



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 **January 18, 2010** at 7:00 p.m. at Town Hall, located at 514 Main Street. Board Members present included Sara Volino, Paula Silva, Karen Dionne, Diane Horton, Brandt Heckert, and Linda Brunini. Ex Officio members Caroline Wells and Alan Crisman were present as well as Town Council member Cathie Tattrie. Member Davison Bolster was absent. Kristin MacDonald was present at the meeting to serve as Secretary to the EDB.

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m.

1. Introduction of new EDB member, Linda Brunini

New member Linda Brunini was introduced to the members of the EDB. Ms. Brunini expressed some of her frustrations with the downtown business district and presented the board with ideas to improve business exteriors and to attract new businesses to Warren. Ms. Volino recognized the new board member.

2. Discussion and Approval of Storefront Improvement Program

The board discussed the CDGB grant and how the Storefront Improvement Program should be implemented. The board discussed several key issues, including criteria for eligible businesses, design guidelines, and loan repayment terms.

Ms. Wells stated that eligible businesses should be located in the 305 Census Tract. The Storefront Improvement Program would provide funding for the improvement of exterior storefronts. Mr. Crisman commented that the program should not be intended to benefit derelict properties; Ms. Wells noted that both ownership history and condition of the property could be included as terms for eligibility to the program. Ms. Brunini suggested that The EDB could form a subcommittee to compile a list of properties that are the most in need of improvement and to form design guidelines for businesses. The board discussed the issue of mandatory design guidelines for businesses; Ms. Volino encouraged the board to focus on design issues specifically related to the Storefront Improvement Program.

The board named various types of improvements appropriate for funding; Ms. Wells stated that specific improvements, including signage improvement and awning installation, could be listed as priorities for eligibility. Ms. Wells stated that EDB could encourage the use of natural building materials and request design plans as part of the application process for the program.

Ms. Wells asked the board to consider loan terms and payment options for the program. One payback option that was considered was payback of half the loan amount within one year. Mr. Heckert questioned the need for repayment when participants are required to match funds. The goal of the EDB is to encourage as many business owners as possible to take advantage of the program. Mr. Crisman agreed that the EDB should make the process as easy as possible at least for the first year. The board agreed to offer a forgivable, zero interest loan with fifty percent matching funds required by the applicant.

A motion was made for Ms. Wells to move forward with the Storefront Improvement Program, the motion was seconded, and all were in favor. Ms. Wells noted that the next step in the process would be to streamline the application requirements and to publish an article in the Warren Times to solicit for candidates for the Storefront Improvement Program.

3. Discussion and Action on Downtown Parking and Signage

Ms. Dionne, as a member of the Parking and Signage subcommittee, prepared a Powerpoint presentation entitled "Warren Wayfinding" to illustrate signage issues throughout the Downtown business area. This presentation would be used as an exhibit to demonstrate signage issues to Town Council.

Ms. Tattrie recommended that the EDB present the Council with a plan to purchase specific signs and that the presentation should not focus on rehashing old issues; also, she indicated that the funds allocated for signage need to be used this year and will not rollover to the next budget year. The board suggested that Ms. Dionne modify her presentation to demonstrate that her exhibit represents "Phase I", the implication being that it is the first part of a larger Wayfinding Plan. "Phase I" would consist primarily of designing, purchasing, and the placement of Parking Signage. Ms. Dionne stated that she would meet with the Parking and Signage subcommittee to decide on specific time limits for different parking sites and to collaborate on a final parking sign design. Ms. Tattrie recommended that the subcommittee contact the Department of Public Works for pricing information on signage. The board recommended that Ms. Volino make an agenda request for Discussion and Approval of New Parking Signage to Town Council for the February meeting.

4. Discussion of 2010 CDBG Application for Economic Development Activities

The board briefly discussed the progress of the 2010 CDBG Application. Ms. Wells stated she was currently working on completing the application and that she would send the application to the board for review.

Given the time, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:15 p.m.

*Minutes submitted by Kristin MacDonald
February 11, 2010*