

Jun 8, 2023, 7:00 p.m. EDC Meeting Minutes - Virtual

- Attendees:
 - Donna Roy, Jodi Harris, Tina Lane, Margaret Eklind, Ryan Madrigal, Stacey Clarimundo, Town Administrator Brendhan Zubricki, BOS Chair Ruth Perea, Town Planner Dana Menon
- Meeting called to order at 7:05 pm by Chairman.
- Public Comment: BOS Chair Perea thanked the EDC, especially Jodi and Donna for a phenomenal job on Essex in Bloom despite the rain. They kept the train on the track and without them she was not sure where we would have landed. Donna replied that the town needed it as much as the business community. It was nice to get people out acknowledging one another, going from business to business. Even residents are discovering new business for the first time. Jodi thanked Donna for sharing all her event planning knowledge. She shared that she had not seen so much traffic on the causeway on a non-summer Friday. The sidewalk chalk artists have a following and were a big draw. Hopefully the business community will take up the event to the next level if they so choose. Jodi suggested the new Essex sign be used for other events.
- Minutes from the 4/27/23 meeting were amended and approved.
- Review of successful votes at Annual Town Meeting – Brendhan Zubricki
 - Article 21: Changing current hotel/motel tax from 4% was approved, Articles 22 & 23 for impact fees failed. Jodi felt that the voters did not understand the articles and committee agreed that it would be worth bringing back to Town Meeting in the fall.
 - Article 33 for a 50K match for up to 500K grant for Centennial Grove passed. Brendhan reported to the state that we were offering a 655K match for this grant via: 150K from Essex voters for the Pavilion, 350K for volunteer labor working on Pavilion, 12K and 18K for materials and volunteer labor to replace roofs on various buildings at the Grove, 50K just approved and possibly an additional 75K from state legislature, together puts us at over 100% match. Project includes 6 separate bathrooms in a prefab restroom facility. Grant awardees will be announced in Oct/Nov.
 - Article 35 Additional money was approved for maintenance of plantings on the causeway through Oct/Nov
 - Jodi commented the Grove project will benefit the town with rental income and as a community space.
- Downtown Lighting Design Update – Brendhan
 - \$50K state earmark to be spent by Jun 30th on \$40K in engineering and 10K toward electrical wire, which will be stored. Additional lighting grant money will be used to complete the project. Jodi reported that in the placemaking discussion Donna suggested we carry the shipbuilding theme to the handhold cement flags by featuring Essex built ships. KD Montgomery from the Shipbuilding Museum will help select the 23 ships to feature. Shelly Bradbury will help guide the process of getting the laser cut metal ships placed into the concrete.
- Placemaking Grant update - Dana
 - Final working group meeting on Jun 16. Need to close out project by end of June. Last working group meeting held on site at 24 Martin. A working document will be created including feedback from open house survey. A slide deck is available to the working group and a presentation will be made to the BOS at their 6/26 meeting.
 - Pocket parks are being nurtured by a volunteer who will install seasonal annuals. Maintenance will be by Lahey Landscaping.
 - Paglia Park will be hydro seeded by Mass DOT. Some plantings are ready to be installed once the park is licensed back to the town. Brendhan will need a sketch of plans to present to the Elaine Paglia and the Cons Com.
- Off Season Event Grant Recap and Wrap-up
 - Debrief tomorrow for working group and Civic Space Collaborative (CSC)
 - Despite rain on the first day, the event gave a good starting point for businesses should they choose to take it on in the future. A handful of people did much of the work. Was disappointed with consultants.
 - Donna asked Stacey who is a business owner for her comment. Stacey recognized that not all businesses were on board with the effort and even though it did not drive business to her shop that weekend, felt the event brought a lot of foot traffic and interest for the

future. It is nice to have an event in town and her hope is that everyone comes to the table and puts in effort next time.

