

TOWN OF STOW
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION

Minutes of the February 10, 2022 Economic Development & Industrial Commission Meeting

Members present: Thomas Farnsworth, Bob Collings, Jen Gero, Mary Bradt-Mintz, Kevin Whalen,
Serena Howlett

Tom Farnsworth called the meeting to order at 5:30

Member updates

Serena Howlett said she attended the information session about the upcoming Masters Academy, a private school planned for the former Bose campus. Several members reported attending the session and said they were impressed by the development plans. Serena Howlett said the comments about new demand for commercial services make it clear there should be coordination between the Masters Academy and the EDIC. Jen Gero said she can reach out to the project team on behalf of the Commission. Serena Howlett requested the EDIC draft a letter to open lines of communication with the Masters Academy team. Bob Collings said local businesses could benefit from the economic activity resulting from the new school. Bob Collings noted that attendees to the information session did not ask questions about the project's finances, despite the substantial investment in the property.

Tom Farnsworth said he and staff will work on drafting language for a welcome letter to Masters Academy. Bob Collings said the EDIC should approach Stow businesses with the information presented by the Masters Academy to make clear the potential impacts to local demand.

Mary Bradt-Mintz said she has been in contact with Rick Rostoff, Vice President of Acquisitions at Linear Realty. Mary Bradt-Mintz said she provided Rick Rostoff with past correspondence detailing concerns from the Commission regarding signage, aesthetics, and water supplies. Mary Bradt-Mintz said Rick Rostoff will reach out to site manager Greg Droczy about meeting with the EDIC to work through previous concerns identified.

Bob Collings asked if there have been any updates on the former Mobil station in Lower Village. Bob Collings said the Green Advisory Committee (GAC) has discussed the possibility of using the site for Electric Vehicle charging stations. Jesse Steadman said he has no updates on the site at this time.

Bob Collings said the GAC has been in discussions with Hudson Light & Power about providing \$2750 rebate payments to new construction that utilize only electric utilities and heating. Bob Collings said the rebate payment would be paid upon utility hookup. Jesse Steadman asked if developers of upcoming housing projects should be made aware of the rebate program. Bob Collings said the GAC is working on an information package to provide developers to understand the benefits of all electric heating and hot water detailing potential benefits to construction costs and marketing.

Lower Village Water Feasibility Study – American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding

Tom Farnsworth said the included ARPA request narrative summarizes many years of planning to date to complete a water feasibility study for the Lower Village. Jesse Steadman said he has been continually

updating a draft request for proposals (RFP) following conversations with the EDIC and other boards, committees, and staff. Jesse Steadman said he began with an assumption that the test well and capacity exploration were not the primary goal but has changed the approach after later conversations. Jesse Steadman said the current proposal involves a test well program, compiling previous testing data, and then shifts attention to understand potential needs and buildout capacity, finally progressing to the feasibility study to understand service area, management structure, and fee system. Jesse Steadman the current approach focuses on getting as much information at the outset as possible. Jesse Steadman said the ARPA request to the Select Board is due March 1.

Bob Collings asked about the composition of the attached narrative and asked if Task 1 included drilling of a test well as previously discussed. Jesse Steadman said task 1 focuses on drilling and exploration. Bob Collings asked if task 2 cost estimates are for the test well or production well. Serena Howlett asked if the language “test well program” includes drilling. Jesse Steadman said it does, along with other permitting and hydrologic study. Serena Howlett asked that “test well program” be made more specific in the project narrative to include drilling.

Bob Collings asked if multiple bids will be needed for the eventual consulting. Jesse Steadman said the Town will send the request for proposals to multiple firms, in line with all state requirements for procurement.

Mark Forgues asked if the RFP will request consultants to understand possible use by Lower Village businesses. Jesse Steadman said the consultant will also estimate potential buildout of the Lower Village business assuming some zoning amendments and additional water capacity in the area based on the test well program. Mark Forgues expressed doubts that Lower Village businesses can build out to a capacity where the costs of water transmission are practical. Mark Forgues said there are additional costs for the system that may not be accounted for by a feasibility study.

Bob Collings said the \$100k referenced for the study is higher than previously discussed. Bob Collings asked if the EDIC may encounter some resistance from the Town. Jesse Steadman said he has reviewed proposals from other firms and is confident in the cost amount, and that he has heard no hesitance from the Select Board on funding the requested \$100k amount from ARPA funds and have identified Lower Village Water as key priority.

Jesse Steadman said the draft RFP includes meetings with the Town and other stakeholders to determine capacities at the Red Acre Road and Heritage Lane and potential constraints at each site. Mark Forgues asked if the RFP will include a primary service area including residential lots. Jesse Steadman said the RFP will ask for a recommendation on a primary service area, depending on the discovered capacities. Jesse Steadman said the service area will be dependent on future political decision making as well as physical limitations of the well sites.

