

## **Economic Development Committee**

Meeting Minutes November 1, 2021

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, this public meeting of the Town of Bolton Planning Board was conducted via remote participation. No in-person attendance of members of the public were permitted, but the public can access this meeting while in progress using Zoom Video Communications, Inc. (Zoom). Members of the public attending this meeting virtually were allowed to make comments if they wish to do so, during the portion of the hearing designated for public comment, by telephone, cell phone or personal computer using Zoom.

Directions to connect to the public meeting were provided on the agenda.

In attendance: Erik Neyland (Chair), Sean Serell (Vice Chair), Amy Balewicz, Alan Santos

Absent: Larry Cedrone

Town Staff: Valerie Oorthuys

Meeting called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman Erik Neyland.

### Approval of Meeting Minutes

Amy Balewicz moved to approve the minutes of February 1, 2021, March 8, 2021 and June 7, 2021 as written. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Alan Santos.

**All in favor by roll call: Erik Neyland – Yes; Sean Serell- Yes; Amy Balewicz- Yes, Alan Santos- Yes; (4/0/0).**

### Backyard Bolton Debrief

The EDC agreed this year's 4<sup>th</sup> annual Backyard Bolton was a success. Members discussed whether to plan additional events for the business community such as a June picnic in the park, Small Business Saturdays, or First Thursday events. Members agreed these events could offer the opportunity to discuss economic development with residents to hear their questions and thoughts.

### Vote to Approve Reimbursement for Backyard Bolton Costs

Erik Neyland shared receipts related to the planning of Backyard Bolton. The receipts indicate a total of \$128.69 paid for the creation of a vinyl banner that was placed at the Town Common and for advertisements placed on Facebook.

Sean Serrell moved to approve the use of funds in the Economic Development Committee budget to reimburse Erik Neyland \$128.69 for Backyard Bolton expenses. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Alan Santos.

**All in favor by roll call: Erik Neyland – Yes; Sean Serell- Yes; Amy Balewicz- Yes, Alan Santos- Yes; (4/0/0).**

Master Plan Economic Development Task Group Update

Valerie Oorthuys said the Town should soon hear whether the application for a Massachusetts Downtown Initiative grant was awarded. The grant will pair the Town with an economic development consultant to conduct a Business District Assessment and Market Analysis. The focus area of the grant will be the main business district around 495, though the market analysis and recommendations will provide considerations for commercial areas in Town as whole. The analysis would include public outreach in order to hear from the business community and residents at large. This type of work, whether done through MDI or contracted out separately, is a key part of the Economic Development Task Group's next steps.

Discussion of Zoning Districts

Erik Neyland discussed whether Bolton's Business, Limited Business, or Mixed Use Village Overlay Districts should be expanded. Erik Neyland said he feels the intersection of Forbush Mill Road and Route 117 should be considered as a priority retail area and suggested that the existing uses of the area could be reviewed. Erik Neyland stated that he feels the historic Town Center should be rezoned as business.

Valerie Oorthuys noted the need for a zoning study and business district assessment, such as the one through the MDI grant, in order to get a comprehensive perspective on the interests of residents, the needs of the business community, best planning practices, and the economic feasibility of any changes. Valerie Oorthuys referenced previous discussions of the need to right-size the business district, as expansion of commercial areas along Route 117 needs further research. Concerns include traffic impacts, continued high vacancy rates, placemaking, and the creation of sprawl rather than dense commercial centers. Pre-pandemic, the vacancy rate in Bolton was around 20%.

Amy Balewicz noted that 711 Main Street, to the east of the Kitchen Sink Candle Company, recently sold. Valerie Oorthuys said it isn't known whether the buyer is intending to have a business at that location and noted that the property is zoned residential and has not been a business for over two years, thereby losing its grandfathered status. Members of the EDC agreed to support the owner should they wish to start a business at that location. Several members noted their interest in changing the zoning of the historic Town Center to allow business uses. Valerie Oorthuys cautioned that rezoning could lead to redevelopment that may not include preservation of historic structures. Valerie Oorthuys suggested the EDC advocate for the use of the barn bylaw or consider support of adaptive reuse bylaws.

Members noted differing opinions within the Committee regarding a vision of economic development in Bolton. Members agreed to continue discussions to understand common ground.

Sean Serrell noted the need of a master plan for the industrial district, specifically the underutilized Paragon site at 41 Main Street.

Updates to Website and Brochure

Erik Neyland said the EDC's website and brochure are out of date and need to be revised.

Vote on Recommendation of Member for Vacant Position

Erik Neyland said the EDC received Sean Woods' letter of interest in the vacant position a few months previously. Members discussed Sean Woods' participation in EDC meetings over the last several months.

Amy Balewicz moved to recommend the appointment of Sean Woods to the Economic Development Committee. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Sean Serell.

**All in favor by roll call: Erik Neyland- Yes, Sean Serell- Yes, Amy Balewicz- Yes, Alan Santos- Yes; (4/0/0).**

Set Economic Development Committee Meeting Schedule

The EDC agreed that the first Monday of the month continues to be a good time to meet. The EDC will meet on December 6, 2021, January 3, 2022, February 7, 2022, March 7, 2022, and April 4, 2022. The EDC will not meet in May due to Annual Town Meeting.

Members noted to need for conducting the annual wreath initiative ahead of the December meeting.

**Respectfully Submitted,  
Valerie Oorthuys**