

TOWN OF STOW
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION

Minutes of the June 11, 2015 Economic Development and Industrial Commission Meeting

Members Present: Bob Collings, Serena Howlett, Mannie Afonso, Andrew Bluestein

Andrew Bluestein called the meeting to order at 7:10 pm

Sara Cressy – Assabet Valley Chamber of Commerce

Sarah Cressy described her work history leading up to her time with Hudson on the Main Street program. Sarah Cressy noted her job was to convince businesses to pay a membership fee to support businesses throughout Hudson. Eventually, she described that the organization merged to form the Assabet Valley Chamber of Commerce consisting of 440 members from micro to large businesses, with non-profit members included. Currently the Chamber has about 25 Stow members with a decent amount of home businesses. Sarah Cressy said the Chamber offers breakfast, lunch and evening network events to allow business owners a chance to meet one another.

Bob Collings asked about the early stages of growing membership in the Hudson Main Street program. Sara Cressy said back then with no internet you had to go face to face with people and convince them that a year to year investment is what they are signing up for. Sarah Cressy said it was important in the beginning to have clear vision that if enough people could get together they could accomplish a mission. Sarah Cressy said she had to consistently hone in on who is the Main Street Program, why are they here and what do they want to accomplish. To get business owners involved you have to be persistent in your pitch.

Sarah Cressy said Hudson's charter essentially defines the mission of the economic development commission. As chartered members, the commission is there to ensure that there is industry. Keeping properties full is important to the tax base because of the higher commercial split tax base in Hudson. Sarah Cressy said for Stow, being a less industrialized town, Gleasondale is a big industrial question mark. Gleasondale, apples, tourism, honey pot and Collings Foundation are big traffic draws for Stow. If a group such as the EDIC can tie together the tourism aspects of golf, agriculture, and other activities with the quality of life aspects that are a big draw for the Town, it could be an effective approach. Sarah Cressy said she could envision a great brochure that draws people to the region rather than just the Town, adding that it would be most effective to include several towns that make up a contiguous region in such an effort.

Regarding economic development specifically, Sarah Cressy said she works with the Town to be as friendly and as welcoming for the Town as possible. Bob Collings asked about what specific accomplishments can be cited for creating business friendliness in the Town?

One of the big things is to get volunteers involved with groups such as the EDIC. Sarah Cressy said it is important for a certain amount of government at business functions and businesses as government functions. Sarah Cressy says since she began in Hudson, she has advocated for hanging signs in Hudson, worked on the rail trail, sat on the Board of the Arts Alliance, worked on downtown revitalization and parking issues in Hudson and Maynard and with the Internal Traffic Committee in Hudson. Building relationships with Town Officials goes a long way.

Karen Kelleher asked how to sell vacant spaces given the tourism traffic. Sara Cressy said that working with landlords and commercial brokers and having an inventory is important. What does the Town have, what is available? Sarah Cressy added that in her opinion it is not as productive to advocate for specific business but the big issues that effect the business environment and community. Why do you want economic development and how much of it?

The Commission discussed the trend in Stow of wanting to attract business to Stow but not wanting the traffic. Sarah Cressy said that in Maynard they were able to negotiate staggered work times at the mill, coupled with changing the timing of the lights to lessen the burden of peak time traffic.

Members of the Commission discussed that in Lower Village there is movement to drill a test well. Sarah Cressy said when you can get a group of people together to build trust and consensus, things get moving.

Hudson approved 5 additional liquor licenses so licenses weren't transferred from downtown to the new development on the hill. In Maynard, it is a bring your own beer environment right now which is difficult to make viable.

The Commission and Sarah Cressy discussed the growth of franchises in the downtown area in Hudson. Sarah Cressy said people were upset about franchises in the downtown but you need a diversity of options to welcome people with family and those with more money. Dominoes and Rite Aid both perform traffic counts and now they are showing up in Hudson.

Sarah Cressy said they have effective sign bylaws in Hudson, although not everyone likes them. They have allowed the historic district to create a unity of character.

Bob Collings asked what businesses believe their biggest challenges are? The biggest issue is transportation and being able to get people in and out of the development. A strength/weaknesses/opportunities/threats (SWOT) analysis is important. Make it easy for people to move through your community. In Maynard you have to find a way to lower price, you have to find other ways to be competitive with Hudson.

Another issue said Sarah Cressy is time management. Today everyone is so connected,

time management has become an issue with people, and communicating a public hearing several times and getting people together one by one if need be is crucial.

The group discussed the importance of Hudson Light and Power in the region.

Sarah Cressy said Intel is moving their manufacturing out, since small chip manufacturers are too small, and have not reinvested the space in a decade. HL&P's Yakoff devised a way to create a savings so that event though even half of Intel is being used they can supplement for two years to not allow costs to rise in the interim. Intel only had 60 employees from Hudson. The other 700 workers were R&D jobs. It will be a clean parcel right at the 290 connection, which could be a great location for the right tenant in the future.

The Commission discussed with Sarah Cressy the current movement toward collective work spaces such as the Wheelhouse in West Concord.

Survey Update

Jesse Steadman noted that to date the Commission has received 9 surveys. The Commission noted that they met with David Horatio, a videographer at Springfest that should be followed up with.

Member Updates

Andrew Bluestein said he visited Boxboro Road near the airport and believes from a safety standpoint the road could be widened. Andrew Bluestein said he was surprised at the amount of businesses that are at the airport and fixes to the road could be a viable way to draw more traffic to the businesses. The Commission discussed whether similar conditions on roads across Stow would set a precedent for further road widening.

Karen Kelleher said she could see going to the Town for an easement but not necessarily a widening of the road. The Commission discussed it could be a way for them to take a position on an economic development issue. Some discussed that the timing for the request to widen the road with the developers seems off. Mannie Afonso asked what kind of action would be taken in Boxboro?

Serena Howlett noted she too visited the site but has no judgement on whether widening the road would help the airport. The over 55 neighborhood will have a lot of traffic from trucks and deliveries, and the road is not great for any of the users. The Commission discussed if it would be appropriate to have an order of condition to improve the roadway. There was a traffic study done at the time of the initial permitting for Ridgewood at Stow, Karen Kelleher added.

The Commission discussed whether they support making a comment to the Planning Board that they offer a condition to make the road safer. Some members agreed that improving the area could help the development, the airport and improve a safety issue.

Andrew Bluestein moved to send a letter to the Planning Board that they consider a condition for safety improvements to Boxboro Road as part of the Ridgewood at Stow Special Permit Modification.

VOTED: (3-1) in favor – Mannie Afonso, Andrew Bluestein, Bob Collings in favor; Serena Howlett opposed.

Andrew Bluestein said when others are available, it would be good to get to a once a month schedule for the summer. Bob Collings said he would not want to pull back with the momentum on the survey.

Meeting Adjourned.