

TOWN OF STOW
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION

Minutes of the October 14, 2021 Economic Development & Industrial Commission Meeting

Members Present: Thomas Farnsworth, Bob Collings, Serena Howlett, Kevin Whalen, Andrew Bluestein

Thomas Farnsworth called the meeting to order at 5:30

Previous Meeting Minutes

*Kevin Whalen moved to approve the minutes of the September 23, 2021 meeting as written
Serena Howlett seconded*

Roll Call Vote: Thomas Farnsworth -**Yea**; Bob Collings -**Yea**; Serena Howlett -**Yea**;
Kevin Whalen -**Yea**

Public Input

Resident Katie Fisher asked if there is a list of businesses in Town that are not within the business district, which would be affected by proposed changes to the signage section of the zoning bylaw. Bob Collings said that the EDIC has a list of roughly 160-170 businesses in Stow. Katie Fisher requested a copy of that list, Town Planner Jesse Steadman said staff will provide a copy. Katie Fisher said that she is concerned for businesses in the Residential District that would not benefit from the proposed allowance of a single internally illuminated sign per establishment in other districts. Serena Howlett asked if the list of Stow businesses should be publicly available on the Town website. Jesse Steadman said the Commission had resolved to compile an updated directory several months ago, but that a limited response rate has meant there is nothing up to date available for the public.

Debrief on Lower Village Rezoning Forum

Serena Howlett said that the overall vision for the future of Lower Village presented by the consultants was interesting but noted a lack of specifics for much of the presentation. Serena Howlett said she believes specific recommendations would have polarized attendees. Serena Howlett said she is concerned many residents will not welcome the changes needed to realize a contemporary vision of a village district. Serena noted that the consultants brought up the historic common as a good place for public realm improvements, but again noted a lack of specifics.

Tom Farnsworth said that it is up to the Town to draft zoning to enable facets of the vision presented by the consultants. Tom Farnsworth said that the consultants' role was more to present some general goals that the Town can draft zoning in order to realize. Tom Farnsworth said that the zoning amendments will need to be crafted to be prepared for a possible development opportunity in the future. Serena Howlett expressed worry that many residents believe any zoning change would result in a development that resembles the Maynard Crossing Development. Tom Farnsworth said that the consultants provided a very high-level view of some possible goals for rezoning the district.

Serena Howlett asked how rezoning may impact property values in the Lower Village, and if property values were likely to increase. Serena Howlett asked if Planning Staff are aware of how property values in the district might be affected. Jesse Steadman said that appraisers would consider the uses and intensities that are allowable at a site in their appraisal. Katie Fisher said that business zoned areas are valued based on allowed uses and the quantity of businesses in a given town. Katie Fisher said that residential property values are impacted by the criteria for businesses in an abutting district. Serena Howlett asked if rezoning would increase the incentives to develop properties such as the used car lot in Lower Village into something more aligned with the vision articulated at the public forum. Katie Fisher said the answer is complicated and depends on the exact zoning. Katie Fisher said it has been difficult to retain businesses in the district without other business uses there to support them.

Sign Bylaw – Zoning Amendments for Special Town Meeting

Bob Collings asked if Andrew Bluestein knew the dimensions of the open sign at his business. Andrew Bluestein said his sign is just over 2 square feet. Andrew Bluestein said that most open signs in Lower Village are similarly sized.

Bob Collings said there are businesses outside the business zoning district that would not be affected by the new allowances for internally illuminated signage in the proposed bylaw change. Andrew Bluestein said that it would be unfair to allow internally illuminated signs for some business and not others. Andrew Bluestein noted that the new owners of Buscemi's Liquors (formerly Ken's Liquors) would still need to take down a great deal of their signage under the proposed amendments.

Bob Collings said that the amendment to allow some internally illuminated signage should apply to businesses in all districts. Jesse Steadman suggested that the EDIC provide that input to the Planning Board during its Oct 19th Public Hearing on the proposed zoning amendment.

Bob Collings said that the EDIC made a very simple recommendation to the Planning Board for the sign bylaw amendment, and that he objects to the Planning Board's proposed language. Bob Collings said he the EDIC should be advocating for all Stow businesses, and not just those within the Business District. Commission members agreed that the amendment should extend to all businesses in Stow. Andrew Bluestein said the Planning Board's current language betrays a very different mindset from the EDIC.

Bob Collings moved to send a letter to the Planning Board urging the proposed amendment be revised to allow a single internally illuminated sign for all business, including those within the residential district. Andrew Bluestein seconded

Roll Call Vote: Thomas Farnsworth -**Yea**; Bob Collings -**Yea**; Serena Howlett -**Yea**;
Kevin Whalen -**Yea**; Andrew Bluestein -**Yea**

Bob Collings said he is disappointed the Planning Board did not continue a dialogue with the EDIC. Bob Collings said that the sign bylaws are applied very selectively, and that the EDIC needs to make a clear appeal to make the change that is needed for the sign bylaw, including for those businesses in the residential district.

Tom Farnsworth asked members for guidance drafting a letter to the Planning Board ahead of the October 19th public hearing. Bob Collings said that the EDIC should recommend that the same language being

proposed to allow a single internally illuminated signs in the Business, Industrial, and Compact Business Districts simply be replicated in the section regulating signs in the Residential District.

Tom Farnsworth said he will draft a letter before Planning Board packets go out tomorrow.

Serena Howlett brought up a sign bylaw study that was recently completed in the Town of Dedham. Serena Howlett said that Dedham paid roughly \$30k for their bylaw study. Bob Collings suggested that the EDIC look at the bylaws from other towns to see how they handled compliance with related case law. Serena Howlett suggested the EDIC could talk to Dedham's consultant to find out more about their revision process.

Serena Howlett suggested that staff contact the sign consultant from Dedham about the process. Assistant Planner Malcolm Ragan noted that the Planning Department received several examples of contemporary sign bylaws from the consultant for the Lower Village district. Bob Collings asked that those examples be provided to the Commission.

Bob Collings said the EDIC should take a more active role in advocating for the interests of business in Stow.

Ongoing Business

Staff updated the EDIC that there will be a public hearing for proposed amendments to the Industrial District on October 26th at 7:30pm. Staff said that the hearing will cover the proposed redevelopment of the Bose Campus into what will be called the Master's Academy, and the exact zoning changes needed to allow a permitting process to go forward. Staff highlighted that the zoning amendment would not permit the proposed academy, and the applicant will still need to obtain a Special Permit from the Planning Board.

Bob Collings suggested that staff get confirmation of attendance from all members ahead of meetings. Bob Collings requested that members let staff know if they will be unable to attend, so that the rest of the commission knows if there will be any issues with quorum.

Bob Collings motioned that members of the EDIC inform staff if they will be in attendance or not ahead of regularly scheduled meetings

Kevin Whalen seconded

Roll Call Vote: Thomas Farnsworth -**Yea**; Bob Collings -**Yea**; Serena Howlett -**Yea**;
Kevin Whalen -**Yea**; Andrew Bluestein -**Yea**

Thomas Farnsworth moved to adjourn

Kevin Whalen seconded

Respectfully submitted,
Malcolm Ragan