



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 January 25, 2016 at 6:00 p.m. at Warren Town Hall. The presiding officer was Karen Dionne. Board members present were Mark Lombari, Sara Volino, Ben Terry, Walter Conklin, and Tyler Dixon. Kathleen Tucciarone was absent. Stephen Smith was in attendance. Kristin MacDonald was present at the meeting to serve as Secretary to the EDB.

### **1. Review and Approval of Minutes from the Regular Meeting of December 21, 2015.**

The minutes from the regular meeting held on December 21, 2015 were reviewed by the board via email. A motion was made by Mr. Lombari to approve the minutes, the motion was seconded by Mr. Dixon, and all members were in favor.

### **2. Review of 2016-17 Work Plan.**

The board reviewed the current work plan. According to the town manager, the storefront improvement plan is an important project for the EDB. The EDB will continue with encouraging businesses to take part in this program in the spring. The new town planner will be able to update the board on the status of the program, most importantly the CDGB funding.

Mr. Dixon spoke to the board about his recent meeting with Mr. Eames, the Building Inspector; they discussed solutions to some of the zoning issues affecting the business district. Mr. Dixon plans to meet with Mr. Reitsma in the next month. Mr. Dixon said he is in the process of creating a survey of individual properties. The completed survey will help identify needs and guide an effective action plan for change. Mr. Dixon stated that the ultimate goal would be to collaborate with RWU students or some other group in order to identify what is working in the zoning code as well as what issues are problematic.

The board continued with a discussion on ways to improve retail properties in town. Many of the currently vacant spaces would require a "build out" investment from a potential business owner which makes it difficult to draw new businesses to town. In December, Mr. Reitsma suggested that the EDB create an inventory of available retail/office spaces. Previously Ms. Tucciarone had been interested in working on this project. Mr. Terry said he would contact Hope & Main in an effort to find out what or if any plans are in place to relocate the incubator clients when they phase out of the Hope & Main program. Mr.

Lombari said he would meet with the town planner to discuss grant opportunities that would allow landlords to improve business properties.

Ms. Dionne continued to discuss zoning and particularly signage regulations. She suggested that the EDB should work on resubmitting suggestions to update the existing signage regulations. Also, Ms. Dionne said she would like to pursue funding opportunities for beautification projects such as planters on Main Street and Water Street.

### **3. Update on status of town website.**

Ms. Dionne updated the board on the status of the town website. Mr. Conklin and Ms. Dionne said that they will work with Mr. Reitsma regarding questions about design and any IT issues that might come forward as the website project progresses. Ms. Dionne reported that Mr. Reitsma will be attending the RI League of Cities and Towns convention on Thursday, January 28<sup>th</sup>. There will be representatives at this convention from companies that specialize in building municipal websites. Ms. Dionne said she may attend the convention as well.

### **4. Discussion and planning of Spring Open Business Forum.**

The board briefly discussed the upcoming Spring Open Business Forum. The planned venue is 426 Fitness at Parker Mills. The board discussed potential speakers for the event, promotion of the event, and the invitation list for the event. Ms. Volino stressed that that tone of the event should be upbeat and promote a successful business client in Warren. Ms. Dionne said that she will extend an invitation to the new town planner to the February meeting. The board will ask the town planner for suggestions regarding a speaker for the Open Business Forum.

A motion was made to adjourn by Ms. Volino, the motion was seconded by Mr. Terry, and all members were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristin M. MacDonald  
February 15, 2016.



