



Town of Warren, Rhode Island

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## Minutes of the Economic Development Board

The Town of Warren, RI Economic Development Board met at a Regular Meeting on December 12, 2011 at 6:00 p.m. at Town Hall, located at 514 Main Street. The presiding officer was Brandt Heckert. Board members present were Sara Volino, Karen Dionne, Kate Dickson, Paula Silva, Mark Lombardi, and Spencer Morris. Board member Darcy DaCosta was absent. Board member Joel Cary has officially resigned from the EDB. Ex officio member Caroline Wells was absent. Patrick DeSocio, owner of Preppy Pig catering, attended the meeting as a guest. Kristin MacDonald was present at the meeting to serve as Secretary to the EDB.

The meeting was called to order at 6:10 p.m.

### **1. Review and Approval of Minutes from the Regular Meeting of November 21, 2011**

The minutes from the regular meeting held on November 21, 2011 were reviewed by the members via email. The minutes were approved with the following correction: Mr. Heckert requested the first sentence in agenda Item 10 be changed from business "fee" to business "ordinance". With this correction noted, Ms. Volino made a motion to accept the minutes, the motion was seconded by Ms. Dickson, and all members were in favor.

### **2. Discussion and action to request from Town Council in writing the status on procuring control of the Narragansett Electric property at the north entrance to Warren**

Mr. Heckert stated that Councilman Bolster suggested that the EDB submit a letter to Town Council to reinforce the effort for the town to obtain a long term lease for the Narragansett Electric property at the north entrance to Warren. The Board agreed that the property could possibly serve as a public information center and park that would provide a great atmosphere for people coming into town. Mr. Heckert noted that the Town Planner is working on a grant from the DEM that could be eventually used for the redevelopment of the property. Mr. Heckert read the letter and the Board discussed a few minor changes; Ms. Dickson made a motion to send the letter to Town Council, Ms. Volino seconded the motion, and all members were in favor. Mr. Heckert said he would forward the letter to Town Council for the January meeting.

### **3. Discussion and action on the directive from council for recommended revisions to the business registration ordinance**

Regarding recommendations to Town Council on the revision of the business registration ordinance, the Board discussed a recent incident in which several local artists who participated in a display at Town Hall received letters from the town clerk requesting they register as businesses. Mr. Heckert stated there were two important issues to be considered; first, the issue of who should have to register as a business and pay the registration fee, and secondly, the issue of the town using the business registration as an opportunity to determine a tangible personal property tax.

The larger part of the following discussion was based on determining the difference between a business and a hobby, and if a hobbyist should be required to register as a business and pay the fee. The Board referenced IRS guidelines and the policies in other communities related to business registration. Regarding the tangible property tax, the Board discussed using an exemption rate as a possible incentive. The Board also recognized the need to refine the business registration application to differentiate between a hobby and a business, and to clarify that the business registration is for the use of the town only and does not affect an individual's federal or state tax status. The Board agreed that communication is an issue and that there is a need to clearly define the ordinance in a business friendly manner either through the website or through additional literature.

In conclusion, the Board decided that the ordinance does not need to change; the real need is to distinguish the difference between a business and hobby, as well as making the application more business friendly. The Board will recommend that the fee remain the same and will not recommend an exemption to the tangible tax. Mr. Morris noted that it is important to recommend that the business registration process should generate useful information which will enhance the business community. A decision was made to hold a Special Meeting on Wednesday, December 28<sup>th</sup> to review the workgroup's final report before presenting the report to Town Council in January. Ms. Dickson agreed to email a draft of the report for review a few days prior to the Special Meeting.

#### **4. Update on the status of the economic development section of the comprehensive plan (Dionne)**

Ms. Dionne reported that the Town Planner stated that the economic development section can be ratified and added to the comprehensive plan in 2012. Ms. Wells has already edited a portion of the section, and would like to attend a joint meeting of the EDB and the Planning Board in February to continue the process. Mr. Heckert stated he would talk to both the Planning Board and Caroline Wells to coordinate a February meeting. Mr. Heckert recommended that the Board review the updated version of the Comprehensive Plan on the town website.

#### **5. Update on the legalities of a centralized EDB informational website (Dickson)**

Ms. Dickson reported that Anthony DeSisto gave the EDB permission to use an informational website. Documents such as letters, reports, meeting agendas and minutes will be posted on a centralized website for all board members to easily access. The website would be available only to EDB members.

#### **6. Discussion on the oversight of a centralized EDB informational website**

Ms. Dickson recommended that the EDB use “Dropbox” as the centralized informational website. She will send the EDB members an invitational link to the site. Ms. MacDonald volunteered to be the administrator for the EDB “Dropbox” folder.

## **7. Discussion of EDB work plan priorities for 2012**

Mr. Heckert emphasized the importance of focusing on work plan priority items for the coming year. He said this was something to think about for the next meeting and he asked the Board to send pertinent agenda items for the January meeting. He noted that focusing on a “business friendly” communication strategy for town hall is an important item that could be worked on by the EDB. Ms. Dionne said she would email a copy of the work plan to the Board and Mr. Heckert will email a reminder for agenda items for the January meeting.

The Board thanked Mr. DeSocio for attending the meeting; he said he has an interest in applying for an open position on the EDB. Ms. Volino said that she has reapplied for her position and will be interviewed at the next Town Council meeting. Ms. Silva noted that she had not reapplied for her position.

A motion was made to adjourn, the motion was seconded, and all members were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristin M. MacDonald

Minutes submitted by Kristin MacDonald  
January 20, 2011

