

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

**EDC Meeting Minutes
9/29/20**

EDC Members

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

Other Attendees

Tom O'Rourke	
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Administration

- The EDC meeting began at 7:03PM.

Minutes

- The Committee voted 5-0-0 in favor of approval of the minutes of 9/14/20.

Discussion

- Acting Chair Maidman opened the meeting by stating tonight we are here to see how the Chamber of Commerce supports towns in their districts. We will gain insight into tax discussion and planning for subsequent meetings.
- Tom O'Rourke from Neponset River Regional Chamber of Commerce came to meet with the Committee.
- Acting Chair Maidman asked how does the Chamber work? What insights and benefits can it offer to Sharon? We are working on meager land and we have to ensure the commercial tax base is secure. The EDC is a new initiative to the Master Plan.
- Mr. O'Rourke said the Regional Chamber has various interests from towns. It is nonprofit and has 500 business members. It offers an opportunity to network. It is a resource center for businesses especially during the pandemic. They help with resources to open safely for customers and employees. They rely on businesses for funding. They have been in existence for 125 years. Mr. O'Rourke pointed out that Sharon School Department joined the Chamber. They are helping to get restaurants open. They know of policy and programs to help.
- Acting Chair Maidman asked how the Chamber stays in touch with grants. Mr. O'Rourke said since COVID they have weekly phone calls with the State and Lieutenant Governor, Director of Economic Development, Director of Workforce and Labor. They get updates regarding reopening and resources available. There is an opportunity for communities to do outdoor seating.
- Acting Chair Maidman asked what are the ground rules to ensure member towns are treated equally. Mr. O'Rourke said they make their voice known if there is inequity. They work with the Housing and Economic Development, Mass Office of Business Development to make connections.
- Acting Chair Maidman asked if he has seen any unusual requests given COVID like the need for more office space.

- Mr. O'Rourke said it is interesting to see how it plays out. Last week he was speaking with the head of commercial real estate in Boston. She says there has not been a big migration. Mr. O'Rourke said he thinks we will see the need for satellite offices outside of Boston.
- Acting Chair Maidman asked what is the best way to proceed for analysis and support. Mr. O'Rourke said they will add the EDC members to the email list. They do advocacy for initiatives and projects. He said he is happy to help with resources.
- Mr. Shapiro said we are looking for opportunities to develop commercial space we have on Route 1. Looking at sectors/industries that might be interested. He asked Mr. O'Rourke if there are opportunities he can think of. Mr. O'Rourke said there is biotech growth but they may be heavy on water use. Norwood and Canton are seeing a lot of these businesses. He said there is growth at Patriot's Place and Westwood. Route 1 has easy access.
- Mr. Berish said we want Tom's background history in split tax rates. Who is participating? We need to understand where our neighbors stand. Mr. O'Rourke said surrounding towns use split tax rates except Sharon. As a business advocate you want to keep the commercial rate down. Towns around here are business friendly. He thinks single rate makes sense for Sharon.
- Mr. Pannone asked if the Chamber can provide consulting services, see what we have and determine what would be good. Better to pinpoint info to rezone and better attract businesses. Mr. O'Rourke said we do not get into this.
- Mr. Pannone asked if they have subcommittees to address topics. Mr. O'Rourke said yes in education and government affairs to name a few.
- Acting Chair Maidman asked Mr. O'Rourke what contacts do you have with rail when times go back to normal. We need a schedule to support reverse commutes. What interfaces do you have on the public transport side? Mr. O'Rourke said this is our biggest focus. He is the rep to MPO. Highway and rail funding have a voice on the board for transportation policy in the region. The challenge now is no one is riding the T. Service will be cut because of ridership. How do we get people to come here for good jobs? 1st mile to last mile, how do you get people from train to jobsite; need a shuttle system. Has this been state funded? Mr. O'Rourke said there has been state funding from the MPO and the Commission on Transportation also from participants. Each committee gets money from Uber and Lyft. Money has to be spent on transportation.
- Mr. Shapiro said it would be useful for us to have transportation help.
- Mr. Pannone said we need a voice at the table. Is there any way to model this for projections to see what is best for Sharon re: split tax? Mr. O'Rourke said Mass Tax would be the place to start.
- Mr. Berish said we need to find a way to bridge the gap with Sharon's lack of participation in the Chamber. We are losing out on these tremendous resources.
- Mr. Shapiro said he will reach out to Jess Murphy who is the Sharon schools contact to the Chamber.
- Mr. Berish asked where is the Uber and Lyft money sitting. Mr. Maidman will ask the Finance Director how is it working and are we eligible.
- Mr. Hauser said it sounds like there are massive resources. We saw multiple ideas and lots of progress. The first milestone is the common understating of information. There are two choices moving forward split rate or businesses in the center of town and on Route 1.
- Mr. Pannone said we need to take a multi prong approach: zoning for Route 1 can start the process and get a voice at the Neponset River Chamber of Commerce. With reference to split versus single tax rate we need to make an educated decision. We need a model. He said he would love to see development near Alice's. He said a discussion should start but we need to solve the sewage problem. He said we need to reach out to Delapa. Ask how are you looking at long term prospects.

