

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

**EDC Meeting Minutes  
1/19/21**

**EDC Members**

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

**Other Attendees**

Sheila Griffin 18 Huntington Avenue	
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**Administration**

- The EDC meeting began at 7:05PM.

**Minutes**

- The Committee voted 3-0-0 in favor of approval of the minutes of 1/4/21 minutes.

**Discussion**

- Chair Maidman stated that the objectives for tonight's meeting include reviewing the January 4<sup>th</sup> minutes, listen to David Wluka who is an active commercial real estate agent and long term Sharon resident, the Select Board report and new EDC appointments.
- Chair Maidman commented that the EDC was established in July, 2020 as advisor to the Select Board to look at commercial development in town. In the absence of good space, and the economic times we live in, Dave, what's the environment in this region and what is your observation? We are looking for pathways to consider like unilateral tax structure in Sharon. What types of hindrance/obstacles are there? This is what we are interested in discussing.
- Mr. Wluka said he is a Sharon resident since 1971. He was a planner, wrote a Master Plan, and did permitting in Wrentham etc. He said the driver of tax base is we have the highest taxes in SE Massachusetts. Schools drive Sharon's residential economy. Sharon is physically positioned well. Things never taken advantage of are the train station, and having 3 exits on the highway. We have been frugal on our zoning and it's hard to get things done. He said he thinks it is wonderful to have zoning in place for the Gallery. Where are we going – there is no land left. Most towns have a commons. Sharon grew at the edge, never the center. The Planning Board tried to give us a center but it failed at Town Meeting. Biggest issues in town are utilities. We had the opportunity for sewers which would have permitted more intense planning. He suggested looking at the center of town but there are bad soils. He said we can do things on the land across from the Wilber apartments, at Shaw's Plaza and the Gallery development.

- Mr. Hauser said 10 years ago we did a water study at Post Office Square and did projections on a waste water treatment plant.
- Chair Maidman commented we have very constrained lands on Route 1 and on the town lines. He asked Mr. Wluka if there are still opportunities on Route 1 and he replied that most is reuse as opposed to vacant land. He said you can build 5 stories in Sharon on Route 1. The question is if the fire department can service 5 stories in the center of town.
- Mr. Hauser said 5 stories is the magic number for fire for ladder and water pressure. Anything over 2 stories is incremental.
- Mr. Wluka said anything over 5 stories needs steel construction. He said look at Sharon Credit Union. There is nothing wrong with 5 stories as it is set back but you need to look at utility issues and sewage capacity.
- Chair Maidman said there are issues of utilities in the center of town particularly water treatment is a big constraint. Key issues in opening up possibilities in town.
- Mr. Wluka said sewer is an issue. He suggested allowing the development to go up to 5 stories. Be creative with a smaller foot print. We could reuse under used property. The train asset is being constrained by zoning and utilities.
- Mr. Shapiro said we can rationalize sewer. He also stated that the Select Board voted to expand the EDC to 8 members.
- Mr. Wluka said if a planner is appointed they can gather needed information.
- Mr. Maidman asked Mr. Wluka if he knows any towns with similar tax structure to Sharon.
- Mr. Wluka commented that Walpole drove away businesses with connection fees. Norwood has less fees. He said charging higher tax rate to businesses is not going to work. Sharon is always difficult to do business with. It is a small town that wants to stay small. You can still maintain the character but need money. He does not think dual tax rate will incentivize businesses to come here.
- Chair Maidman asked what affect an increase in commercial taxes rate would have to existing buildings.
- Mr. Wluka said COVID created a difficult dynamic. The goal is to expand the tax base not the tax rate. Invest in sewage, increase density. Tie into MWRA from Cobbs Corner.
- Mr. Shapiro said there are odd lots on Route 1. There are constraints for utilities. What are your thoughts and how do you approach these lots?
- Mr. Wluka commented that the old gas station near Applebee's has wetland constraints but if you build a service road on Route 1 you need to fill in the wetlands. The process would take years unless there is buy in and reasonable controls. There is 8-9 acres of land to get to there which could be unlocked with Conservations help. Cost and benefits need to be raised.

- Chair Maidman asked if there is any open space not suited for industry but could lend itself to solar.
- Mr. Wluka stated it's done all over the place. Solar is cost effective on low value land. He is not aware of parcels on Route 1.
- Chair Maidman said there are some weird shaped parcels on Route 1.
- Mr. Wluka said it depends on access to utility lines. Mr. Wluka said he would provide his opinion if shown the properties.
- Chair Maidman asked Mr. Wluka if he has seen any towns where there is interest in developing remote work sites.
- Mr. Wluka said Coney Street, Route 27 has potential but needs rezoning. With reference to taxes he said 70% to 30% is an ideal rule of thumb. If you can get from the current 94% residential to 85% residential that would be terrific.
- Mr. Berish asked Mr. Wluka if there a site plan for the 8-9 acres on Route 1. Mr. Wluka said he will provide it. Mr. Berish commented that there are underlying themes and need a serious study on sewer.
- Mr. Hauser said exercise the best use and dual study of waste water generation and physical sites and business opportunity and revenue it would generate is what we did for Post Office Square. There are grants to help. The other point in the Master Plan study is to look at Heights Plaza as well. Inventory the zones available. Mr. Hauser said to get grants and execute viability and feasibility of Post Office Square studies.
- Mr. Wluka said he will take a map of Sharon and will circle available properties.
- Chair Maidman said the planner's job should be posted at the end of the month. 2 EDC members will be a part of the interviews. We need to ensure the person is skilled in our needs such as how to find grants.
- Eli Hauser said the positive thing that came from the Post Office Square study was that we got accelerated zoning passed. We failed in building community which this group needs to think of how to do. Get business owners together to build momentum. He still thinks we can address waste water. How do we get community happening to build energy to allow this to get through?
- Chair Maidman said he is still working on the shell of the report. Dave Wluka's perspective has given him new guidance to focus on different areas.
- Mr. Shapiro asked if there is a timeline to get on the Select Board agenda and Chair Maidman replied February.
- Mr. Berish commented that this was a fantastic meeting. The part time planner will set grants and the organizational side in motion.

- The Committee questioned whether it would be beneficial to speak with some property owners to get their perspective and ideas. Alice Hu would be one example of an owner to have a discussion with; Her restaurant is half way between Town Hall and the square.

#### **Next meeting dates**

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

#### **Adjournment**

- The meeting concluded at 8:25 PM by a vote of 4-0-0.