

**Town of Sharon  
Economic Development Committee  
Virtual Meeting via Zoom**

**EDC Meeting Minutes  
9/14/20**

**EDC Members**

Rob Maidman, Acting Chair	Alan Lury
Jim Berish	Pasqualino Pannone
Eli Hauser	Xander Shapiro

**Other Attendees**

Margaret Laforest	Chris Cooney
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**Administration**

- The EDC meeting began at 7:03PM.
- Mr. Maidman stated that he asked Mr. Turkington to accelerate the hiring of the Town Planner but this needs to wait until Town Meeting on October 12<sup>th</sup>.

**Minutes**

- The Committee voted 4-0-0 in favor of approval of the minutes of 8/31/20.

**Discussion**

- Acting Chair Maidman opened the meeting by stating tonight we are here to learn about the available resources, key takeaways and action items from our guest speakers.
- Mr. Berish introduced Margaret Laforest from MOBD. He said he has spoken with Ms. Laforest about the EDC skills, various zones and opportunities with the conversation centering on long term discussion to rehab the center of town or infrastructure improvements. State resources were discussed. He discussed how to maximize value of commercial properties on Route 1 with a great proximity to Boston and Providence and access to a knowledgeable work force base. Having no access to sewer could restrict what businesses can go along Route 1.
- Ms. Laforest of Greater Boston Massachusetts Office of Business Development said she works for the executive branch. She works with municipalities to navigate and understand executive orders to know their needs. Her role is to connect business and communities with grants whether through commonwealth or private. The primary tool is the economic development incentive program. She can help to offer real estate tax relief for municipalities. She can structure agreements for communities to offer a TIP program. She said there are a lot of resources to assist existing companies and businesses. Hiring a Town Planner is a great next step.
- Acting Chair Maidman said we have connections to MAPC working on small scale projects. He asked Ms. Laforest if the Economic Development Incentive Program is for existing business to expand for capital expenditure and creating jobs or for new business coming to Sharon.
- Ms. Laforest said there is increased value based on incentivized like manufacturing jobs. Mass Life Science Center has a state tax credit program. There is a Mass Bio Ready Program that she can connect Sharon to. She can help navigate what happens. She said there are programs available to create housing near transit. She asked if there is a market for age restricted housing. She said if you are trying to attract people to downtown and

walkability have you pivoted public spaces. There is funding available. The municipality can apply for funding to promote outdoor commerce.

- Acting Chair Maidman said we are not urban or rural but somewhere in between. He asked what other industries you are seeing. Covid has changed the dynamic. Ms. Laforest responded that she has seen some startups in biotech and life sciences. Nothing is strongly trending.
- Ms. Laforest said there are grant fundings to support infrastructure like traffic changes, sewers etc. through Massworks awards.
- Mr. Pannone asked if there are grants for sewage to help increase density of shops and mixed use. Ms. Laforest said there are other planning grants. She said what we want for housing density. You are not capitalizing being at a location between Providence and Boston. Mr. Pannone said we have momentum because of the Master Plan and excitement on the Economic Development Committee.
- Ms. Laforest said she would be willing to come to visit and tour Sharon. She said there are many resources to help.
- Mr. Berish introduced Chris Cooney President of the South Metro Chamber of Commerce. He said thank you to Margaret Laforest. He said she was great and has a direct link to the Governor.
- Chris Cooney, President of Metro South Chamber of Commerce said it is a private business association and they have some nonprofits included. It is a 30 member board that meets 6 times per year. He said each year they publish a booklet on 20 communities tax rates, average income, average SAT scores, average number of people going to college etc. He will send copies -for the EDC. Mr. Cooney questioned if will there be shrinkage in Boston, will there be opportunity for offices in local communities. The pandemic has allowed people to enjoy a staycation.
- Mr. Berish stated that Sharon does not have a split tax rate between commercial and residential. Mr. Cooney replied that half of the 20m communities they support have a unified rate. More developed communities will introduce a higher rate. A conversation ensued.
- Mr. Cooney said to create an inventory of properties.
- Mr. Maidman asked in terms of commercial expansion are you finding more companies making the investment or 3<sup>rd</sup> parties. Mr. Cooney said it is too soon to tell. As leases come up there will be a tremendous change in commercial offices. Surveys are being conducted on where employees are. Companies could be looking for satellite sites.
- Acting Chair Maidman said to Mr. Cooney that we will consider you as a go to resource. He said the key take a ways are to keep it simple, Route 1 is near term and there are structural benefits in downtown.
- Mr. Lury said there is funding to move forward to overcome infrastructure issues like water, sewer and the center of town. If something can be subsidized it may be placed higher on the priority list. For Route 1 if we can get water and sewer subsidized to MWRA that would help.
- Mr. Pannone said the potential is there. We have bits and pieces. We need to be proactive, remove obstacles as we have the willingness and capacity. We cannot be passive. Make it known that we are open for businesses.
- Mr. Hauser said we need to find an audience and guide to their needs. Approach this as strategic marketing campaign. Understand the audience and their needs to build a zoning profile for them. Do an evaluation on Route 1 for expansion or redevelopment.
- Mr. Berish said tap into We Works. A discussion ensued regarding the split rate and absolute rate for taxes. He said we do not want to be under market. Need to motivate.
- Mr. Maidman said there is a strategic side and a tactical side. In Post Office Square, The Master Plan and fundamentals have not changed. It bears discussion on the parking lot at

Alice's and removal of the Bank of America building. If there is an opportunity for existing tenants to expand on Route 1 there may be a whole host of incentives to support that. He also stated that as we move forward through the process and get site specific we need to get the word out. Think about the open tract of land on Route 1 is it better to find a tenant or a developer?

- Mr. Berish said to have a discussion with the property owner. What is their motivation? Need to get parcels on database with State and get best uses.

### **Next meeting dates**

The next scheduled EDC meeting dates include: 9/29 (Neponset River Chamber), 10/13, 10/26

### **Adjournment**

- The meeting concluded at 8:52PM.