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TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE

Economic Development Committee
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**Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes – February 4, 2019**

A meeting of the Economic Development Committee was held in the History Room in Gladys E. Kelly Public Library, 2 Lake Street, on February 4, 2019.

Present from the Committee: Chairwoman Sharon McMahan, Vice Chairman Marc Becker, Don Bourque; Chris Charniak, Dennis Lukko, Deb Horan, Town Administrator Doug Willardson (ex officio), Director of Planning and Economic Development Ann Morgan (ex officio).

Chairwoman Sharon McMahan called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

1. **Pledge of Allegiance** – There was no flag in the room. This item was passed over.
2. **Minutes** - The draft minutes from October 29, 2018 were reviewed. Motion to approve the minutes as drafted made by Mr. Becker, seconded by Mr. Charniak. Motion passed unanimously 6-0.
3. **Working Group Update**

Ms. McMahan noted that she, Mr. Willardson, Ms. Morgan, Mr. Becker, Carol Cyr – Director of Community Development and Carole Marchand – Recreation Director were part of a working group that met weekly to advance a number of economic development work items. This is helping to move things forward between regular Committee meeting dates. This group will report back to the Committee for input and direction.

New Business Outreach: Ms. Morgan noted that she has collected and reviewed data from the business certificates for new businesses. These are issued by the Town Clerk. The intent is to send a letter and a brochure to new businesses to provide information on ways the Town can be of assistance. She has data on new certificates from May 2018 through January 2019. A number of issues have been identified that can better improve the Town's outreach efforts including an improved application process that requires vetting applications through various departments to ensure that taxes are paid and that there are no land use conflicts, specifically zoning. She further noted that the zoning by-law is outdated and does not adequately address home occupation and current, modern businesses. Work on databasing the business certificates and review of the zoning by-law will continue. Mr. Willardson noted that staff will look into grants to have the zoning by-law updated. The draft letter to new businesses was distributed and was reviewed.

Brochure: a copy of the most recent brochure was distributed. Ms. Morgan noted that this would be included in the mailing to new businesses in Town. Mr. Willardson noted that the brochure would be distributed locally and in surrounding towns in order to generate interest in Webster as a place to do business.

Grants and CMRPC Study Update: Ms. Morgan noted that she and Mr. Willardson would be meeting with CMRPC on Wednesday, 2/6 to review the scope of services for an economic assessment study. CMRPC had been asked to put together a scope to assess various opportunities in town including the Route 395 Exit 1 interchange and the commercial corridors along Main Street into Dudley, East Main Street, and Thompson Road. Mr. Willardson noted that the Town did not receive funding from the Urban Agenda grant from the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development. He is looking into applying for a grant from Mass Development for a market analysis for key areas in town. Mr. Willardson noted that the town has received money for the tornado damaged properties on Main Street. He had been talking to developers about rebuilding on those lots but not much progress has been made. Mr. Willardson noted that a market study has been recommended as a means to generating redevelopment interest. The study would generally cover the whole town with specific focus on several areas that have good potential for development / redevelopment including the Main Street lots. Mr. Willardson noted that the Town will be applying to the Complete Streets program from MassDOT for vehicular and pedestrian improvements along certain roads in Town including East Main Street, Lake Parkway and Thompson Road.

Downtown Tours: Mr. Willardson noted that he and members of the working group have been touring other towns in the area to learn about economic development strategies. They met with the Town Administrative of Putnam, CT who discussed the success of the Putnam Business Association (PBA) who has been very successful in revitalizing the downtown. She noted that the PBA was a driving force in the town's success in attracting and retaining local businesses. Mr. Willardson noted the Putnam downtown is smaller and laid out quite differently from Webster's downtown. They also do not allow mixed use such as housing on the upper floors which Webster does. Mr. Bourque added that the downtown buildings have quite a bit of turnover. Mr. Becker added that the vacancy rate can be high at times. Mr. Willardson noted that they dress their vacant storefronts with a decorative film / cover that reduces the visual impact and provides a cleaner look of vacant storefronts. This might be helpful in Webster. There was a site visit to Southbridge as well. This involved a walk along the Main Street area. It was noted that Southbridge has a lot of similar issues with vacancies and façade treatments. However, there is a larger sidewalk / public space area separating the buildings from the roadway which allows for more opportunities. Ms. Morgan is arranging for site visit / tour of Hudson, MA as well.

