

**Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes – March 1, 2021**

A meeting of the Economic Development Committee was held on March 1, 2021 via remote participation pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order Imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place.

Present from the Committee: Vice Chairman Marc Becker, and Members John Milas, Andrew Jolda, Jessica Valby, Chris Charniak.

Present - Ex Officio Members: Town Administrator Doug Willardson, Director of Planning & Economic Development Ann Morgan, Director of Community Development Carol Cyr; Other: Recreation Director Carole Marchand

Mr. Becker called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m. Attendance of those members present was taken by roll call. Mr. Becker turned the meeting over to Mr. Willardson.

1. Action Items

- a. Draft Meeting Minutes – February 1, 2021. The draft minutes were tabled to the next meeting.
- b. Elect a new Chairperson: Motion to appoint Jessica Valby as Chairwoman made by Mr. Becker, seconded by Mr. Jolda. Discussion – Ms. Valby stated that she would be happy to serve. No additional comments from the other members. Motion passed unanimously 5-0 by roll call vote: Mr. Charniak - yes; Jolda – yes; Ms. Valby - yes; Mr. Charniak – yes; Mr. Becker – yes.

2. Old Business

- a. Update: Regional Microenterprise Program: Ms. Cyr noted that the program got off to a slow start but was picking up recently. A number of applicants were having trouble meeting some of the income qualifications. She noted that was working with Representative McKenna to see if they could go back to the State to see if something could be done to change this and other roadblocks keeping people from applying. Mr. Willardson stated that he would be happy to assist. Ms. Cry noted that additional outreach may be needed.

3. Staff Report

- a. Event Planning: Ms. Marchand reviewed the upcoming events such as the Easter Egg Hunt which has been modified from previous events to adjust for COVID 19 restrictions on gatherings which prohibits holding the event at the Beach. This year it will be a two week event where the eggs will be hidden throughout the Town with a few special eggs that, when found, will earn a special prize. Other events include a sidewalk chalk, concerts in July and August, a Shakespeare Plan in August.

Ms. Cyr asked if any events were planned for the Fourth of July. Ms. Marchand noted that, as of now, an a fireworks event was planned at the Beach for the Friday before the Fourth (7/2) but much would depend on what was allowed by the State regarding limitations on outdoor gatherings set by the State due to COVID 19. They have until April 1st to make a final decision. Mr. Willardson noted that the selection of a vendor for the fireworks would have to go out to bid first.

- b. Outdoor Dining: Ms. Morgan noted that current outdoor dining permits were reviewed by the Board of Selectmen and managed by the Mr. Willardson's office based on the Governor's orders relating to COVID 19 restrictions. Staff has discussed ways to create a process to allow for regular outdoor dining once the pandemic has passed. Outdoor dining creates a vibrant atmosphere but often times comes in

conflict with Zoning and other public safety regulations such as sidewalk vs. parking lot areas where there may be reduction of parking or pedestrian / vehicle conflicts. She noted that staff was looking for ways to create a process to create standards and to assess each request on a case by case basis. Until the pandemic restrictions are lifted the temporary outdoor seating process will remain in place.

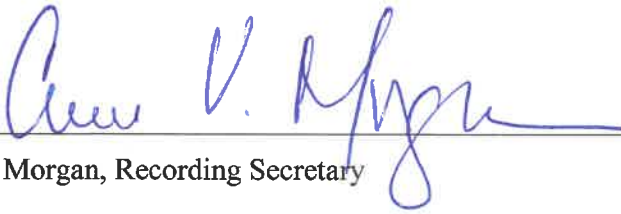
Ms. Valby asked if the Town could use some of the State program funding to develop parklets where outdoor dining could be accommodated. She expressed concern about outdoor dining on sidewalks where pedestrians may be forced to walk into the street to go around seating. State money could also be used to incentivize dining establishments to purchase attractive and appropriate safety barriers to surround outdoor seating. Mr. Willardson noted that the State program no longer provides grants and that money is no longer available. However, the Town will continue to work with those businesses who seek to provide outdoor dining. Ms. Cyr noted that every situation needs to be evaluated to ensure that public safety was protected.

