

TOWN OF STOW  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
AND INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION

Minutes of the January 22, 2015 Economic Development and Industrial Commission Meeting

Members Present: Mannie Afonso, Andrew Bluestein, Bob Collings, Tom Farnsworth, Serena Howlett, Kevin Whalen

Non-Voting Associate Member:

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm

**Review of Meeting Minutes**

*Bob Collings motioned to approve the minutes as written.*

*Tom Farnsworth seconded.*

**VOTED: (6-0) Unanimously in favor. (Mannie Afonso, Andrew Bluestein, Bob Collings, Tom Farnsworth, Serena Howlett, Kevin Whalen)**

**Discussion of Survey**

Kevin Whalen discussed his conversations with potential survey respondents at the shopping center and is looking forward to getting some feedback. Mannie Afonso discussed his conversations as well, entering some questions into the record based on the feedback he was given.

Bob Collings said holding a public meeting and inviting some business owners may be a good process for organizing a questionnaire.

Serena Howlett asked about the curb appeal on Great Road. Bob Collings said to turn it into a question you can ask businesses, regarding what steps could be taken to increase customers.

Tom Farnsworth asked what kind of survey the group may want to distribute and what specific information they would like to correct? Certain types of people are more likely to focus on certain types of questions, such as different types of questions.

*Serena Howlett motioned to hold a public forum to introduce the EDIC and discuss opportunities to interact with the business community.*

*Mannie Afonso seconded.*

**VOTED: (6-0) Unanimously in favor.**

Jesse Steadman said he would check the Town Hall schedule.

### **Potential Question Brainstorm:**

Bob Collings said the 495 survey shows a variety of potentially useful questions. Bob Collings suggested creating a series of preliminary questions offering the following brainstorm to get the process going.

- What are the best attractions for doing business in Stow?
- What are the detriments?
- What would you change?
- Do you plan on increasing the size of your business, decrease. Why?
- Have you recommended doing business in Stow to others? Have you recommended against doing business in Stow?
- Do you know of anyone interested in doing business in Stow?
- How would you rate the different Town Boards in terms of helpfulness in starting a business?
- Do you have recommendations or suggestions?
- Would you be OK with sharing those recommendations?

Mannie Afonso said that one important aspect is simply knowing one another's business or promote each other's business. Bob Collings said there is a nice mix of businesses in Stow. Mannie Afonso said it would be nice to have a forum to ask who they can look to for certain businesses.

Mannie Afonso said that before we find the questions how will they be delivered? Perhaps by mail and online? Jesse Steadman said the Planning Department has had a good response rate with online surveys.

Serena Howlett said she had been in contact with a few past members of the Stow Business Association. Serena Howlett said she spoke with Dave Augusta who she can ask about possibly visiting an EDIC meeting. Serena Howlett also asked who could potentially speak at the meeting to raise the profile and attendance. The Commission discussed the potential of approaching Greg Hill, Dave Augusta, or a local news anchor or meteorologist. Bob Collings said holding a forum may be a chance to make sure that the Commission is asking applicable questions. Bob Collings said that he will collect the survey questions from various members of the Commission for redistribution at a later meeting.

### **Budget**

Karen Kelleher said she spoke with the Town Administrator regarding a potential budget. He suggested the Commission provide some input into what kind of budget they would need.

The Commission discussed that a figure of \$1500 would help cover the costs of mailings, meeting preparation and perhaps some basic web development.

### **Master Plan Survey Discussion**

Bob Collings asked about the status of Public Water supply discussions in Lower Village. Karen Kelleher said a piece of Town owned property is available, and at this moment a group of businesses are developing an agreement to create a public water supply on the property.

Kevin Whalen asked about seeing the responses to the Master Plan Survey. Jesse Steadman said he will email the members the verbal responses for their review.

Tom Farnsworth said that there may be some questions that they can modify to use on their own survey. Bob Collings said that it would be interesting to see the actual responses.

### **Draft Press Release**

The Commission discussed editing the draft press release to note the upcoming public forum and then make a second pitch to the Stow Independent to build notice of the forum. The Commission noted that it will be incumbent on the business owners to get the word out as well. A poster may be useful to help publicize.

### **Business Map**

The Commission discussed whether a future business map should include every business or whether it could be based on brick and mortar businesses to save space. Bob Collings asked about Bose and what their plans are. Jesse Steadman gave a brief update.

Tom Farnsworth said it would be helpful to have a map of the zoning districts.

Serena Howlett described that Stow has barely a blurb in the Merrimack Valley Guide. Serena Howlett said that it may be helpful to identify such advertising opportunities and relate the opportunities to local businesses. Serena Howlett said it may be a pretty good idea to get involved in such brochures to get the word out on Stow.

Bob Collings said it would be helpful to reach out to those business owners that are trying to attract business. Bob Collings, said the Commission may want to particularly reach out to those businesses that have resources and hear from them. Karen Kelleher said that on the Bolton website they have listed the amount of vacancies of and square footage for certain properties.

## **Review/Understand the Process for Business Starting in Stow**

Tom Farnsworth said that he would like to take some time to think about what it would take to start a business in Stow. What is the experience really like? Bob Collings said it is significantly different to build a structure, rather than move into a space. Tom asked for experiences on opening a business from other members of the Commission.

Mannie Afonso said he had to visit several departments to open a storefront. It would work better if there was a checklist that could help him know who he needs to see in Town Hall. It is nice to have a packet and a Department that can put the packet together.

Bob Collings said that the Hudson Traffic Committee helped get his application on the right track.

### **Business List**

Jesse Steadman circulated an ongoing list of businesses in Stow. The Commission noted that there are few businesses that were left off of the initial list.

*Dr. Kraus – Dentist near Stow House of Pizza*

*Family Federal Loan*

*Lombardo screening on South Acton*

*Trophy business in South Acton*

Serena Howlett asked how supporting franchises fits into the mix of their goals. The Commission agreed that although businesses are franchises, they are often individually owned and should be treated as any other business in Stow.

*Tom Farnsworth motioned to adjourn*

*Andrew Bluestein seconded.*

**VOTED (6-0) all in favor.**

**Adjourned.**

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Jesse Steadman**