

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

**EDC Meeting Minutes
1/4/21**

EDC Members

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

Other Attendees

Linda Berger	
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Administration

- The EDC meeting began at 7:05PM.

Minutes

- The Committee voted 4-0-0 in favor of approval of the minutes of 12/7/20 minutes.

Discussion

Economic Development Ideas

- Linda Berger, Recreation Department Director attended the EDC meeting as some subjects she is working on fit into Economic Development such as farmers markets and lake front events.
- Ms. Berger has worked for Sharon for 6 years and knows the town from all age groups. Linda suggested she wants to improve the usage of the lakefront by creating other revenue sources to hold down the lake fees. Economic incentives are aimed at restaurant market and farmers markets. She said we may be talking about 2022 based on COVID. She said she spoke with Crescent Ridge as to why there is no more farmers market and they said there was not consistent commitment by the vendors. She wants to help support a venue for struggling crafters and restaurants. She said vendors could be added to Wednesday night concerts. She said she had gotten approval for beer gardens but needs to speak with the Select Board again. Braintree has a successful beer garden event. She also said they are looking at kayak rentals as an initiative.
- Chair Maidman said the EDC was also talking about farmers market. The owner of Heights Plaza might let us use the space. With a minimum number of vendors we need to ensure attendance. Two organizations in the State help to coordinate vendors. Ms. Berger did not contact them yet. There is no structure yet. She said they need state guidelines.
- Chair Maidman said to Ms. Berger that a barrier to the beer garden is the Identification of the customers which falls on the vendor. She suggested that a beer garden would be a laid back atmosphere which can occur before concerts. Food could be offered as well. Buy- in

is needed from the police and fire department because of the town property. We would need a trial to see if the event could be held without a concert. The Chief of Police would need to be comfortable.

- Mr. Maidman asked Ms. Berger; in terms of revenue share what does she see. She said there has been no discussion on this topic yet. This is all in the beginning stages. We need this to be advantageous. She said it would be good to make the events for all ages.
- Mr. Shapiro said it's appealing to have an all-encompassing package to include crafters, art, food trucks and entertainment. He asked if there are grants to subsidize local businesses.
- Mr. Lury said events would need to be diversified. He suggested different things each time.
- Ms. Berger said that seasons can diversify and make events unique. The projects can grow based on attendance.
- Mr. Berish said he loves the open market idea. It's quite popular and it is also competitive. We can offer lake and concert series as a method of uniqueness.
- Mr. Berish asked Ms. Berger if there are any other assets she manages that could be potential revenue sources for the town budget as a whole. Ms. Berger stated that all revolving accounts are self-supported. She is trying to rent 100 kayak spaces. She also commented that pools run as a deficit. They need to be subsidized.
- Mr. Shapiro said that Heights Plaza is not the prettiest for outdoor dining and asked if that was in her purview. She said Deborah Sampson could be used for the market.
- Mr. Maidman asked if for a beer garden is it possible to invite retail establishments in town to provide the alcohol. She said they would need to apply and be awarded the contract by the Select Board.
- Ms. Berger said everything is on hold until March to see where COVID is and this may all be a 2022 endeavor.

Split Tax Rate

- Mr. Maidman commented that realtor Richie Gorden is a member of the Board of Assessors. He provided his thoughts on an approach to taxes to Mr. Maidman in a brief email as Mr. Maidman had asked for his opinion on the split tax rate topic.
- Mr. Shapiro said to clarify; the goal is to look for additional sources from the split tax approach.
- Mr. Maidman said our charge is to make the best recommendation. Currently 92% of taxes come from residents and 8% from residential.
- Mr. Shapiro said to look for options for Sharon to increase revenue from commercial based real estate taxes. Grow tax revenue from commercial owners when it's the right time. He does not want it to feel punitive. He is not suggesting raising residential.

- Mr. Lury said you do not want to significantly increase the burden on commercial. You want to take some residential burden and spread to commercial. Increase the top line of town's revenue. He said Mr. Gorden was looking at tax relief to residential and that was not the intent. We are looking at the ability to tax businesses.
- Mr. Maidman said this raises the question, if recommended and approved increase in commercial tax rate, what is the impact to town businesses. The ones in town are not big revenue generators. How can we address this?
- Some towns have grandfathering. This may not be the right path. We need to be mindful of commercial and what impact a tax increase has.
- Mr. Berish said that all neighboring towns continue to be aggressive on real estate taxes. Easton is introducing sewer to commercial properties. It is a convenient way to kick start. How would this effect business now? Total occupancy costs are market driven. Residents of Sharon have been subsidizing the commercial rates in this town.
- Mr. Shapiro said he can understand the sticker shock factor pent up by COVID anxiety. Need to do this in a thoughtful manner. We cannot operate in a vacuum. Need to listen. People need to be heard. Need to listen more to stakeholders. He would focus on the three big real estate owners. Need to learn the impact to an increase from them.
- Mr. Maidman said the letter from Mr. Gorden did not address what we are working on.
- Delapa, Heights owner and Alice are good to ask for perspective; how they interact with tenants and leases, how the property works.

Planner

- Mr. Maidman said Mr. Turkington is set to post within the next two weeks the part time Planner position. Half time will be to work with the EDC. Do we need to be a part of the interview process? Mr. Shapiro said yes we need to be a part of the process. We need grant writing and someone who is familiar with Mass development people. This has high priority.

Reports

- Mr. Maidman said he is still working on the interim report to the Select Board and the Annual Report draft is almost complete.

Energy Advisory

- Subcommittee set up for Energy Advisory. The landfill and Gavin's Pond development will take more time. This group will assist with reaching out to the neighborhoods.
- We know of challenging parcels on Route 1. They require water and treatment. Some parcels are open fields. Would they lend themselves to solar? Minimal disturbing land, no water, no sewage. Is this worth considering?
- Mr. Berish said those are tough parcels with many restrictions. Environmental to consider. Hate to forego the highest best use for solar use.

- Mr. Berish said he has forgone jumping on solar in his properties. He has never done it. He has heard that single occupant user buildings have been successful.
- Mr. Maidman said maybe this would be worth exploring.
- Mr. Shapiro said the next step is approach developers to see if assets we have could be promoted. Learn best use.
- The EDC can determine the candidates for the subcommittee.
- Chair Maidman said he would ask David Wluka to talk about this subject with the EDC.

Next meeting dates

- The next scheduled EDC meeting dates include: 1/19 Tuesday, 2/1, 2/16 Tuesday and 3/1

Adjournment

- The meeting concluded at 8:10 PM by a vote of 5-0-0.