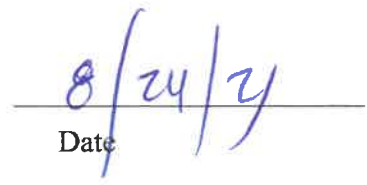
- c. Zoning District B5: Ms. Morgan reviewed two zoning changes that will be proposed for the May Town Meeting. The first is a change to the Business without Sewer (B5) zoning districts which would allow self-service storage facilities by special permit and site plan approval from the Planning Board. This change was considered when UHaul had approached the Town to repurpose that old K-Mart building on Worcester Road which has remained vacant for some time. Presently the Town's zoning by-laws do not allow this use other than in the B5A –Gore Business District. By requiring a special permit / site plan each future applicant would be required to address site specific issues and impacts to abutting properties. Mr. Milas and Ms. Cyr both noted this proposed change would be good.

Ms. Morgan noted that the second change would involve the removal of “within sewer” language from the Zoning by-law and the Zoning Map. The language is no longer applicable as most of the areas in Town now have sewer infrastructure available. This has led to a lot of confusion for people looking to open businesses in Town. The language cannot be removed without Town Meeting approval. The proposed change does not affect any other aspect of the Zoning by-law or map.

- d. Town Administrator Updates: Mr. Willardson noted the following:
1. Proposed UHaul at the old K-Mart Plaza – 70 Worcester Road – the site consists of two lots. UHaul is working on purchasing the lot that contains the old K-Mart store and the building next to it containing several vacant storefronts. If the change in zoning happens at Town Meeting they would then move forward with apply for the required special permit / site plan approval to refurbish the old K-Mart building into a self-service storage facility with a rental office / retail store. Plans for the other building are not known.
 2. Sondra Murphy has been hired as the new Library Director. She will start work on March 15th.
 3. Award letters for the Microenterprise Grant Program for the State have been sent out. The Town applied for more funding in this round.
 4. AARP has just released requests for applications for another round of grants. He thought that the Town could apply for funds to support downtown initiatives and asked that the Committee forward suggestions to him.
 5. The retail marijuana dispensary located at 70 Worcester Road, The Vault, is fully open and the parking lot has been mostly full. It is hoped that this activity will generate more business for the other stores in that plaza.
 6. Downtown / Town branding / marketing ideas. The economic development working group (staff and Chairperson of the Economic Development Committee) meet every other Thursday. This topic will be discussed at that meeting. All members of the EDC are welcome to join the meeting.

7. Physical improvements include the ongoing completion of the dog park, new benches, outdoor ping pong tables, planters and renovations to the Beach facilities.
 8. MassDOT continues with the planned improvements for the I-395 interchange which will include a new roundabout (aka rotary). Public hearings will be scheduled soon. Ms. Cyr noted that this could generate interest in the vacant lot abutting Long Subaru on Sutton Road which abuts the proposed project area.
 9. Mr. Willardson noted that someone called him seeing 5,000-10,000 square feet for the development of a marijuana research lab. Said use is allowed in the Industrial zoning district.
 10. Other: Mr. Jolda noted that Enterprise Car Rental is seeking site for an office with parking spaces for 20 cars. The Committee offered some suggestions for appropriate sites. Ms. Morgan noted that the zoning might be problematic at any site as that use is not specified in the Zoning By-law.
 11. Other: Ms. Valby noted that the new wine bar at 175 Main Street is hoping to open soon. The new owner of the building is looking to rent a small space to a company who wants to run a self-contained valet station which would be beneficial to customers as downtown parking is at a premium. It is possible that this service could be extended to other restaurants in the area by setting up another booth and hiring a professional valet company. Mr. Jolda agreed that parking can be problematic and that the idea was a good one.
4. **Next Meeting** – April 5, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. via remote participation / Zoom.
5. **Adjournment:** Motion to adjourn made by Mr. Jolda, seconded by Mr. Charniak. Motion passed unanimously 5-0 by roll call vote: Mr. Charniak - yes; Jolda – yes; Ms. Valby - yes; Mr. Charniak – yes; Mr. Becker - yes. The meeting was adjourned at 6:18 p.m.


Ann Morgan, Recording Secretary


Date

Minutes approved at the February 1, 2021 meeting.

EXHIBITS

- None.