

TOWN OF STOW
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION

Minutes of the January 8, 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

Appointees of the Economic Development and Industrial Commission were sworn in as official members by the Town Clerk and given informational packets on the Open Meeting Law and Conflict of Interest Law.

The Commission reviewed the Mission Statement for edits. Bob Collings asked about the meaning of liaison in the Mission Statement. Karen Kelleher explained that it is more of a contact point between the Commission and Town businesses. Bob Collings said that some communities have a contact point to be able to provide a wide array of information.

Bob Collings motioned to accept the mission statement.

Tom Farnsworth seconded.

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

The Board discussed the appointment of a chair

*Bob Collings moved to appoint Tom Farnsworth as Chair and Andrew Bluestein as Vice Chair
Mannie Afonso Seconded.*

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

Member Roles/Responsibilities

Staff explained that guidelines for meeting interactions can be good to help the Commission interact with each other. Bob Collings added that issues that come up often in groups include guidelines around interruption, respect and confidentiality, adding that it would be good to come forward with guidelines from each member. Bob Collings said that communication styles can influence styles and candidness and cooperation can make for a more efficient group setting.

Tom Farnsworth noted that this committee will need to be able to make some of their own rules of conduct and direction. Tom Farnsworth said that it would be important to understand the priority direction. Tom Farnsworth suggested thinking of the priority areas for next meeting to better know how to structure their meetings in terms of frequency. Jesse Steadman added that depending on group member's strengths and interests, it is possible to work on more than one project at once.

Bob Collings suggested that twice a month may be helpful to kickstart the process. Reaching out to existing businesses with a questionnaire would help provide a base of information to help understand what perspective businesses may need. Bob Collings said that such a process would be based on data and therefore more justifiable. Bob Collings said the questionnaire could be modified and then strengthened to try to reach out to all of the businesses. Kevin Whalen said that delivering a survey seems like a great start.

Bob Collings said that a pre consultation discussion would be a good way to test out questions and determine which businesses should be approached at the outset.

Andrew Bluestein said that having tangible targets and goals are an important component to keep the process moving forward. Andrew Bluestein said that a survey could be an important step. Karen Kelleher said that the group could send questions to staff to be compiled. Kevin Whalen said that it would be an important step to include a thank you letter as well.

Tom Farnsworth said he likes to have a plan laid out so he can see where projects are going. Tom Farnsworth said that he wants to be sure that they know what the Commission will do with data that they collect, in terms of goals and defining roles. Tom Farnsworth said if the survey helps to move the Board in a certain direction that would be helpful progress.

Bob Collings said the first step is to be able to get to know the businesses that are in Stow. After that, he continued, you reach out for the perspective of realtors and owners of the shopping center, for instance, the people who have a solid understanding of current prospects.

Karen Kelleher said that the Town of Bolton outlined vacancies and helped market properties. Bob Collings said that the Assabet Valley Chamber of Commerce is a group that may be able to shed light on the issues.

Survey

The group agreed that it would be helpful to compile survey questions to uncover the positive experiences that led businesses to choose to come to Stow as well as the concerns.

Serena Howlett said it will be important to think about supply and demand and how that affects attraction of businesses.

Bob Collings asked how strong an appetite do the Selectmen have to invite new business to Town understanding the potential impacts. He expanded, asking what is their thought on the tradeoff between new revenue and impacts to neighborhoods. Tom Farnsworth said that there is going to be a cost benefit between the pros and cons for any new development.

Andrew Bluestein said that he also likes the focus of helping existing businesses as well as the new ones, and believes the group can have a quicker impact than he believed. Andrew Bluestein said there are easy things that can be done to attract business to the Stow businesses through social media. He said that is one example of tangible economic development that can work.

Bob Collings noted that several members of the Board are very results oriented and each wants to make a difference and get results.

The Commission discussed how to start a website, agreeing that it is important to look into the different attributes of websites and platforms. How would a social media policy work for the group? What would the rules be? Bob Collings said that businesses can be approached and asked if they would like to be on the website. Andrew Bluestein said an open online forum would be a great way to get the survey out as well.

Bob Collings motioned to build and establish an Economic Development and Industrial Commission website to be linked to the Stow Webpage for lists of Stow businesses with links to their websites.

Andrew Bluestein seconded.

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

Look into local web site company to see if someone would donate time. The Independent could also be very helpful and they may be amenable to the kind of information that the Commission would like to Disseminate. Karen Kelleher noted that an initial press release could be helpful to express the intent and enthusiasm of the Commission as well as ideas and dates of meeting, etc. Bob Collings said it could be helpful to get the word out. Serena Howlett said some of her vision was about growing the Town as a whole, rather than only filling out space.

Bob Collings said that public water supplies are going to be a big issue for any new development in Stow. Bob Collings said that some clarification is needed due to the fact that it could be a huge deterrent for incoming businesses. Bob Collings said it would be helpful to have clarification on what is actually needed from DEP and what the implications are on the land use.

Karen Kelleher noted that she did ask the Town Administrator about the possibility of a budget for the commission. Karen Kelleher said she will remind Bill Wrigley of the discussion.

The Commission discussed the frequency of meeting, agreeing that in the early stages, meeting every two weeks may help to get the group up and running.

Bob Collings motioned that the Economic Development and Industrial Commission meet the second and fourth Thursdays of each month.

Mannie Afonso Seconded.

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

The Commission discussed topics for the next agenda, agreeing to the following action items:

- Review of Survey Questions
- Review of Master Plan Survey
- Review of Draft Press Release
- Review of Business Map from Serena
- Discussion of Initial website

Richard Eckel arrived at the meeting.

Richard Eckel apologized for the late arrival and said that he hopes the group can find ways to build on the destination aspect of the Town's brand, such as sponsoring an apple festival or finding creative ways to bolster the recreation and golf activities in Town.

Bob Collings motioned to adjourn
Meeting Adjourned 8:50 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Jesse Steadman