

**STURBRIDGE PLANNING BOARD
MINUTES OF
TUESDAY, JUNE 26, 2013**

Ms. Gibson-Quigley called the meeting of the Planning Board to order at 6:30 PM.
The following members were present:

Present: Russell Chamberland
Heather Hart
Sandra Gibson-Quigley, Chair

Also Present: Jean M. Bubon, Town Planner
Alexandra McNitt, Executive Director of Central Mass South Chamber of
Commerce

Absent: Charles Blanchard
James Cunniff
Penny Dumas
Susan Waters

Ms. Gibson-Quigley opened the meeting and read the agenda. The sole purpose of this meeting was to allow Alexandra McNitt the opportunity to provide an overview of recent efforts of the Regional Economic Development Organization (REDO). A quorum of the Planning Board was not present and no official action was taken by the Board. This meeting was to allow Alix McNitt the opportunity to host this meeting and to invite all member towns in the region to attend.

Ms. McNitt explained the REDO organization. She stated that this REDO is comprised of all the communities within the Central Mass South Chamber of Commerce including Brimfield, Brookfield, Charlton, East Brookfield, Holland, North Brookfield, Southbridge, Spencer, Sturbridge, Wales, and West Brookfield as well as the towns of Warren, Webster, Dudley and Oxford. The last four communities were added in an effort to meet the population requirements set forth by MOBD's Regional Economic Development Organization Grant Program. She noted that even with adding the additional communities, the population requirement was still not met and this group was matched with a Blackstone Valley REDO for the purposes of the grant. The overall group was still a few thousand short on population, but thanks to the efforts of Senator Brewer, the grant was received.

The grant proposal consisted of several components including:

- o Research and Initial Brand Development
- o Planning and Education
- o Continuation of Development

The website and branding was developed by Smith and Jones. Since a representative could not be present this evening, a video was developed and that was played at this time. The video highlighted the branding that was created with the tag line "Central Mass South – Get in the Middle of it All", and the website that was created. The website highlights each community, has testimonials and photos, and commercial and industrial property listings at this time.

After the video, Ms. McNitt explained that if the grant is received this year it is hoped that the website can be expanded to include job postings and additional information.

Ms. McNitt then discussed the School to Career Program and how important it was to the employers in the region to continue to foster relationships with the vocational schools and community colleges. A large impediment to employers is finding qualified individuals to fill open positions when they arise. She also discussed the goal of holding a Mass Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Boot Camp next year if the grant is received. She explained that this two week program costs \$15,000 to operate. The potential applicants are carefully screened to be sure that the program is the right match for them and it is estimated that it takes at least 100 attendees at an information session, to be able to select 12 individuals for the program. Through this intensive boot camp, students learn shop math, blueprint reading, metrology and other workplace readiness skills. Participants receive a certificate of completion and there is a very high success rate of placing those students in quality manufacturing positions after completion. It is hoped that this program could be offered in the Fall and then be able to continue the program on a regular cycle to fall just after graduation occurs. Ms. McNitt is keeping close ties with school guidance counselors since this track could be very beneficial for those students not going on to college.

Ms. McNitt then explained the mini MOBD assistance offered to businesses within the region. She explained that there are many state programs available to help local businesses; the problem is that the programs are not promoted very well. Her organization has been meeting with businesses one on one to help match programs with company needs. This has been a very successful venture. She highlighted two success stories; one being AO Eyewear making the decision to move operations from China back to this area. A Mass Development Loan Guarantee was the tool that enabled that to occur since a \$1.1 million dollar piece of equipment is required to make that move possible. Another success is working with Southbridge Sheet Metal to help them increase productivity levels and efficiency which in turn translated into new hires. They have an additional meeting next week to see if they can work with Mass Development for some help in acquiring new equipment which will also allow for additional hiring. She stated that there are lots of great programs; the issue is just getting the word out there.

She closed by saying that basically this REDO is focused on promoting economic development in a way that makes sense for each community. This is not a one size fits all approach to development and the goal is to help each community develop in the manner they desire and in a way that is consistent with the Master Plans.

Board members questioned grant cycles, website updates, and organization of property listings. Ms. McNitt indicated that this year the grants are due on July 5, 2013; she is hopeful to hear by the end of summer. The website will be maintained by the Chamber now that it is developed. Whether the site can be expanded will be contingent upon grant and private funding. She will also investigate the suggestion that properties be broken into Commercial and Industrial listings. The Board commended her on the work of the group and the final product and asked that she keep them up to date on progress.

On a motion made by Russell Chamberland, seconded by Heather Hart and voted 3-0 the meeting adjourned at 7:08 pm.