



# Town of Pepperell Economic Development Advisory Committee

1 Main Street, Pepperell, Massachusetts 01463-1644

## Minutes – January 21, 2020 Meeting

### **Committee Members Present:**

Mark Mathews, Chair  
Joyce Morrow, Clerk  
John Masiello  
Chet Babineau  
Stephen Themelis  
Chuck Walkovich

### **Committee Members Absent:**

Kelli Kinney

### **Additional Attendee(s):**

Tony Beattie  
Deb Fountain  
Joanne Smith (Century 21NE)

Meeting Convened at 6:00 PM. Pledge of Allegiance took place. Meeting was recorded.

### **1. Minutes of the December 2020 meetings**

Minutes of the December 17, 2020 meeting were accepted and approved.

### **2. Discussion**

Joanne Smith, President of PBA and realtor with Century 21 NE was introduced and gave a brief overview of PBA activities ongoing and on hold due to the pandemic. PBA is doing its best to keep local businesses engaged but is finding it very difficult since most of the fund-raising events have not been happening since the Covid-19 outbreak. PBA tried a tri-town event by collaborating with Groton and Townsend on some activities. It was successful and it was suggested that more events be planned.

EDAC members asked how we could work together and build a relationship with PBA in a public/private collaboration. Mr. Themelis asked how the PBA could help with economic growth in Town. Joanne said that be informed about what's going on in Town and being aware is key.

Mr. Themelis suggested that real estate was the first point of contact for people looking to come to Pepperell to live. Why do they want to move to Pepperell? Is it because of the real estate? Is it because of the rural nature of the community? Is it for business purposes? Are they interested in the school system? Do you get any kind of indicators from that when you are dealing with prospective new residents coming to Pepperell?

Joanne responded that she hears that people are looking at Pepperell because they had exhausted everything else east of 495. A couple just closed on a property on Townsend Street. He lived in Randolph and she lived in Hudson NH. They have been looking all over. Their agent said that they have put in 15 offers on other properties. So, they kind of ended up here by happenstance. They are a young couple who will bring energy to Pepperell. Joanne sold another property on Birch Hill Road. Another young couple, and they specifically wanted to be in Pepperell. They have school children and they like the idea of the North Middlesex School district. As of today, Joanne stated that there are only four houses on the market. Joanne stated that she would like to see some business here in Town especially with the Fitzpatrick and the Mill Site.

Mr. Walkovich asked from a sellers' standpoint, one of the big priorities that the Planning Board has put on and is part of what EDAC is helping with too is looking at the re-districting or rezoning of the Main Street corridor, including the Peter Fitz. What would be Joanne's thoughts on things that we should be looking at when we approach that venue?

Ms. Morrow commented that there are properties from the rotary up to the Town Hall which range from the minimum zoning which is 1.88 and her property is 4.6, so it runs the gamut. The properties are all over the place with regard to acreage in that area. But you don't see it because it's all in back. Elm Haven has approximately 12-14 acres. Much of the property is hidden behind other properties along Main Street. To make note of what Stephen and Chuck were talking about, Stephen, Chuck and I were on the Master Plan Committee. There were certain recommendations that came about regarding making permitting more user friendly. And education was also a big topic. We were thinking that real estate is really the biggest revenue generator for this Town and the real estate industry, obviously, is at the foot of that food chain. So would like to work with the real estate industry in our town what works, what doesn't, what are the strengths, what are the weaknesses as far as permitting, what are people looking for? Are they looking for old, are they looking for new? How can we work together as a community to make real estate sales smoother when it comes to the permitting process, but also when it becomes a land issue, and having to go through various permits, and septic, etc. Not only does it encompass the real estate industry, it encompasses the Town, it's internal departments, like the Board of Health, etc. Ms. Morrow stated that EDaC is looking for some sort of hand-holding relationship with the PBA and specifically those in real estate. Our reach is more broader in scope than just the PBA, through the real estate professionals if we can bring in the right people with the right talents, hopefully the entrepreneurs and those having creative talents will follow with that. That is basically where we are coming from.

Mr. Themelis asked Mr. Walkovich to rephrase his question to Joanne about the Peter Fitzpatrick? Mr. Walkovich stated that we are trying to figure out what the best zoning vehicle for that whole area would be? Should we encompass Brookline Street and go over to that area to extend the whole corridor? Feedback from the PBA would be very helpful.

Joanne stated that from a realtor's perspective, we need more housing, and we need more housing for the over 55 group. Single -level living. Unless someone moves out of a ranch in the pines, it's not happening. There's a housing shortage everywhere. It's not just Pepperell. That age group is aging out of their big single family homes and there is no where to go. That's what I would like to see. When Joanne talks with all of the other realtors in town, that's what they would like to see too. People of a certain age have to leave Town in order to find something smaller.

Mr. Themelis asked about who was buying the properties. Were they singles, mostly families? Joanne answered saying that, for example, the development at Scotch Pine Farm, the fourth unit is under contract right now. Two of the families are retirees. One buyer is a middle-aged woman with some college-age kids, and she believed the fourth one under contract now is for a retiree couple.

