

Committee Members

Zachary Knowlton, Chair
Khalid Abdi, Vice Chair
Richard Di Iulio, Member
Mark Schultz, Member
Cassandra McKenzie, Member
Jennifer Kendall, Member
Liam McDermott, Member



TOWN OF MEDWAY COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes

Thursday, June 17, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.
Sanford Hall

Members Present: Zach Knowlton, Chair; Khalid Abdi, Vice Chair; Mark Schultz, Cassandra McKenzie, Liam McDermott

Members Absent: Rich Di Iulio, Jennifer Kendall

Also Present:

Barbara J. Saint Andre, Director, Community and Economic Development
Katherine Mitchell, Recording Secretary

Chair Knowlton opened the meeting at 7:06 p.m.

New Business

Annual Reorganization

Defer until next meeting for all members to be present.

Update on Cultural Council Initiatives

Ms. Kendall did not attend the meeting. Chair Knowlton asked if any updates were known. Ms. Saint Andre noted that her hometown had a restaurant week and gave away \$100 gift certificates to winning participants. Mr. Schultz shared that the Center of Natick has neat art on display.

Assistance to business owners affected by COVID-19 emergency

Chair Knowlton asked for any other suggestions to figure out ways to help the business community. Ms. Saint Andre mentioned the legislation signed by the Governor, which extended outdoor dining and take out beverages for restaurants. There is more legislation still pending. Mr. McDermott mentioned in-town job fairs. Ms. Saint Andre stated it might be good to do this in conjunction with another event. Ms. Saint Andre said she would check with a contact. Chair Knowlton said we could investigate other communities who have done something similar to leverage their experience. Good way to play matchmaker as well as assist in staff shortages.

Chair Knowlton stated the committee should get in touch with owners of vacant commercial real estate again, to re-open the dialogue. Members can put them in contact with whomever can assist them, including potential zoning changes.

Reports

Master Plan Committee

Ms. McKenzie gave a summary of the town forum that was held recently – 60-80 people participated. The consultant utilized a virtual software and is looking into how to get better data for participation ratios. The consultant just recently sent the first deliverable, which is the existing conditions report – Phase 1 of the Master Plan – over 200 pages. Ms. McKenzie stated all members of the Master Plan (MP) Committee will read and provide feedback by July 15th. The next MP Committee meeting is June 28th. Ms. Saint Andre mentioned the consultant is doing an overview of the 200-page report at the MP Committee meeting – she suggested members watch to get a brief overview. The meeting will also be on cable tv. Mr. Abdi asked if the report is available to the public. Ms. Saint Andre stated this is just a draft and will be released after it goes through appropriate approvals. Ms. Saint Andre encouraged a lot of public involvement. Ms. McKenzie said they are putting together slides that she will be able to share eventually.

Use of Economic Data

Chair Knowlton stated Ms. Saint Andre emailed out some information for review from the 495/MetroWest Partnership, one is the Strength in Numbers 2021 and the other is the 2021 Employer Survey. Chair Knowlton stated both pieces were great and the employer survey was interesting. Most businesses that responded thought that the environment would improve or slightly improve. Most employers reported that some or all staff will return to the office. He noted that the town can leverage commercial growth to offset the residential tax burden. The natural inclination is to downsize commercial real estate. We should work with real estate investors and owners – commercial real estate may decrease over time. Large number of respondents planned to permanently shift some staff to remote work. Ms. McKenzie stated businesses in Boston are looking to incorporate suburban locations. People from the City may seek out suburban locations. Important challenges that businesses are facing – labor quality and skilled workforce. Mr. Abdi asked if employers are being selective. Companies are setting the bar high. Chair Knowlton said if you see a “help wanted” sign at a business within town, ask them what their challenges are.

Ms. Saint Andre stated the Director of 495 MetroWest indicated that it is releasing town specific numbers for the Strength in Numbers. She is going to continue to keep an eye out for this information. Mr. McDermott questioned where the Medway Animal Hospital can relocate. It was stated that the Central Business District rezoning did expand the commercial uses allowed in the zone. Veterinary hospital was one of them, so the Animal Hospital can hopefully find a suitable spot within town. He asked if there would be any zoning issues if commercial uses are looking for real estate. Ms. Saint Andre discussed many mixed used areas within town.

Planning and Economic Development Board

Mr. Di Iulio did not attend so there was no general update. Ms. McKenzie asked about battery storage. Ms. Saint Andre mentioned the town meeting vote. Also, the Town’s state representative Jeffrey Roy sponsored a webinar recently which provided information on battery storage by a panel of experts, both agreed it was very well done. Planning and Economic Development Board (Board) held another webinar – will be available on the livestream. Should be up soon. Ms. Saint Andre heard it was also well done. The Board is plunging in. They will use this information to hire a consultant to work with the Board. These two webinars were provided for free. Ms. Saint Andre said it’s a really interesting topic and they will continue to pursue this. They are looking to hire a consultant soon. Ms. McKenzie asked if there was a time crunch. Ms. Saint Andre mentioned the Town Meeting vote deadline of October 15, 2021.

Update on Business Resource Guide

Ms. Saint Andre submitted the request for funding for this under the Community One Stop for Growth. She said they will likely not hear back until the Fall. Sent a quote from SourceLink – they are enthusiastic. The Medway Business Council might be interested in partnering with us on the Resource Guide.

Approval of Meeting Minutes from May 20, 2021

On a motion made by Mr. Abdi; seconded by Ms. McKenzie, the Economic Development Committee voted unanimously to approve the meeting minutes from May 20, 2021.

It was noted that zoning now allows food trucks in the Central Business District with a special permit from the Planning and Economic Development Board. Ms. Saint Andre stated Medway Plaza has proposed an area for food trucks, to bring more traffic to the businesses. Members discussed Rocky's grand opening this Saturday.

Next Meeting: July 15, 2021

On a motion made by Ms. McKenzie; seconded by Mr. Abdi, the Economic Development Committee voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Katherine Mitchell, Recording Secretary

Edited by

Barbara J. Saint Andre, Director
Community and Economic Development