

TOWN OF STOW  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
AND INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION

Minutes of the November 2, 2017 Economic Development and Industrial Commission Meeting

Members Present: Bob Collings, Tom Farnsworth, Jen Gero, Serena Howlett, Jean-Claude Sureau

Absent: Andrew Bluestein, Kevin Whalen

Tom Farnsworth called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

**Meeting Minutes of September 21, 2017**

*Bob Collings moved to approve the minutes as written.*

*Jen Gero Seconded.*

**VOTED: (5-0) Unanimously in favor (Bob Collings, Tom Farnsworth, Jen Gero, Serena Howlett, Jean-Claude Sureau- Yea).**

**Mixed Use Zoning Presentation and Discussion**

Serena Howlett said that she wanted to learn more about the reasoning behind restricting uses in Lower Village, saying that at the time the area was zoned for business use, it made sense given the economy and retail patterns. Serena Howlett said that now there are more home-based businesses and online purchasing is popular. Serena Howlett said that in the mile between the Lower Village gateway sign and Town Center, there is a hodgepodge of uses, including private residences, a mixed use building under construction at the former Stowaway Inn and at Getchell Insurance, and retail shops. Serena Howlett said that she put together a presentation titled “Strip Mall Makeovers” for the EDIC after learning more about what other Towns in the area are doing to balance economic vitality and aesthetics.

In the presentation, Serena Howlett reviewed research on the changing retail climate, which previously favored the conventional strip mall. Serena Howlett said that public, private, and commercial land each exists in Lower Village, though they are on separate parcels. Serena Howlett said that she doesn’t believe this separation is advantageous for the town, and that retail can be lively public/private spaces.

Serena Howlett described trends in successful commercial spaces, saying that these can be community centers with a mix of dining options, residences, office spaces, and outdoor gathering areas.

Serena Howlett outlined mixed use zoning in Sudbury and Maynard, noting that Sudbury had contracted with a consultant, the Cecil Group, to produce a zoning report. Serena Howlett noted that zoning and development in those towns provides competition to Stow that the town may not be prepared to handle. Serena Howlett said that easing restrictions on land use along 117 could produce a more vibrant business climate.

Jean-Claude Sureau asked if business owners on the south side of Great Road in Lower Village have expressed interest in mixed use zoning. Serena Howlett responded that Steve Steinberg, the owner of three lots on the south side, has discussed his interest at a previous meeting of the EDIC, and that Andrew Curtis has also expressed interest.

Bob Collings asked if this would require a Town Meeting vote. Jesse Steadman said that it would, and added that mixed use zoning in Lower Village is an ongoing discussion with the Planning Board.

Mark Forgues, *9 White Pond Road*, asked if mixed use zoning would bring condos into Lower Village, adding that the existing vacancies are unattractive. Serena Howlett said that she believes the use would be up to the free market.

Bob Collings added that another issue with Lower Village is the lack of a public water supply.

Jean-Claude Sureau said that owners in Lower Village would need incentive to redevelop, and asked if they are currently being blocked. Serena Howlett said that in the case of the former Mobile gas station, she has spoken with the engineer overseeing the remediation who says that while the site is not fully clean, there are still uses available.

Jean-Claude Sureau asked if the goal would be to change the zoning in Lower Village and then see what changes. Jean-Claude Sureau said that the changes are very difficult to envision, and that if business owners aren't motivated to redevelop, the intended effect may not come about.

Jen Gero said that she has seen online discussions from residents who are part of a Super Stow Moms Facebook group, and that they are hoping that Lower Village welcomes business that would activate public space, such as a restaurant or bar.

Jesse Steadman said that the Planning Board is looking to apply for a grant for a consultant to conduct a business district assessment and market analysis, which would provide answers to these questions, as it would determine what kinds of businesses could succeed in Lower Village, taking regional competition into consideration. Jesse Steadman said that some of the work the EDIC has accomplished would be good baseline documentation for a consultant. Jesse Steadman offered to share the grant narrative and an example of this type of analysis at a future EDIC meeting.

Mark Forgues said that another obstacle to developing Lower Village is the lack of septic infrastructure. Serena Howlett asked why the focus in Lower Village has been on water if septic is also a concern. Jesse Steadman said that septic systems can be located underneath parking, unlike water, as DEP Zone 1 wells require undisturbed land. Jesse Steadman said that the business owners have also concentrated on water infrastructure, as they would have built any needed septic upgrades themselves.

### **Update on Clean-Up at 124 Great Road**

Serena Howlett asked if the engineer at Kleinfelder could come to a future EDIC meeting to discuss the progress at the site and suggest alternative uses. Jesse Steadman noted that progress on clean up can be found at the states' 21E website, and said that allowed uses at the site would have to be what is within the Zoning Bylaw. Serena Howlett said that the engineer has described what other towns were able to do with past 21E sites, including an example from Bolton of turning the space into a park.

### **Members' Updates**

Jesse Steadman said that a new business, a gun retail shop, is opening in Lower Village at 128 Great Road.

Serena Howlett said that she walked along the Assabet River at Track Road and noticed the Crow Island Airpark, and asked about the history of that site.

Jen Gero left the meeting.

### **Stow Job Fair**

Tom Farnsworth suggested that the discussion of organizing a job fair should be moved to a future meeting to include Andrew Bluestein. Jean-Claude Sureau said that he would be interested in participating as an employer in the fair.

### **Sign Bylaw Working Session**

The EDIC discussed a draft document that provides an overview of their previous discussion on the Sign Bylaw, as a basis of a letter to the Planning Board to ask for the bylaw to be modified.

Jean-Claude Sureau asked about the history of this conversation. Bob Collings said that over a year ago, the EDIC conducted a business survey, and that he felt that the sign bylaw was described as a regulatory obstacle. Tom Farnsworth said that the EDIC has been reviewing the bylaw at meetings held in the previous months, and have found that it is vague and difficult to comply with. Serena Howlett noted that the appearance of Lower Village and the numerous signs in the district that don't comply with the bylaw also triggered the conversation.

Serena Howlett suggested that the EDIC's review of the sign bylaw should be sent to the Board of Selectmen's liaison to the EDIC. Bob Collings said that he would prefer an

expedited process, and that the Planning Board should contract with a lawyer to look into the legality of the bylaw. Serena Howlett said that hiring a lawyer is expensive, and that any change to the bylaw would need to be voted on at Town Meeting. Serena Howlett said that she feels this would not be a good use of resources when it hasn't been shown to be a business issue.

The EDIC discussed what the next step should be, as their concerns with the bylaw have been documented. The EDIC agreed to draft a letter to send to the Planning Board.

#### **Discussion of Meeting Schedule**

The EDIC discussed schedules during the holiday season and planned to meet on November 16<sup>th</sup>, December 14 and December 28<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Meeting Adjourned.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Valerie Oorthuys