

HOPKINTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MINUTES

January 22, 2024

The meeting was held at the Hopkinton Town Hall, 1 Town House Road, Hopkinton, RI 02833 scheduled for 4:30 p.m. The meeting was in-person.

Present: Chair Sarah Steverman, Etta Zasloff, James Chabot, and Town Council Liaison Robert Burns.

The meeting was called to order by the Chair Sarah Steverman at 4:20 PM. Jim Chabot led the Pledge and a moment of silence.

The minutes of Nov. 27, 2023 were approved on a motion by Chabot, seconded by Etta Zasloff.

Steverman opened the meeting by reading aloud the description of the EDC from the Town website: *"The Economic Development Commission is responsible for studying, investigating, promoting, and encouraging the preservation, expansion, and sound development in the Town of industry, business, commerce, and tourism. The Commission shall be considered the economic development agency in the Town."*

Steverman then asked Robert Burns, the Town Council Liaison to the EDC Commission, to comment on the role of the EDC to the Council. Mr. Burns suggested that the EDC reach out to the community and beyond for ways to increase the tax base of Hopkinton. "We don't want WalMart, but we do need something. Our tax payers are screaming at their tax bills," he said at the beginning. He identified some critical economic questions he has about the Town: What properties are available? How are they zoned? What type of businesses would work here, given our existing infrastructure?

Jim Chabot asked if the intent, as Burns stated, is to look at where the town should be going and advise the Council, as we do that? Burns agreed and said that the EDC was an Advisory Board to the Council and that the Council would listen to recommendations that the Commission made.

Etta Zasloff asked about the established process for initiating a development project in Hopkinton. Burns answered with 1) Contact the Town Clerk with intent 2) Appear before the Zoning Board 3) Appear before the Planning Board, 3) Bring the project to the Council for final approval. Zasloff continued, "Is this process readily available in writing somewhere, like the website? Is there a development packet to guide a prospective developer on this process?"

Steverman checked the website and could find no specifics to guide the overall development process, and posed that as a beginning point for the Commission to consider.

Zasloff suggested that the Commission might conduct an informal study of the town to be used to guide economic development recommendations to the Council. She listed some categories that we could research: population trends and projections, analysis of existing businesses, availability of the capacity of all utilities, especially water, regulations that impact business development, tourism potential, community aspirations and priorities. Burns agreed this would be a good place for the EDC to start.

In Open Forum, Joe Moreau reviewed his move to Hopkinton from Coventry in 2000, seeking a rural lifestyle. In 2018 he resisted a zoning change that would allow solar array developments on vacant property near his

home. He informed the EDC that most of the vacant land in Hopkinton is zoned Rural, Farm, Residential -80 (RFR-80). In addition, he commented that the Council now has zoning for solar only to be constructed on contaminated land, eliminating the commercial/manufacturing category.

Discussion ensued about some specific avenues for economic development in Hopkinton, mostly focusing on tourism development. Burns described a beneficial arrangement that the Town of Exeter had with the sport of Motocross. Moreau proposed investigating Food Truck events, like Richmond holds. Working with the Hopkinton Recreation Department for such events has not worked in the past, but stands as an opportunity to pursue.

Zasloff suggested that our Chair appear at a Town Council meeting as soon as possible to speak at Open Forum about the reactivation of the Hopkinton EDC for the purpose of getting into the minutes and out to the public that we are working and are seeking input. Steverman agreed to attend and speak at the Feb. 5, 2024 Town Council meeting. Other members offered to also attend in support.

Steverman expressed her interest in joining the EDC as an objective, unbiased, interested resident who was raised in and plans to spend a long time in the community and therefore hoping for some needed responsible economic development in the future. In addition, she expressed that if the agenda goes personal or self-serving she will no longer participate. It is her hope to maintain objectivity and open-mindedness with this commission.

In addition, Steverman noted that where most top performing RI schools ratings diminished this year, Ashaway Elementary School received a top score, 5 star rating, and wants to keep in mind that there is a correlation between successful schools and high property value/demand and therefore new opportunities for economic growth.

The discussion turned to criticizing the Chariho School District Administration for misleading the taxpayers on comparing the actual cost of the "Newer and Fewer" plan to the "Safe, Warm, and Dry" option. While admitting that this actual cost comparison needs to be made clear, Zasloff expressed the opinion that the School Committee's Job is to administer the schools for our children and the Town Council's job is to provide the resources to support that basic need. She suggested we need to either stay focused on reasonable economic development to increase the Town's tax base or accept the consequences of rising tax bills.

The next meeting of the EDC was set for Monday, February 12, 2024, 3:00 PM in Town Hall Chambers.

Meeting adjourned at 5:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Etta Zasloff
Hopkinton EDC Secretary