

TOWN OF STOW
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION

Minutes of the July 22, 2021 Economic Development & Industrial Commission Meeting

Members Present: Thomas Farnsworth, Bob Collings, Serena Howlett, Jen Gero

Tom Farnsworth called the meeting to order at 5:30

Jen Gero moved to approve the minutes of the June 3, 2021 meeting as written

Bob Collings seconded

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

Correspondence

Members of the Commission requested that meeting packets and correspondence not be published on the Town website ahead of meetings, and that those materials be provided to the public on request, as required under the Open Meeting Law.

Signage Bylaw – Approval of Letter to Planning Board/Select Board

Bob Collings offered amendments to Serena Howlett’s draft memo.

Bob Collings moved to approve the memo as amended, and send to the Planning Board, Select Board,

Building Department, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Town Administrator

Tom Farnsworth seconded

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

Town Planner Jesse Steadman informed the EDIC that a new Building Commissioner was beginning his position and had not acted on the enforcement letters sent by his predecessor. Jesse Steadman said that he had observed a handful of the affected businesses turning off their signs. Jen Gero commented that she had spoken with a business owner with internally-illuminated signs which had not received any enforcement notice. The EDIC noted that many businesses employ internally-illuminated signs and did not receive any notice of a zoning violation, referencing an email from former Building Commissioner Craig Martin, dated Dec 2, 2020. EDIC members commented that enforcement of the prohibition on internally-illuminated signs appears to have been uneven and arbitrary.

Lower Village Water System Feasibility Study | Scope of Service

Jesse Steadman said that the Planning Department had previously prepared an application for a rural development grant to fund a Public Water Supply feasibility study for Lower Village. Jesse Steadman said the Planning Department had not been able to complete that application in time, but that a cost estimate and proposal from engineering firm Weston & Sampson could be used to search for other sources of funding.

Jesse Steadman said such a study would provide clear answers as to whether a public water supply system would be feasible for the southern portion of Lower Village. Jesse Steadman remarked that test wells for groundwater exploration would increase the cost of the study. Jesse Steadman said that the Town is under no obligation to follow through with the study at this time, and the proposal only provides an overall cost benchmark.

Bob Collings asked about potential sources of funding for a feasibility study. Bob Collings asked if the Town or affected businesses would pay for future construction, and if it was likely to fund construction with federal funds from upcoming infrastructure bills. Jesse Steadman said that there is no clear answer yet, and that a clear construction cost estimate could be used to begin such discussions. Bob Collings asked where the \$20k to pay for the feasibility study could come from. Jesse Steadman said it could be funded in grant cycles next year, or the EDIC could request the money from an upcoming Town Meeting.

Serena Howlett remarked that Representative Kate Hogan suggested the EDIC ask for funding for the feasibility study at an upcoming Town Meeting. Tom Farnsworth said that obtaining outside funding would be less uncertain. Tom Farnsworth suggested searching for outside grant funding and only requesting funds from Town Meeting as a fallback option. Bob Collings said that the Select Board had resisted being involved in discussions about a water supply for Lower Village in the past, and that their support would be needed to bring an article to Town Meeting. Tom Farnsworth said that having accurate cost estimates would be the first step to securing necessary buy in.

Resident Mark Forgues commented that Linear Retail already has their own water supply and asked why businesses on the south side of Great Road could not connect to that system or develop a comparable system on their own. Mark Forgues asked who in the town is pushing this effort, and why the business owners have not stepped up to cover any of the cost of the feasibility study. Tom Farnsworth said that none of the businesses on the South side have been able to upgrade their business without a water supply. Mark Forgues said that none of the businesses have been willing to shoulder the cost themselves.

Bob Collings said that businesses have much higher requirements for public water supplies than homes, which makes it infeasible for any individual business to create their own water supply given the site constraints on the southern side of Lower Village. Mark Forgues said that the businesses should still shoulder the cost of the feasibility study. Bob Collings said that the EDIC is committed to arriving at an agreement to share the costs of construction and maintenance of an eventual system.

Jesse Steadman clarified that businesses on the South side of Lower Village have existing grandfathered public water supplies that are outdated and limit allowable uses.

Jesse Steadman said that Planning Staff will search for additional grant funding sources.

Serena Howlett moved to authorize Staff to search for grant funding for a Lower Village Public Water Supply Feasibility Study
Jen Gero seconded

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

Bob Collings commented that shovel-ready projects are more likely to get funding from the federal government. Tom Farnsworth said that having this study done would facilitate future funding allocation.

Debrief Representative Hogan Discussion

Jesse Steadman said he will review resources provided by Rep Hogan and try to apply those toward funding the water supply feasibility study in the previous motion.

Serena Howlett noted that the South Side of Lower Village could face not having enough water to fight fires without a proper public water supply. Serena Howlett commented that Rep Hogan suggested the EDIC conduct further outreach and get the Select Board to approve a warrant to fund the public water supply.

EDIC members requested that the Select Board liaison be added to the distribution list for future communications.

Bob Collings commented that support from Rep Kate Hogan would be needed to secure Federal funding for construction of the water supply. Bob Collings asked about avenues for securing support from Rep Hogan and her staff. Jesse Steadman said that he maintains close contact with Rep Hogan's office, and would provide them the proposal and cost estimate for the feasibility study to begin conversations.

Ongoing Business Checklist

Serena Howlett said that she prepared an ongoing business checklist for review, which could keep important business on the radar for the EDIC.

EDIC members requested that staff provide updates on the checklist items at the start of meetings.

Jesse Steadman provided the EDIC with updates about various Planning Board efforts and ongoing permitting and agreed to update the EDIC about key projects at the start of future meetings.

Membership Discussion

Jesse Steadman said that he had not yet received a firm commitment to fill the vacancy left by David Elkins.

Meeting Format Discussion

The EDIC agreed to conduct upcoming meetings in-person.

Respectfully submitted,
Malcolm Ragan