- Jodi had discussed with Dana that without the confines of a consultant and zoom meeting time restraints more creativity will be allowed when planning future events.
- 30 Apple Street Economic Development Opportunity
 - Ryan & Jodi presented to the BOS the opportunity for housing as an application to benefit whole town. It is a new revenue opportunity which does not often happen in Essex. For seniors who want to downsize or reduce costs over 55 units at the right price point is a way for them to stay in Essex. Some affordable housing could be included.
 - Jodi asked Brendhan what would be the next step? He reported that the BOS is waiting for input from MERSD on whether the School Building Authority SBA will consider Essex Elementary School for renovation or replacement before making a recommendation for 30 Apple Street. If the SBA will help fund replacement, then that site will provide more field space and the students will not have to deal with a construction project.
 - Discussion led to a report on the sale of parcels on Gregory Island. Offers totaling over \$500k were submitted for 11 of 12 parcels. They are non-buildable lots and will generate a small amount of tax revenue. The BOS will work to close the transactions in July. Money will go into the sale of Real Estate funds and can be used for capital projects (any item in which you can borrow money for 5 years or more). There would be enough to fund our portion of the artificial turf fields for the school district if allowed or could be used towards planning and development costs for over 55 housing.
- Revenue in Essex, current and future
 - Jodi observed that the recent school budget discussion revealed that voters do not have a clear understanding where revenue comes from to support the town expenses. She asked that the EDC members follow the work of the Planning Board on zoning and its impact on economic development. She listed the following sources of revenue:
 - Cherry sheet revenue from State
 - RE taxes - Total assessed value in Essex is \$1B (Manchester is ~ \$3B), comes most from single family homes. Residents who “Educate and evacuate” are a factor. With the median RE tax revenue of \$9,144 and a per student cost of \$20,000 to educate 1 child the district. The town is in the hole 11K/yr with 1 child, 31K/yr for 2 children x 13 years.
 - Excise tax
 - Short term rental / Meals tax - This revenue varies and cannot be relied on to fund the operating budget. It goes to free cash and can be used for capital expenses.
 - Fees / permits building, electrical etc.
 - Marijuana - Business is reported steady but lackluster. Brendhan reports the 3% local tax is less than \$50K far less than the 300K initially anticipated. 3% impact fee regs are being rewritten at the state level. At this time the market is crowded and just like CPA, once everyone is in, the level of state funds is reduced.
 - With 2024 estimate Prop 2 ½ is 350K + new growth ~90K. What can we do to increase revenue - housing, business growth, split tax? Our inspector works 5hr/week. Is that enough time to recognize all the new growth (major renovation or new construction)?
 - Margaret opened a discussion about pursuing new bigger sources of revenue via real estate agents / business brokers to develop a Light Commercial District (LCD) as did Manchester.
 - Donna asked about developing rental properties at Conomo Point via a developer. Brendhan said we currently receive \$600k from tenants after selling off 2/3 of the Point where we once received \$100k for the entire Point.
 - Donna believes the big opportunity for revenue are the town parcels and Lot 8 (owner unknown) near Route 128 and Southern Ave.
 - Dana shared that there are title research and site prep grants (Site Readiness Program) available but feels the town may not be in position to compete without zoning or a plan for those parcels. Perhaps have planning board prioritize that area?
 - Access to the town owned property is a challenge because there is no easy public path via Southern Ave. A ramp off 128 is one way to provide access but we would have to start with the State, and it could take years.

- Brendhan advised that there is no water or sewer and if it is shallow to ledge it's useless. We can walk the parcel first to see if a title search is worth the cost. Police and state police could allow us access for reconnaissance. Margaret and Ryan are interested walking the property. The use of drone for reconnaissance is not allowed unless it is an emergency, and a drone would only provide a tree view when a ground view is necessary.
- Ruth, BOS Chair, assured the EDC that the BOS understands the opportunity at the parcels. They have attempted to access the land and planned to pursue the title search grant in Mar/Apr 2024.
- Cell Signaling site is contiguous with Lot 8 and if perhaps they would like to own it, Essex is the only entity that convert it into an owner.
- Dana suggested looking at Western Ave. sites. It is not densely developed and might be lower hanging fruit.
- Next EDC meeting will be held at town hall on Thursday, 7/20/23 at 7:00.
 - In closing Donna asked that we research Portugal Tiny Homes to understand the potential for Essex
- Meeting Adjourned 9:17

Respectfully submitted,
Tina Lane