

TOWN OF STOW
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION

Minutes of the June 3, 2021 Economic Development & Industrial Commission Meeting

Members Present: Thomas Farnsworth, Kevin Whalen, Bob Collings, David Elkins, Serena Howlett,
Jen Gero

Kevin Whalen called the meeting to order at 5:30

Bob Collings moved to approve the minutes of the May 25, 2021 meeting as amended
Kevin Whalen seconded

Roll Call Vote: Kevin Whalen -**Yea**; Thomas Farnsworth -**Yea**; Bob Collings -**Yea**; David Elkins -**Yea**;
Jen Gero, -**Yea**; Serena Howlett -**Yea**

Questions for Representative Kate Hogan

David Elkins said that Stow is changing rapidly, and that people coming into town are spending close to \$1 million on homes. David Elkins said that the Lower Village area lacks adequate services for existing residents and new residents alike. David Elkins said that the southern end of Lower Village lacks adequate water which has limited the potential for that part of the district. David Elkins asked how the state can assist development of a public water supply for that part of Lower Village.

Representative Hogan agreed that Lower Village has unmet potential and commented that significant improvements have already been undertaken to improve the transportation infrastructure in the district. Rep. Hogan said that a public private partnership required a clear expression of buy-in from affected businesses before Stow can begin searching for construction funds.

Representative Hogan provided the EDIC a list of state and regional resources and partners to work with on developing a water system for Lower Village. Kate Hogan said that emerging technologies can be utilized through partnership with the Mass Clean Energy Center (MassCEC). Representative Hogan said that MassWorks grant funding is most frequently awarded to projects that are clearly supporting economic development and have a private partner that is committed to building once needed infrastructure is constructed.

David Elkins asked if it would be beneficial to have Town leadership in support of any future water supply project. Rep. Hogan said that she understood that the issue was enormously complex and expensive, and that building support in local government requires greater understanding of likely costs.

Rep. Hogan asked Jesse Steadman if discussions had advanced on possible design for a Lower Village system. Jen Gero said that there had been talk about getting water for Lower Village for years, and that the discussions were going in circles.

Rep. Hogan suggested that the EDIC go before the Select Board to propose some way to begin moving the project forward. Kate Hogan suggested that the EDIC begin building buy in from the Select Board and Town Administrator. Jesse Steadman mentioned that the Planning Department is seeking cost estimates

from engineers for a feasibility study. Assistant Planner Malcolm Ragan said that having a clear cost estimate for the feasibility study is needed break out of the circular discussions about the need for water in Lower Village.

Tom Farnsworth said the feasibility study is necessary to move the project forward. Jesse Steadman informed the EDIC that the Planning Department had been unable to get a cost estimate in time for funding through the Rural & Small Town Development program, but that funding could be secured through other sources. Jen Gero asked if MassDevelopment funds could applied to the study. Jesse Steadman said that it was possible. Jesse Steadman said MassWorks could also be used, but that it would be a challenge without a single private partner. Jen suggested reaching out to Bolton for possible collaboration on a future grant application.

Rep. Hogan also suggested that the EDIC work with the MetroWest 495 partnership, and that this group would be a valuable resource for creating sustainable development in Lower Village. Rep Hogan offered to help facilitate a meeting with this group in the future.

Rep. Hogan said she had been impressed by the work of the Hudson Business Improvement District (BID) and would be interested in seeing the concept explored for Stow.

Serena Howlett asked Rep. Hogan what she suggested doing about filling business district vacancies. Rep. Hogan said that the Hudson BID and Business Assoc. had collaborated to fill vacant spaces. Rep. Hogan said that the popularity of Nan's Market had demonstrated an unmet demand in Stow, and that there must be effort to determine how to bring that demand toward the Lower Village district. Serena Howlett asked if zoning changes can accomplish this, and Jesse Steadman replied that zoning in Lower Village was due to be updated in the near future, and that this could result in a different build out of the site to better adapt to current consumer demand.

Bose

Rep. Hogan asked for an update on the sale of the Bose property. Jesse Steadman said that one possible bidder has proposed a buildout of Bose similar to the original permits. Jesse Steadman and Rep. Hogan agreed that grant funding could be applied to improving nearby traffic infrastructure in partnership with the eventual new owner.

Nan's Support Letter

The EDIC reviewed the draft letter, which expressed support for the outdoor dining Special Permit currently under deliberation by the Planning Board.

Bob collings moved to send the letter to the Planning Board and Select Board
David Elkins seconded

Roll Call Vote: Kevin Whalen -**Yea**; Thomas Farnsworth -**Yea**; Bob Collings -**Yea**; David Elkins -**Yea**;
Jen Gero, -**Yea**; Serena Howlett -**Yea**

Signage Bylaw Enforcement

Bob Collings said that the EDIC had previously surveyed 170 businesses and discovered widespread belief that the signage bylaw was burdensome and outdated. Bob Collings said he believed the Town could be sued over the signage bylaw. Bob Collings said that the EDIC needs to send a very strong letter to the Town that it should halt enforcement.

Serena Howlett said that the bylaw is enforced arbitrarily. Tom Farnsworth said any letter from the EDIC should clearly argue that it is arbitrary and capricious. Bob Collings reiterated that the Town should not enforce the bylaw to avoid risk of litigation. Tom Farnsworth said that the letter should question the legality of the bylaw and referenced the letter the EDIC sent to the Planning Board about these same concerns in 2016.

Kevin Whalen asked Jesse Steadman how long it would take to draft an amendment to the signage bylaw. Jesse Steadman said that there would likely be a Special Town Meeting in the Fall, which could allow for space to address the immediate concerns around internally illuminated open signs. Jesse Steadman said a complete overhaul would likely not be possible until the next Annual Town Meeting in Spring 2022.

The EDIC agreed upon important components of the forthcoming letter to the Planning Board and Select Board.

- Signage is most raised issue from business owners to the EDIC
- EDIC requests that enforcement be halted
- EDIC has serious questions about the legality of the current signage regulations
- No one has alleged harm created by those signs
- Bylaw appears to be enforced arbitrarily
- Issue is important enough to bring before a special town meeting

The EDIC agreed to approve the draft letter at the following meeting.

Other Business

Jen Gero informed the EDIC that Honeypot Orchard has been seeking a license to serve hard cider and has run into issues. Tom Farnsworth said that the EDIC needs some specifics to know how to best assist them. Kevin Whalen said that the EDIC should strive to assist businesses through permitting processes, especially in cases where multiple permits are required at once. Jesse Steadman said the Town has a problem with interdepartmental communication for permitting, and that state requirements often conflict with local permitting and vice versa. Jen Gero said she would follow up with the business owner to determine the exact permitting issue.

Respectfully submitted,
Malcolm Ragan