



Town of Warren, Rhode Island

Minutes of the Economic Development Board

The Town of Warren, RI Economic Development Board met at a Regular Meeting on **July 20, 2009** at 7:00 p.m. at Town Hall, located at 514 Main Street. Board Members present included Sara Volino, Brandt Heckert, Paula Silva, Diane Horton, Karen Dionne, Nancy Blount and Davison Bolster. Ex Officio member Caroline Wells was present as well as Town Council members Dave Frerichs and Cathie Tattie. Ex officio members Alan Crisman and Cheryl Silva were absent.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

1. Introduction of New Board Member, Diane Horton

Ms. Volino recognized the new board member.

2. Discussion with Chris Fuller. The EDB discussed this item after the Work Plan agenda. Mr. Fuller explained that he works with RISE Engineering on energy efficiency plans for buildings. He said that giving business tenants a predictable payment plan for office energy costs can help sell a building. Moreover, existing incentives (visible at the website <http://www.dsireusa.org/>) can help make energy upgrades more cost effective. He discussed the value of re-insulating buildings and mentioned the relatively low savings for replacement windows. The EDB agreed that a write up that forms part of the permitting process would be very helpful to business owners or landlords thinking of renovations.

3. Work Plan Agenda Items. The EDB determined that it would report on actions to accomplish each objective monthly. Actions are reported by the Objective “champion” or leader, who is responsible for pushing each objective toward fulfillment (even if other board members or work groups are involved). Objectives discussed:

- a. **Objective 1 “Create clarity for visitors to Warren.”** Mr. Bolster volunteered to lead this objective. He stated a need to keep revising the Parking Study with Ms. Wells. Mr. Heckert stated that wayfinding was important, but he also felt that the town had a need for parking enforcement to limit squatters. The EDB discussed enforcement through ticketing and the usage of constables rather than officers.
- b. **Objective 2 “Capitalize on Warren’s farms and agriculture.”** Mr. Frerichs said that he and Ms. Wells would lead this objective. He suggested that the EDB start now to plan for a farmer’s market at Burr’s Hill (either at the top of the hill or at the parking lot) for next year’s summer concert series. He also mentioned that the Farm Fresh truck made deliveries now to Warren and local restaurants like The Sunnyside were participating.
- c. **Objective 3 “Improve Information about locating and operating a business in Warren.”** Mr. Heckert will lead this objective. Ms. Volino said that the EDB discussed this at their last meeting in June. The permitting process needs to be in black and white. Ms. Silva and Ms. Volino already started work on the vacant storefronts issue. Ms. Tattie inquired as to whether the Police have more detailed contact information for store owners. Ms. Wells has been working on the website and will continue to work

with the help of Ms. Dionne. The EDB indicated that the website will be key for many issues.

- d. **Objective 4 “Initiate a business retention program.”** Because of the complexity of this issue and the possibility of coordinating with the Chamber of Commerce, no lead was selected for this objective. Ms. Blount volunteered for task 3, to ensure that Warren’s businesses are represented on appropriate marketing websites and listings. Ms. Tattie indicated that the Chamber has a number of listings, along with the East Bay Tourism entity, which now supports many of the Chamber’s activities. Ms. Tattie and/or Ms. Wells will contact Betty Pleacher and see what they can pull together.

Ms. Horton mentioned action #5, “creating a calendar so businesses know when to be open” and stated that in Providence, activities are often coordinated around Brown and RISD, and that knowing what is happening regionally can be important for promotion. Ms. Tattie mentioned that the EDB should tap into Roger Williams University’s activities as Bristol is certainly doing. She agreed with Ms. Wells that Warren can look toward Providence and East Providence as marketing targets for Warren.

- e. **Objective 5 “Create a Warren Arts Council to represent Warren in the Art Community”** Ms. Horton volunteered to lead this effort. EDB concluded that it would not call this group a “council”, which sounds too official, but instead will name it “Warren Arts” (spelling?). This group would be a working group of the EDB specifically focused on the fostering the arts in Warren. The EDB discussed advertising for such a group, but concluded that approaching a few active citizens in the arts community may be less controversial. Since Asher Scofield had a particular interest in public art, he will be approached by the committee as well as contacts in the cultural and performing arts. Ms. Silva discussed the Tiverton Arts Council/Sakonnet Arts Network and their mission. Ms. Horton added that a mission is important when dealing with artists and that this is something she has experience with.

Ms. Wells discussed the Main Street School, which the EDB was tasked with a reuse plan. The EDB had toured the property, and came up with a list of possibilities, including the possibility of an arts or exhibition hall. Ms. Wells said that beyond that, she did not have funding for more detailed analysis. She would talk to Alan Crisman and John Massed about the cost of maintaining the property and the cost of leasing (property management), etc. The EDB discussed if Warren could have a smaller indoor farmer’s market like Pawtucket, and if FarmFresh could help with this.

4. Old Business

- a. **Review of parking recommendation.** 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. Old Business

- a. **Review of parking recommendation letter and gathering of petitions.** Mr. Heckert presented a letter to Council requesting parking stripes along Water Street. He said that the petition gathering process was going to be long. The EDB made a few suggestions to the letter.
- b. **Discussion and Action on Arts Group.** This item was discussed above as part of the work plan.
- c. **Discussion and Action on Sign Clutter.** Ms. Wells stated that she talked to the DOT about sign clutter, and they agreed that it was a problem. They said that she could take pictures of the offending signs and
- d. **Preparation of revised CURP Assessment.** Ms. Wells stated that she has not received the password to Northeastern's CURP site, but when she does, EDB members can work through the assessment again and compare results.

5. New Business

- a. **Discussion of Businesses and Social Media.** Ms. Silva talked about the value of using online social media to promote Warren and Warren businesses. Twitter, Facebook, MySpace are now becoming common ways for businesses to get the word out. She mentioned the Cheeky Monkey in Narragansett (<http://www.cheekymonkeynarragansett.com>) and how they have a Facebook page and announcements on Twitter. Ms. Wells said that maybe as "Discover Warren" the EDB could get the word out about Warren & its events. The EDB discussed holding a free after-work event to educate business owners who may want to advertise through social network accounts. Because of summer, the EDB concluded that September may be the best time, and that they would need a venue that supports at least 30 people.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Caroline Wells, July 23, 2009