



TOWN OF WAKEFIELD

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

MINUTES

March 6, 2024 | 7:00 p.m.

Public Safety Building | Community Room and via Zoom

Item 1 | Call to Order

Erin Kokinda calls meeting at 7:03 PM.

Erin Kokinda gave quick introduction to the group.

Item 2 | Attendance

Economic Development Council: Edward F. Dombroski, Mehreen N. Butt, Chris Barrett, Rocco Cammarata, Ali Choucci, Ann Hadley, Ally Houghton, Kimberlee Meserve, Julianne Orsino, Will Strong

Absent: Nithya Ramakrishnan

Administration: Erin Kokinda, Community and Economic Development Director

Item 3 | Introductions Between Economic Development Council Members

7:06 PM- The Economic Development Council went around the table and Zoom introducing themselves, professionally and personally, and discussed what they would like to see out of this Economic Development Council and what they can bring to this Council. They also answered two icebreaker questions: what they like the best of Wakefield and where Wakefield has the most potential.

Introduction conversations transitioned to the importance of planning, supporting businesses, and other ideas to support and grow the business community... filling vacant storefronts, streamlining the business processes throughout Town, nonprofit development, community growth, shopping local, neighborhood commercial districts, Chamber of Commerce, etc.

Item 4 | 2024 Economic Development Council Goals and Objectives

7:34 PM- Erin Kokinda, shares the Economic Development Goals and provides background on small business work that she has done for the City of Lowell and the ample amount of funds they had to create small business programs but within smaller communities it is harder to access funds to create grant and loan programs to attract and retain businesses. She discusses a few programs she has run through the Town- Digital Marketing, Local Rapid Recovery Program, etc. and future programs.

Erin Kokinda is hoping the Economic Development Council can guide her on economic and community development moving forward.



Edward Dombrowski discusses how this Council can support the Community and Economic Development Department, especially with possible ARPA funds being allocated to Economic Development.

The Council provides how funds could support different programming, ex. sign and façade and how that could be transformative. Also, discussion, on larger businesses and office parks, and how we target and market to new businesses and tenants. Small and larger businesses have different needs and solutions.

Discuss the importance of tax credits of attracting new businesses and development within our community and how it is integral to the growth of our community. Both business TIFs and development TIFs.

The Town has the elements here to be successful, but how do we promote what we have in an effort to attract new business or people to our businesses. Also, how do we preserve the New England character and family businesses in our commercial corridors when we have larger businesses where people shop like Amazon. How do we find businesses that are a niche business? Like a Kidcasso?

Is Wakefield really as welcoming to the business community as we think? Maybe we need to look at rebranding our community.

We also need to look at streamlining the Town processes and that is why the Economic Development Director job was created, but there is still a lot of work to do.

Discussion on difficult property owners, and how that has a detrimental effect on attracting new or retaining businesses. What can be done to address this? This is continued challenge and dealing with absentee landlords. The group highlights a few properties in Town that have been sitting vacant for a while, and thinking of new ideas of work with the landlords. How do we encourage new developers to buy these properties?

This Council should be a resource to Erin Kokinda when it comes to grant opportunities and new programming.

We should have targeted and strategic approach through this Council when we are looking to attract new businesses and have people shop here. (ex. Bike/Ped Plan just passed, we should have a bike store. Civic Center has pickleball constantly, how do we keep those people here and have them shop/eat here.). Also, build upon our assets already, including the Albion Cultural Exchange, this has become a huge draw to our community and we need to build upon it.

Also, need to be mindful of our commercial/residential tax base when looking at new development opportunities—housing and commercial.

Discussion of bylaws to require more commercial as part of housing developments. 190-32 multifamily, mixed use district was put in place for this very reason.

More discussion on new businesses that could attract people to our community- hockey rinks, breweries, community pool, etc.

What is causing businesses to not come to Wakefield and how do productively remove those barriers for the business owners? This should be a task for the Economic Development Council.

The discussion of having subcommittees, but this meeting was to look at high-level priorities for this group and chart the course and how we can be effective.

We need to address the homelessness issue in Town, understand this is a bigger issue with Police and Health. If we are looking to revitalize our downtown issue, this is an issue someone is going to need to take up. Mehreen addresses this issue and how the Council and the Town have invested the resources to support these individuals, and it is a national problem, not just locally....

Discussed having a bylaw for vacant storefronts, it has been brought forward at Town Meeting prior and it failed but some feel like it would pass now.

Look at different economic development activities- pop-ups, creative ideas etc.

Erin runs through different buckets of economic development initiatives this group can work on. The group can send different ideas to her directly and not to the large group to avoid Open Meeting Law.

Item 5 | Overview of Previous Economic Development Town Plans

Ran out of time to discuss.

Item 6 | Schedule Moving Forward

8:50 PM- Discuss the frequency of the meeting and time. It is decided at the beginning of this Economic Development Council formation we will meet once a month. Erin will follow up with an email to everyone on the next date.

Item 7 | Items Not Anticipated.

8:51 PM- Erin brings up the topic of nominating a Chair, it is decided we will discuss at the next meeting.

Item 8 | Adjournment

8:52- Motion to adjourn- Mehreen Butt, Second- Ally Houghton, All in favor- 10-0, Absent-1