Signs: Mr. Willardson provided an update. An LED sign will be installed in the brick structure on the Town Hall front lawn. Mr. Bourque noted that, speaking as a private citizen and not as a Selectmen, that he was not a fan of that type of sign in historic downtown Webster. He cited Sturbridge as an example to successful signage that didn't require / involve electronic messages. Ms. Horan noted that a similar sign at the Dudley Town Hall wasn't all that bad. Mr. Willardson noted that the frequency and types of materials displayed on the Town Hall sign would be carefully managed.

A "Welcome to Webster" sign has been ordered and will be located on East Main Street / Route 16 directly across the street from the Price Chopper plaza. It will be approximately 8' x 14' and will be hand carved. Mr. Becker noted that it would be located on the Samuel Slater Memorial lot. Mr. Bourque noted that the full name of the lake would be included on the sign.

Downtown signs were discussed. Mr. Willardson noted that he was working with the property owners at 75 Main Street (the Metro PCS / Can Redemption Center building) and adjacent plaza at 63 Main Street to install a freestanding monument sign to serve both properties. A sign belonging to the property owner of 75 Main Street had been removed by the town without permission and this new sign will be replacing it. Mr. Willardson noted that he was having trouble reaching the property owner of 63 Main Street. Mr. Becker stated that he would provide him with additional contact information. Mr. Bourque asked about the

commitment to maintenance and lighting of the new sign. Mr. Willardson stated that the sign would be installed on Mr. Rheault's property, owner of the building at 75 Main Street, and that he would be responsible for maintenance and lighting the sign. Mr. Rheault plans to provide some nice landscaping under the sign once installed. Mr. Willardson noted that the owner of Pete's Tire is interested in improving his properties and that he would continue to work with him.

4. Role of the Economic Development Committee

Ms. McMahon distributed a handout that listed some thoughts on what the role of the Committee could or should be. The Committee reviewed it and made some suggestions. Of particular interest was the role of the members in mentoring and outreach to new businesses. Ms. Horan noted that the two local business associations also serve local businesses in this capacity. The Committee discussed ways to connect businesses with resources offered by the Town as well as the two business associations. It was agreed that sharing information about all available resources is important. Mr. Bourque recommended that the business outreach letter include contact information for the two local business associations – the Webster Dudley Business Association and the Webster Dudley Oxford Chamber of Commerce. Ms. McMahon asked the Committee to forward additional comments or edits to her before the next meeting.

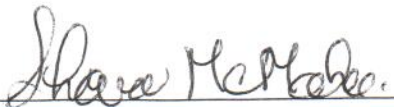
Ms. McMahon distributed a one page handout entitled "Balanced Scorecard" which is a tool that the Committee can use to advance goals, work items and provide reporting to the Town on economic development initiatives. She said she had reviewed the goals of the 2014 Master Plan and thought that this would be a helpful tool. Mr. Willardson noted that this would be helpful to Town staff in guiding day to day work items associated with economic development and making things better for the business community. Ms. McMahon recommended that the Committee adopt an annual plan based on this format. She asked that the Committee look it over, send her comments / ideas and that it be further discussed at the next meeting.

Mr. Bourque returned the conversation back to business certificates. He suggested that, once approved, that actual certificates be issued for businesses to post. This would be a reminder to them to renew every four years as well as showing the community that they have a valid certificate to conduct business. Ms. Horan agreed noting that other permits and certificates are required to be on display such as those issued by the building and health departments.

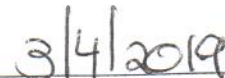
5. **Next Meeting** – March 4, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. Ms. Morgan will find a location and let everyone know. Mr. Bourque asked that the next meeting include downtown façade lighting as part of the agenda.

6. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Mr. Bourque, seconded by Mr. Becker. Motion passed unanimously, 5-0. The meeting was adjourned at 6:53 p.m.



Sharon McMahon, Chairwoman



Date

EXHIBITS:

All materials associated with agenda items and referenced in the meeting minutes can be viewed in the office of Planning & Economic Development in Webster Town Hall during regular business hours.