



Town of Warren, Rhode Island

Minutes of the Economic Development Board

The Town of Warren, RI Economic Development Board met at a Special Meeting on **June 3, 2009** at 7:00 p.m. at Town Hall, located at 514 Main Street. Board Members present included Sara Volino, Brandt Heckert, Paula Silva, Fariba Goldberg, Karen Dionne, Nancy Blount and Davison Bolster. Ex Officio member Caroline Wells was present as well as Town Council members Dave Frerichs and Cathie Tattrie. Ex officio members Alan Crisman and Cheryl Silva were absent.

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m.

1. Resignation by Board Member Fariba Goldberg

Ms. Goldberg stated that she needed to resign from the board because she did not feel that she could devote enough time to the board's activities. Ms. Goldberg left the meeting after this item.

2. Discussion with Chris Fuller (CREW)

This item will be postponed until a later date if requested by Mr. Fuller.

3. Review of Minutes

- a. **March 16, 2009.** Ms. Silva noted that there was a discussion of an arts council (the notes did not reflect this). Approved subject to the addition of a discussion of the formation of a Warren Arts Council. Approved: Sara Volino, Brandt Heckert, Paula Silva, Karen Dionne, Davison Bolster and Nancy Blount (unanimous).
- b. **March 23, 2009** (Main Street School Site Visit). Mr. Bolster noted that he was not actually at the site visit. Minutes approved subject to removal of Mr. Bolster in the attendance list. Approved: Sara Volino, Brandt Heckert, Paula Silva, Karen Dionne, Davison Bolster and Nancy Blount (unanimous).
- c. **April 20, 2009.** Minutes approved subject to removal of Mr. Bolster in the attendance list. Approved: Sara Volino, Brandt Heckert, Paula Silva, Karen Dionne, Davison Bolster and Nancy Blount (unanimous).

4. Discussion of the EDB Work Plan

Ms. Wells mentioned that the *Warren Times* called for an interview with her regarding the EDB's idea to make use of vacant storefronts, which is a key piece of the EDB Work Plan. She noted that she was wary of giving the interview, since the last three articles created a negative slant of the Town's efforts at Town Beach, Jamiel's Park and Touisset.

Ms. Volino stated that she spoke with Matt Hayes about the negative articles and attitude by the *Warren Times*. Ms. Volino asked Mr. Hayes to be fair in the articles and they discussed the possibility of a workshop that would enable residents and the town to get

better coverage of town activities. The EDB considered the following ideas in dealing with media coverage:

- Create a press release for Town news/events for the newspaper, web or any other sources;
- Create a library of pdf articles (such as the recent Projo article) on the Town's website;
- Write letters from the Economic Development Board refuting incorrect articles, slanted journalism or "reviews" biased toward advertisers;
- Work with Chamber or other entities that create news that is not covered with the Warren Times to ensure that stories reach the public (such as the "Apple of the Eye" award)

In discussing the Work Plan, the EDB made the additional observations:

- **Warren Arts Council (now EDB Work Plan Objective 5).** The Work Plan omits the discussion from March on the formation of a Warren Arts Council. [*Note: this has been added at Objective 5*]. Ms. Silva mentioned that Lisa Carnevale of the Rhode Island State Council for the Arts is seeking an East Bay representative as a "go-to" person that can support them and offer support to Warren's efforts. She noted that Tiverton has a similar entity as does Pawtucket. Ms. Silva mentioned that she knew of someone who might be a good candidate. Mr. Bolster mentioned that he would be meeting with Ms. Carnevale to discuss as well.

The EDB also discussed formalizing the empty Main Street School as an arts center, with possible "events" that would allow local artists to display their work. Ms. Wells needs to follow up with LIFE Inc to see if they are still interested in space there and what exactly the utilities are.

- **Objective 1: Clarity for Visitors to Warren.** Mr. Bolster mentioned that this was his particular interest. He stated that it may be better to refer to Warren's downtown area as a "village" similar to Wickford's. By indicating that it is a village, people should expect that it is oriented to pedestrians. He stated that our parking study counted 2,700 parking spaces (both private and public, on street and off street). He discussed a previous wayfinding proposal by Dave Chapman and proposed a new type of signage based on the visual of a house with meaning denoted by color.

Ms. Volino asked about marking spaces and about enforcement. Mr. Heckert also noted that enforcement was a key issue and may not require an extra police officer. Several EDB members suggested looking at constables(?). As for marking spaces on the street, Ms. Tattrie and Mr. Frerichs suggested that the EDB gather a petition of business owners on Water Street supporting on-street marking and present the petition with a letter to Town Council.

Mr. Heckert and Ms. Dionne discussed a walk and pictures that they took showing the outdated and work signage cluttering the sides of the roads on Main and Water. Ms. Dionne noted that a sign for a public phone stands at the Water/Main corner,

but no phone. Ms. Wells also noted that Warren has a lot of phone poll clutter. [Note: addressing sign clutter has been added to Objective 1 of the EDB Work Plan].

- **Objective 2: Capitalize on Warren's Farms and Agriculture.** Mr. Frerichs said that he would be happy to be on all of the farm work groups. Ms. Wells mentioned that she would like to discuss with farmers what they do and if there is any resources needed. The Town is looking at community gardens at Schoolhouse Road. Mr. Frerichs and Ms. Tattrie both thought the high speed traffic there might present a problem and Mr. Frerichs was concerned that some people might use chemicals in the watershed. Ms. Wells will analyze this area's possibilities. Mr. Frerichs also noted that the lot off of Paul's Court would be good and also, if Ms. Remy really wanted to pursue the gardens, in the private property off of Libby Lane.

- **Objective 3: Improve information about locating and operating a business in Warren**

Mr. Heckert indicated that he thought this was a major part of the EDB's responsibility. Ms. Silva said that she looked at Middletown's ED website and several others and thought it was really good. Ms. Wells mentioned that the RIEDC is creating a database of properties and had a good summary of what businesses are looking for when relocating. She indicated that the Newport County Chamber got the grants for the Middletown website and offered to help Warren in pulling together something similar. The EDB discussed the Newport Chamber and the East Bay Chamber and what Warren stood to gain from these entities.

Mr. Heckert thought that items 2 and 3 under this objective could be combined. Ms. Volino and Ms. Silva mentioned that they started to inventory the storefronts and needed to finish this work—their goal was to have information for possible renters or for beautification efforts. The EDB discussed Mr. Desisto's empty storefront (the former Tack Shop) and wondered if they could do some work there. Mr. Frerichs said that he would discuss with him.

Ms. Blount discussed how easy it was to work with Portland, Maine, and that there may be some lessons there. The government actively seeks out businesses, makes contacts and appointments and is a liaison between business and government. Mr. Heckert thought that was something that Warren should do. Ms. Wells thought that was what the Enterprise Zone essentially should do, but the title and program do not specify what business services are being provided or how proactive the position is in soliciting business.

- The next meeting of the board is on June 15, 2009.

Given the time, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 9:36 p.m.

*Minutes submitted by Caroline Wells
June 4, 2009*