Chair mentioned that one of the EDAC agenda items is to identify all open opportunities for commercial/industrial properties available. He asked if there was a central resource for such information., and if she could help give us some direction or identify who that might be. Joanne said that there wasn't. Perhaps going to the Assessors' maps might show this, or any GIS maps for zoning. Chair asked if there was any such listing for available industrial/commercial space. He said that other than driving around and taking notes, he couldn't find any source for this information. Joanne stated that perhaps the PBA could just compile a list of all the businesses in town., and that she would be happy with that. She mentioned Lomar and Pepperell Place. She confirmed that the housing real estate market was hot but that listings were limited, and commercial/industrial were pretty much non-existing. Discussion ensued about working together with EDAC and Town departments to help educate home buyers on the Pepperell community, permitting process, etc. Joanne agreed to work with EDAC members to compile a listing of current potential commercial and/or industrial properties available.

Mr. Masiello mentioned that finding vacant industrial/commercial properties was tough. Having a common spot to inquire would be great but non-existing. He stated that anyone coming into a town could reach out to a real estate agent who could cull through the MLS listings and identify properties of interest. Finding commercial/industrial properties was tough.

Joanne stated that most commercial/industrial real estate professionals focus on the 495/128 belt since there is little to nothing going on around here. Most of us are on MLS. Most commercial real estate does not end up on MLS. Local spots like Paugus Mall is on there. She stated that there is no MLS for commercial real estate that we subscribe to as local realtors. And some of the sites like LoopNet are not updated.

Mr. Masiello mentioned that he had reached out the State at Mass Development and they said here's somebody who might help you. But they pointed him to NH, all over Massachusetts, but there was nothing. It would be nice if we had something local, but he just didn't know. Something that is active, because a one-shot deal doesn't mean anything, it's static and it's meaningless.

Mr. Themelis added that it might make sense to think about expanding the commercial/industrial district somewhere round Railroad Square, or around the Nashua Road area. Next to Lomar Park – not too far away—you have that 40-50 acre site which there are current controversies over. If you think about a location like that, it would be a prime location for rezoning vs. “toxic dirt” and all that other kind of uses. Joanne asked if that land was Shattuck's and if that was zoned industrial? Mr. Themelis confirmed yes and said that there are some opportunities, but there are no driving forces behind it. Joanne stated that we need to get Eric Shapiro to do something in Pepperell as he is the best. Stuff moved, and the space became available.

Chair asked if there were any more questions for Joanne. Joanne said that she would be happy to partner up with someone to compile a list of possible industrial sites. Chair indicated that was something that we could get back to her on an agreed that having that information would be very valuable. Mr. Masiello said that he would be happy to work with Joanne on that. Ms. Morrow stated that she would be happy to help her as well and reminded Joanne that she had Ms. Morrow's email.

Chair then took over the meeting and shared the Excel spreadsheet which identified the various MP Implementation Recommendations identified under EDAC's purview. This basically was a review of what was discussed at last month's meeting and whether it still need further refinement or changes. Ms. Fountain joined in and indicated that there was no representation under the Cultural Council. Mr. Masiello suggested that we contact Diane Cronin in connection with her work on the Historical Commission and recent work on the Wayfinding signage. Diane is a valuable resource for Historical events she helped spearhead over the past years and her work would fit very well within the parameters of EDAC. Chair asked Ms. Fountain if she would be willing to contact Cultural and Historical representatives to gain buy-in for getting involved with MPIT in connection with the implementation recommendations directly related to their respective organizations. Ms. Morrow pointed out that Historical and Cultural would tie in with #3.16 “....spin off opportunities from regional projects such as Indian Hill Music Center....”. #3.15 and 3.16 all tie in with this. Mr. Masiello suggested contacting Frank Cullak who is very much into historical. He's got that place right downtown where he has a lot of products and things from yester year from Pepperell and around, and he is vey much into that. Mr. Masiello offered to reach out to him.

Mr. Themelis gave a brief status report on the LRRP grant. Having just attended the NMCOG monthly Council meeting, Bev Woods indicated that she has not yet heard anything and would let us know as soon as she did.

Deb Fountain mentioned that perhaps it might be helpful for EDAC to reach out to PFC for business plan and status of programs. Ms. Morrow briefly stated that Mr. Hansen appeared at an earlier EDAC meeting and provided an overview of plans and programs which, unfortunately, were not able to commence because of Covid. We agreed that it would be helpful to know status of programs and business plans going forward into 2021. Discussion was brought up regarding the zoning constraints of the PFC and how such changes could augment revenue generation for the Collaborative.

Ms. Morrow inquired if there was any word from Ms. Kinney regarding the dog park. Mr. Beattie advised that Ms. Kinney was currently dealing with a medical condition and would let us know when she would be back. Chair thanked him for that information.

Chair asked for a Motion to Adjourn.

### **3. Adjournment**

Motion was received and approved to adjourn at 6:57PM.

### **4. 2021 EDAC Meeting Schedule**

February 18

March 18

April 15

May 20

June 17

July 15

August 19

September 16

October 21

November 18

December 16