

Town of Bolton
Economic Development Committee (EDC)
Minutes to EDC Meeting
Monday January 11, 2011
Town Hall, Bolton
Draft

Meeting televised via BATCO
PUBLIC FORUM

Attendees:

Jennifer Atwood Burney, Helene Demmer, Stephen George, John Karlon,	Dina Mazzola, Lysa Miller, Chris Nelson, Eileen Schomp, Bruce Slater
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Non-member attendees: *Need list from Jennifer Atwood Burney*

Next meeting: February 7, 2011, 7:30pm Town Hall or Public Safety Building if available.

Introduction:

Chris Nelson, EDC Chairman, opened the meeting, which was the EDC's first Open Forum, by welcoming everyone and stating the EDC was faced with many civic challenges: 1. Filling vacant commercial space 2. Looking at revenue strategies for funding projected operating budgets over the next 10 years 3. Operating within the framework of balancing community character and quality of life.

He pointed out that the EDC was formed over a year ago and reviewed the several projects we have been working on: gathering data, launching a town survey, and building the EDC's website. In reference to the survey, Chris said he did not want to debate/discuss specific questions in order to avoid biases on people who did not take the survey yet, but may be watching this open forum from home.

Once we get the results from the survey the EDC will be able to use it in the formation of the Economic Development Action Plan – which will be recommendations with ideas and suggestions presented to the Town of Bolton. All information will be presented numerous times before the BOS and probably Town Meeting. This was just a presentation of things to come.

Audience Comments/Questions: asked people to introduce themselves

Dave Lindsay (Berlin Road): Dave said he took the survey and overall thought it was good. However he cautioned the EDC to utilize the demographic questions to normalize the responses to represent the make-up of the town. For instance if the responses were from predominately male citizens and the population of Bolton was 50/50 male-female, the results may be statistically mis-leading. Same thing would apply to age groups. Later in the evening Leigh Shanny indicated that was her intent but also would depend on ensuring a high percentage of resident participation.

John Balco (Green Road): Tagging on to Dave Lindsay's point, he said statistic courses do matter and was interested in seeing how the individual results relate to statistical relevance.

Burt Shnitzler (Meadow Road): Was frustrated with the survey since he felt the survey was biased towards a pre-determined answer.

Response was that the committee worked very hard to make sure that bias was taken out of the survey and the intent was to listen to the voice of the people. The survey is not an end-game, we are in the early stages of information gathering. People have their own opinions and still would like to hear from the people.

Leigh Shanny (Wilder Road): Commented on the development of the survey and told the audience that one did not have to answer all the questions in order to submit. People did not seem to believe Leigh, but she was the one who developed the survey and knew the construction.

Fred Freidus (Wattaquodock Road): Wanted to know why the EDC did not send hard copies of the survey with the census. He later wanted to ensue that the mission was to improve the economic climate, just not focus on raising revenue – that improving the climate would by definition raise revenue.

Response was that we had a cost constraint and could not send hard copies of the survey – in addition that the EDC wanted to have the survey automated in order to tabulate the results. And the group basically agreed with his comment in regards to economic climate and revenue.

Steve Bing (Main St.): Was frustrated, he felt if we were conducting an opinion survey then some of the questions were really testing facts and not opinion – in particular he wanted to discuss questions #3 & #10.

Response was that we could not talk about specific questions and if he did not want to answer a specific question, he did not have to answer it in order to submit.

Dina Mazzola commented that we started out with a much longer survey and went through iterations in order to make it user friendly and simple for Bolton residents. The committee felt that we presented a good survey which would be able to capture the opinions of what a majority of residents want in their town.

Roland Ochsenbein (Main St): Wanted to know what other activities would the EDC be doing?

Chris responded that we would be doing follow-up surveys if they were warranted and we would be seeking feedback on the process and survey itself.

Web-site development

Lysa Miller reviewed the web-site purpose and status. She thought the website would help attract new business to Bolton, be able to work with business owners and increase the visibility. The content is developed and is now working on the layout and design. Still trying to collect photos – hopefully be able to launch in mid-February.

Bolton Office Park status

Will probably be bringing on a tenant to lease 8k+ sqft space. Owners will be doing some renovations and will probably be having an open house in the summer time. Need to market to the community.

John Balco (Green Rd): wanted to know how the EDC was going to market the town.

Chris Nelson's response was he wanted the EDC/town to be proactive. The website would only help if people know about it, so, communication, communication, communication. E-mail – commercial realtors, outward communications, etc.

Burt Shnitzler and John Balco (Meadow Road): Need to understand what types of businesses do we want and generally what \$'s do they bring in –

Response lead to the data collection discussion -

Data Collection: Helene Demmer updated the group on the status of the data collection, in particular the methodology in determining the comparable towns to be used in the Action Plan. Working with the consultant Michelle Ciccolo, who was Bolton's interim Town Administrator a few years ago, in addition to being a MA town planner consultant, Helene Demmer and Jennifer Atwood Burney were able to gather data collected from multiple State of MA sources – and created a matrix. Trying to use towns with similar infrastructure (i.e. well and septic), tried to eliminate towns which were statistically different in three categories. Looked at: population, income per capita, median family income, EQV/capita, Avg. tax bill, commercial tax rate, operating budget, size and school enrollment. Narrowed down to: Bolton, Boxborough, Littleton, Harvard, Stow, Lancaster, Lincoln, Carlisle, Sherborn, Berlin, Boxford, Boylston, Mendon, Princeton, Rowley and Topsfield.

Goal will be to actually communicate with the towns and try to understand their major business contributors (determining the types of businesses) and the impact, both positive and negative on the towns.

Town Planner and The EDC: Jennifer Atwood Burney, Bolton's Town Planner, explained that she learned from the many seminars she attended that successful towns have an established point of contact. When she took her job, she felt her role as Town Planner should be a critical point of contact for any one who may have interest in looking into the Town of Bolton. Since that time, most developers/business people interested in coming to the Town, seek out Jennifer. In addition, her perseverance in applying for and getting Bolton to become an Economic Target Area (ETA), has provided Bolton with

tools to attract businesses through tax incentives. In addition, reaching out to businesses, like in the case of Firematics, proved to be one of the main factors in the company's decision to move to Bolton. In addition, Bolton is able to utilize the State website for marketing Bolton Office Park and Future Electronics space.

Jonathan Keep (Main St): Need to point out amenities the town has to offer. Point out what we have in town.

Ken Zito (Berlin Rd): Is there confirmation for completing the survey?

Response that there is a small "thank you" sent upon completion.

EDC Board decided that officers would be determined after Bolton's Town Meeting, versus at the anniversary of the 1 st EDC meeting.
