to open inside.

Mr. Mahady noted that an excellent website with economic data is the "Opportunity Atlas". They have an economic tracker which is part of a service provided by Harvard. It tracks for the State in broad sectors telling you what the current employment is compared to January of this year. You can get a real time update for the state.

Mr. Foley asked if they thought mixed-use still has a future in Fairhaven and if people wanted less retail and bigger housing spaces. Mr. Mahady said yes and that there is no question that bigger apartments are needed. People are going to need more space as they work from home. The average size of apartments was going down to 800 sf and is going back up again. Obviously, 800 sf is not going to do as well as 1,200 sf apartments. The data shows that there is still a demand in Fairhaven for market rate apartment rental units.

Mr. Mahady stated there is still a need for shared spaces that accommodate people. If you provide reasonable rent and safe spaces with access to all of the things you find in an office there is an opportunity that people will come out of the house and work from a shared space near where they live. Long term planning for mixed use is still a good idea.

Mr. Espindola asked about how to go about, aside from planning and zoning, to try to market the Town and to work with property owners to promote these concepts. Mr. Foley noted that this is just part of the study. He said there will be some public hearings specific to the redevelopment plan besides his regular reports to the Planning Board and EDC. The property owners he has talked to so far are excited about moving forward.

Mr. McLaughlin asked if they thought major office buildings would make a comeback. Mr. Mahady was of the opinion that people are working remotely for the most part. He said he would be nervous if he owned a big business building in Boston right about now. It is going to be tough for large office spaces in Boston to recover.

Ms. Tsitsos stated that companies are finding out they do not need to accommodate the number of people in the amount of office space that they did previous to this. You have a lot of people who want to stay home and work remotely. She said there is a definite change and there will not be the same kind of demand for the office space that companies have now. In terms of a marketing plan, she stated an online presence will be very important.

Mr. Espindola asked if this was the end of what FXM was commissioned to do. Mr. Mahady said this is the draft for your review. There could be subsequent projects that may happen, they certainly would be happy to help in the future. Mr. Foley said this was the very first step in the study to bring the economic statistics up to date. When they need more economic analyses done for the study they will have to put out an RFP.

4. Goals of Economic Development:

Combined with the FXM presentation.

5. Review of Town meeting articles:

Mr. McLaughlin stated an email was sent with the Town Meeting Articles to committee members.

Mr. Espindola asked Mr. Foley to briefly summarize the Planning Board recommendation for the Bourne Knowles property. Mr. Foley gave a brief summary of the G. Bourne Knowles property of 22 acres which the Applicant would like to rezone to Business, whereas it is RC (Apartments) now. Mr. Foley said that the Planning Board recommended 5-1 to recommend the rezone to Business. Mr. Knowles wanted to continue work there and possibly co-locate Niemiec Marine with a boatyard and retail on the property as well.

Mr. Lopez asked about boat storage zoning. Mr. Foley explained that boat yards are allowed in the Industrial and Business zone in the "use" schedule. Mr. Foley stated that 'self-storage' is not necessarily in the use table of our zoning bylaws but is generally considered "warehousing" which is not allowed in the Business District. Boatyard is specifically allowed in our use tables in the industrial and business zone. This would be more retail and boat storage indoors, although it does sound like it may trigger a special permit through the Planning Board.

Mr. Foley also advised Chris Electronics relocated to Little Bay Road.

Mr. McLaughlin had a few concerns on a few Town Warrant Articles. Mr. McLaughlin stated he was not comfortable with the Capital Spending Articles and wondered if this was a good time to spend that kind of money. He wondered if it was truly 'necessary'.

Mr. Espindola explained the formal capital process that was put together a few years ago. He said it was a group of people through community and town staff that met and reviewed all the capital requests from the different departments and ranked them in a very structured matter. Mr. Espindola stated that the Town is in a good place for the capital spending and has a means of reserve to do so.

Mr. McLaughlin is concerned whether the projects in the capital plans are necessary right now. State revenues have been impacted by the economics of the world right now; he was not questioning the process of capital budgeting. He did not think the turf field was a necessity but also wanted to know more about the other items on the Capital budget.

Mr. Espindola stated the Budget was put together with current revenue and existing conditions while knowing what is expected will be received from the state. The second piece is even with the withdrawal from the reserves and there is a healthy reserve margin still.

Discussion between Mr. Espindola and Mr. McLaughlin on the concerns of the town meeting warrant article on capital planning. Ms. Melanson stated it is a long process on the Capital Planning Committee, as she is a member. She stated the departments need to make a statement to the capital planning committee for big expenditures.

Mr. McLaughlin asked if at some point EDC should help to review or make recommendations to help the committee be more involved. Ms. Melanson stated she would absolutely share that information once the Capital Planning Committee meetings started again.

Mr. McLaughlin also had a question on warrant article #12 regarding land acquisition and the terms "eminent domain." He asked for clarity on whether or not the Town can essentially take a property it wants.

Mr. Espindola stated it has to be a certain criterion, but it is something that can happen. He did state that this article was being passed over at Town Meeting.

Discussion on when eminent domain can occur. Mr. Foley said that while a town or government can take land for a public good the property owner has to be paid fair market value. He added that as a planner he thinks that eminent domain should only ever be considered as an absolute last step.

6. Review of Marine Resource Committee draft regulations

Mr. McLaughlin thanked Bob for sending the draft regulations to everyone.

Mr. Espindola stated the committee worked really hard on this and they were hoping to get on the Fall Town Meeting warrant but unfortunately the sense was that the Selectman needed more time to review and more time for public input as well. He said it was tabled until next town meeting in May. Mr. McLaughlin stated he was more than happy to email Mike McNamara directly to go over his comments directly.

Chairperson of the Marine Resource Committee, Mike McNamara attended to review the draft regulations. He summarized the draft. New user fees and applications and inspections of moorings. A lot of debate and compromises were incorporated. They are 99% complete, but they still need to be cleaned up a bit.

7. Rte. 6/240/ Opportunity Zone Redevelopment Study Town Planner Update

Was presented earlier by FXM.

8. Any other business reasonably anticipated within 48 hours prior to the posting of this meeting

Mr. Espindola brought up an idea to perhaps devote a short time in beginning of our meeting to "spotlight" a business at each one of our meetings. He suggested it be on their next agenda to perhaps discuss how it would work.

Mr. McLaughlin advised it was a great idea. Perhaps give some input to the committee what their interactions with the Town is/was. Perhaps people could share what the Town overall could do better to help their business succeed. Mr. McLaughlin will also email Mr. Espindola on the mission statement of EDC to be reviewed with the Select Board.

9. Next Meeting November 19, 2020

Town Meeting on Tuesday, October 20, 2020.

Cathy Melanson made a motion to adjourn and was seconded by Bob Espindola. The motion passed unanimously at 8:11p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Patricia A. Pacella
Recording Secretary