

**TOWN OF LEICESTER
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 2024
TOWN HALL - SELECT BOARD MEETING ROOM**

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LEICESTER, MASS.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Paul Fontaine called the Economic Development Committee (EDC) meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

Committee Members in Attendance: Harry Brooks, Joshua Cambell, Paul Fontaine, Adam Menard, and Jim Reinke

Other Attendees: Peter Cusolito (Advisory Board), Kristen Jacobsen (Town Planner), Jordan Hollinger (CMRCP), Elena Ion (CMRCP), and members of the community, Linda Colby and Bob Mercer.

2. INTRODUCTIONS

Paul Fontaine asked everyone in the room to introduce themselves.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Jim Reinke moved to approve the minutes from the 02/15/24 meeting. Harry Brooks seconded the motion. The motion passed 5 to 0. All Committee members will sign minutes before being sent to the Town Clerk's Office.

4. ROUTE 9 PLANNING BOARD REVIEW

- a. Kristen Jacobsen stated that there is a public hearing scheduled for Tuesday, April 16 at 7:00 PM in Meeting Room 3 to discuss zoning amendments and the search for Master Plan Committee members.
- b. Peter Cusolito has been gathering information regarding vacant buildings and properties in town. He has learned that some properties have recently changed hands, but have not yet been updated at the Registry of Deeds. He is working on creating an electronic binder that will include information on these properties. Paul Fontaine has some hard-copy items that could be included in this electronic folder.
- c. Recently, Peter has noticed that 'For Sale' signs are cropping up around town, which may draw interest from developers. Peter also indicated that the Commonwealth of MA may be able to provide low-cost loans so that developers can work through any infrastructure issues that may exist. He will forward the information to the EDC.
- d. Peter Cusolito spoke to Ben Morris, Cherry Valley Water/Sewer Superintendent, to discuss infrastructure issues at these properties. Ben Morris confirmed that he would help in any way possible to get the properties ready for development. Joe Wood, the Leicester Water/Sewer Superintendent met with the EDC at the February meeting and indicated that he is also willing to help as needed.

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5. CENTRAL MASS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION - REVIEW OF TOWN CENTER PLAN

- a. Elena Ion presented EDC with a preliminary list of the Town Center Plan goals. They fall into three categories:
 - i. Physical Environment
 - ii. Business Attraction and Retention
 - iii. Zoning
- b. Elena asked EDC to review the preliminary list of goals and let her know if anything needs to be changed so that the goals can be finalized at the next meeting.
- c. Paul Fontaine asked what the next steps would be, and Elena explained that implementation of the plans would follow. A separate implementation committee would be needed to accomplish action items, and CMRPC can help search for funding sources.
- d. Paul Fontaine suggested that it would be great if the Town Common was used more often. Linda Colby asked if anyone on the committee knew of towns that have an overall committee that sets up a master plan for usage of their town's common. Nobody knew specifically, but some suggestions of commons that are used regularly are Grafton and Brookfield. It might be worth speaking to people in those towns about who manages the schedule and conducts activities. Paul Fontaine indicated that Parks and Rec might be able to assist with scheduling, but it will still take volunteers to conduct new activities at the Leicester Common.
- e. Jordan Hollinger provided some examples of assessed values per acre of developments in surrounding towns. The purpose of looking at this was to better grasp the economic costs and rewards of different development patterns and what it might mean for Leicester. His analysis showed developments in Boylston, Holden, Millbury, and Shrewsbury.

6. UPDATE ON CURRENT PROJECTS

- a. The following projects were mentioned:
 - i. The Salvation Army is looking at land next to Walmart. This is still in the initial stages.
 - ii. Starbucks and Ziggy Bombs have started the work needed to open their new locations.
 - iii. Giguere's is working with the Planning Board to get information regarding cleaning up the space across the street from the Gym.
 - iv. The WorcShop has been closed, and there is no current plan for redevelopment.
 - v. Old St. Joseph's Church will be demolished at some point in time, but there is no current plan.
 - vi. Apartments next to the church have been approved, but no information was available for discussion.

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- vii. Some smaller businesses have cropped up on Stafford Street.
- b. Jim Reinke suggested that it might be time to think about razing some of the old mills that are too far gone and selling the property so that they can be developed with the future in mind.

7. LEICESTER BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

The LBA is starting up again. Based on the discussion that occurred at the February meeting, Paul Fontaine suggested that LBA might be fully up and running by this time next year. The next meeting is scheduled for sometime in June. Paul will invite some of the LBA members to come to the next EDC meeting to start developing relationships.

8. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- a. Bob Mercer indicated that Leicester has a reputation for being hard to do business with. Paul Fontaine commented that we have some new people in the Town Hall who have been working to make it easier. For example, the Town Hall is in the process of updating its website and permits will now be posted online. There is a new checklist that people can use to determine who to speak to about the issues they are facing. Paul also suggested that the EDC might be able to act as a conduit to help people get the information they need to obtain permits.
- b. The EDC agreed that as progress is made, the town needs to communicate it to the public. Having the new town website will be helpful, especially if all departments and boards have access to their own pages on the website so they can keep them up to date promptly.

9. DEVELOPMENT OF A QUESTIONNAIRE

Paul Fontaine asked if the EDC should come up with a questionnaire asking townspeople what they would like to see come into town. The CMRPC is working on a questionnaire for the town's Master Plan and could add questions if needed. The plan is to have a questionnaire that consists of about 20 questions so that it is not overwhelming. Elena Ion will send the questions to the EDC as soon as she has a preliminary draft.

10. NEW BUSINESS

There was no discussion

11. OLD BUSINESS

Consistent communication from the Town Hall can help people stay up to date with what is happening in town, prevent rumors from spreading, and fend off misinformation and disinformation from appearing on social media. As noted previously, the town website is currently being updated and will most likely be ready in late May or early June. Linda Colby will contact Sam Chatterton, the Assistant Town Administrator, to see if she needs

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any assistance. The EDC Facebook page has not been updated for some time. Harry Brooks and Linda Colby will work together to start posting again.

12. QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

- a. Paul Fontaine asked the members to think about what economic development means to them. The following ideas were mentioned:
 - i. Consistent growth
 - ii. Regular revenue streams
 - iii. Development and redevelopment
 - iv. Financial stability
 - v. Strong infrastructure, schools, and businesses
- b. Mission and Vision statements will be developed from these and other ideas.

13. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 18 at 6:00 PM in the Select Board Meeting Room

14. ADJOURNMENT

Jim Reinke moved to adjourn the meeting; Adam Menard seconded the motion; the motion passed 5 to 0. Paul Fontaine adjourned the meeting at 7:45 PM.

Paul Fontaine
Steph M. Paulty
Wm J. Wood
[Signature]