Bob Collings said the capacity analysis is needed before the Town can even understand how far the water supply can be transmitted. Jesse Steadman the RFP and ARPA funding narrative will be finalized ahead of the next EDIC meeting on February 24.

Sign Bylaw Review – Scope of Work and Draft RFP

Jesse Steadman said he drafted a request for proposals following EDIC comments on an initial scope of work discussed at the last meeting. Jesse Steadman said that funding for a Sign Bylaw review will require a Town Meeting vote, and that a warrant article submission must be submitted to the Select Board before April 1st. Bob Collings asked anticipated costs. Jesse Steadman said he is expecting roughly \$10k, based on recent zoning consulting for the Lower Village and similar scopes of work. Jesse Steadman said once the commission supports the draft RFP, he will send it to several consultants to get broad costs estimates to use in drafting a warrant article. Bob Collings asked if the consultant will meet with commission members, Jesse Steadman said the draft RFP includes several public meetings to discuss findings and recommendations with boards and committees across all 3 phases of the scope of work.

Serena Howlett asked why the EDIC is being named as the primary sponsor, given that the Planning Board and Select Board have an interest in updates to the sign bylaw. Jesse Steadman said it is an open question about who will sponsor a warrant article to Town Meeting. Tom Farnsworth said he would like to see buy-in from the Planning Board and Select Board on the proposal as it is brought to Town Meeting. Bob Collings said \$10k is two weeks of work for a consultant, and expressed doubts that the amount is high enough, or that the expenditure would produce a very superficial review.

Tom Farnsworth said the project goals need to be agreed upon before staff can shop the proposal around to get accurate cost estimates on the proposed work. Jesse Steadman noted the draft RFP includes meetings with the Planning Board to compile specific concerns. Jesse Steadman said the proposal has not been written to include a draft sign bylaw from the consultant. Bob Collings said the Town does not have the capacity or expertise to craft a draft sign bylaw even with specific technical recommendations, and that his preference is a draft zoning amendment that can be revised pending further review by the Town.

Serena Howlett said the zoning strategy review is an overly complicated task and said that no consultant could provide clear recommendations to comply with evolving federal case law around signage. Serena Howlett said the main problem is not that the sign bylaws are unconstitutional, but rather that they are not readable or enforceable. Bob Collings said that it may still be useful to understand some general areas that the Town cannot legally regulate.

Tom Farnsworth summarized that the EDIC is expressing interest in a new task 4 with some new draft sign bylaw language. Bob Collings said the consultant should draw information from similar communities, and the EDIC should search for a consultant that is familiar with the issues around signage and has a demonstrated track record of solving those issues. Bob Collings said the consultant should be asked to provide a draft amendment to the Sign Bylaw, with a later opportunity for the Planning Board and/or EDIC to modify the draft bylaw based on local considerations.

Serena Howlett said the draft RFP includes issues identified by the Town but should leave it to the consultant to identify problem areas. Bob Collings said the RFP provides for giving the town strategies but should instead ask for particular solutions and bylaw amendments. Jesse Steadman said he will modify the draft RFP to request a draft revision to the sign bylaw.

Mark Forgues said he was under the impression the sign bylaw has some minor issues and is surprised to hear the EDIC talking about a comprehensive rewrite. Mark Forgues said there is not a need for a

comprehensive rewrite of the sign bylaw. Mark Forgues said the Town Planner hears common complaints about signage frequently and is in a position to identify the major issues.

Kevin Whalen said a bylaw rewrite could increase the costs of consulting services. Kevin Whalen said a deep dive into considerations and strategies is a good idea but does not want an outside consultant to write the Town's zoning bylaws. Jesse Steadman said the draft RFP covers what staff and the Planning Board believe they would need to draft a bylaw; however, he recognizes that the EDIC wants to see the project increase to include a draft revision. Jesse Steadman said he did not request a draft bylaw because any draft could be heavily modified by the Planning Board during the requisite public hearings. Jesse Steadman said there could be a middle ground requesting some bylaw language alternatives or portions of a rewrite.

Serena Howlett said the Select Board and Planning Board would be less likely to reject a draft if they are involved in the process of seeking consultants. Kevin Whalen said he is in favor of a deeper analysis than currently proposed but not as far as writing the bylaw for the town.

Bob Collings asked if staff have a list of qualified consultants to complete the work requested. Tom Farnsworth said the exact dollar amount of the work does not need to be known now, and that the draft RFP is needed to get price quotes that allow the EDIC to request funds from Town Meeting.

Mark Forgues said the sign bylaw is 4 pages and expressed doubt that the Town needs outside consulting to amend that section.

Jesse Steadman said that he will work on revisions to the RFP based on EDIC discussions.

Other Business

Serena Howlett asked to be provided with the DEP document stating permanent solution at Mobil Station.

Bob Collings motioned to adjourn

Jen Gero seconded

Respectfully submitted,
Malcolm Ragan