- Mr. Hauser said we need to find a developer. This would create Town Center but that is not a big money maker.
- Mr. Berish suggested speaking with Marini Developers in Canton.
- Mr. Shapiro suggested that we need a designated rep with each chamber.
- Mr. Lury said speaking with Alice Hu might be beneficial especially during this time. She might welcome an opportunity.
- Acting Chair Maidman said he will volunteer to reach out to the Mass Tax Payer Association for tax rates to see what research they can perform.
- Mr. Pannone said we need a leg up to make educated thoughts.
- Mr. Lury said in the town warrant, Article 27 shows the town selling a parcel of land to CVS for a drive through window. Funds would be going to the general fund but they should be going to a specific fund for purchase of land to use for development or acquisition of parcels and buildings to add incremental money through development.
- Mr. Hauser provided an analysis dating back to 2006 that showed how much has been spent for land. It was \$16,000,000 on land with 1.2 million dollars spent per year. At this rate he said we will be spending 24 million through 2038. A discussion ensued.
- Mr. Maidman said this is a real challenge in this environment. He suggested Mr. Lury get in touch with Mr. Turkington to determine if anything can be done when the money flows as it needs to be put in a protective setting. He said Fred should be amenable. Earmark until May.
- Mr. Shapiro showed the committee tax rates for the surrounding towns.
- Mr. Maidman said there are a lot of moving parts. It is starting to coalesce.
- Mr. Maidman said that a couple of years ago the Select Board created EAC Energy Advisory Committee. They identified the land fill, East Elementary and Gavin Pond as sites. This caused a backlash with abutters and residents. Last spring the Select Board appointed a group to identify abutter's issues to work with EAC to get a forward path. 3 contracts were signed for East, Gavin's Pond and the landfill. East is halfway done. It is ongoing at Gavin's and landfill is complex. It has to be examined by Eversource for ISO – group of all utilities in N.E. This falls under the Economic Development sites are almost chosen, suppliers have been chosen. Select Board is putting this under the EDC as a subcommittee. Lends itself to what we want to do. Learning we can get out of it are synonymous and aligned. We all could benefit. It is important these Economic Development fall under our guidance. Once we learn more some rezoning may be necessary. He said he will share more details as they arise.
- Mr. Pannone asked what is our structure and Acting Chair Maidman said the EDC reports to Mr. Turkington, This is a stand-alone committee. Town Planner will be our resource along with Energy Advisory.
- Acting Chair Maidman said this as an excellent meeting. We will have to make a report to Mr. Turkington on where we are.

Next meeting dates

- The next scheduled EDC meeting dates include: 10/13, 10/26

Adjournment

- The meeting concluded at 9:00 PM