

Economic Development Committee
Monday, 26 September 2016 Meeting
6:30 pm

Attendees:	Chair, Jim Patacchiola Richard Maki Vice Chair, Mike Pineo	BOS, Maureen Cranson Secretary, Rosanne Mapp Treasurer, Brian Kindorf
Non-attendees:	Paul Cathcart	TA, Michael Szlosek
Guest:	David Shapiro, Planning Board	

Call to Order: 6:30 pm

Meeting Minutes: Approved Meeting Minutes for **August 2016**. NEED INPUT HERE.

Motion:

1st

2nd

Discussion/Actions:

Discussions with David Shapiro, Planning Board, Representative, regarding a joint meeting to present EDC information. Request was made to be placed on the Planning Board Agenda for the meeting on 26 October 2016. The EDC Committee would like to see if Chantell would present to the Planning Board. Mike Pineo made a motion to pay Chantell for her services in presenting to the Planning Board. Second by Maureen Cranson. All in favor. Suggests that the Planning Board may want to include the Zoning Board of Appeals at the meeting in October.

Actions:

Jim Patacchiola to email all the information from Chantell to the Planning Board for their review prior to the meeting in October so that they may be prepared and read it in advance.

David Shapiro, Request meeting with the Planning Board on 26 October.

Jim Patacchiola to contact Chantell to assist in Presentation.

Treasurer Report. No input.

BOS Report:

- Looking into long-term water issues. Meeting with DPW, Water Department this week.
- Town Administrator is moving on. Search Committee is looking for volunteers.
- IT (Spaulding) has notified the Town of its Contract termination. Search Committee is in process of looking into new IT company.

Sterling Fair Input: Mike P stated the Fair went very, very well. Discussion on how important the Fair is to the Economic Development of Sterling.

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EDC Presentation to Businesses:

Brian: *Ongoing. No input at meeting.*

- Brian will contact Paul to discuss progress on contacting local businesses.

Devens Impact Study: Brian K attended the meeting and presented us with a 126 page Report. This report states that Devens has and "Award Winning" permitting process. One board handles the entire process. (Brystol Meyers got approved in 45 days). The Development Plan at Devens is to develop 225K square feet annually....ongoing.

Old Business: OPEN/Ongoing

Business Questionnaires. *Paul and Brian ongoing.*

Tri-fold Brochures. *Rosanne* continues to work on tri-folds. Rosanne requested help in verifying information in tri-folds and will send out the files again.

NEXT MEETING: Monday, 26 October 2016, 6:30 pm.

Meeting Adjourn 8:28 pm. Motion Jim
1st. Mike P 2nd. Maureen All in favor.

Landmark Article:

Route 12: prime real estate for new storefronts?

By Joel Mongeon

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Route 12 in Sterling may be the site of a few more storefronts in the near future.

As the Economic Development Committee looks for ways to bring more business to the town, they are finding that the northern section of the Route 12 corridor, which extends from downtown to the Leominster line, is prime real estate for shops, restaurants, and filling stations.

“That area up on north Route 12 is so all over the place to begin with,” said EDC member Brian Kindorf. “I wonder if the...property owners wouldn’t be just as happy to have a commercial opportunity for their properties in the future.”

Because of its proximity to the 190 off-ramps, this section of Route 12 would be ideal for commercial zoning and could be more of an asset to the town if rezoned for commercial use. However, the EDC is instead pursuing an overlay district as the quicker and easier strategy.

According to Chantell Fleck, formerly the principal planner for the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, an overlay would mean that the northern portion of Route 12, currently zoned for industrial and residential use, would be open to limited commercial use as well.

“It kind of makes it difficult for retail to occur,” she said of the current zoning. “So the EDC wanted to alleviate that for potential businesses to set up. The overlay would [be] the easiest way for that to occur, instead of expanding the commercial district, which would take a long time.”

Landmark Article continued

Fleck recently took a position in the planning office in Winchendon, but she has long been involved with Sterling's economic development plan through her role in the MRPC. In the past she has helped to install commercial overlay districts in both Gardner and West Fitchburg.

The overlay would need a 2/3 majority vote at town meeting to go into effect. Prior to the vote, the EDC will reach out to Sterling residents to gain a better understanding of the sort of businesses that would be charming and convenient additions to the town. While the usage of commercial space can't necessarily be regulated, the town can regulate the amount of space that a business can take up.

"You can limit the commercial size," said Fleck. "So figuring out what is a good threshold for the area would be helpful. I think that sometimes you'll get the folks that don't want a Super Walmart or that sort of thing."

Public feedback will allow the EDC to assess the limitations that the residents would approve of so that the plans can eventually get consensus at town meeting. It will also inform the committee of what kinds of conveniences the residents of Sterling are looking for.

"If you live in Sterling, you have to pretty much leave Sterling for virtually anything," said Kindorf. "And so [we're] looking at businesses that might come into town that would fill some of the needs that residents currently have but have to drive for."

Ostensibly the only potential downside to an overlay is that should the town choose to discontinue it, the commercial establishments would then be considered "nonconforming." In that case, the overlay would remain in effect for businesses that are grandfathered in. Should a grandfathered business fold, the zoning change would affect the empty space only if a new commercial tenant is not found for it within two years.

The commercial establishments that now occupy that section of the Route 12 corridor were in place before the current zoning went into effect, and thus they were grandfathered into exception.

Perhaps the most salient issue is the character of the town and whether that can be sustained through further commercial development. Earlier this year the EDC held a public forum to collect feedback from residents. The popular opinions reflected that the Sterling community would benefit from increased revenue and employment opportunities, but participants in the forum were wary of traffic congestion and big business changing the town's identity.

The next step for the EDC is to present the planning board with the proposal for the overlay and to determine what the parameters and restrictions will be. With the help of the MRPC and the selectmen, they hope to gain the support of the community and eventually bring the proposal to town meeting.