

Economic Development Committee

2 March 2023 – Meeting Minutes

Time: 12:00pm – 1:05pm

Attendees:

Glenn Brown
John Drohan
Patrick Hafford
Viktoria Anshu
David Thorn

Not available:

Christine Carosella
Chimaya Gogineni

Also in attendance and participating:

Travis Ahearn – Town Administrator
Tina Hein – Select Board
Julie Winston – Finance Committee

Discussion

Meeting opened with John Drohan calling meeting to order and Travis reading State required zoom meeting information. Roll call taken.

Primary discussion was the task of the EDC to begin creating a work plan based on the results and recommendations of the MAPC analysis that was completed last month. The primary result of the MAPC study was the recommendation of the town hiring a person in some capacity to manage a town economic development program. The MAPC proposal was a multi-phase idea where the current EDC would engage in specific tasks for year 1 in preparation for hiring a person in year 2 to begin engaging in the next level of tasks. These tasks were outlined in the executive summary of the MAPC proposal as well as in a grid task list (tear sheet). Both of these were referenced throughout the meeting.

John and Travis had indicated that they both discussed the MAPC recommendations at the Select Board and Finance Committee meetings earlier in the week with the intent of letting both groups know that the EDC would be discussing and presenting a recommendation on how we thought this would work.

We discussed that we would use this meeting as well as our next meeting scheduled for 16 March to talk about everything we needed to in order to provide our best recommendation.

The recommendation would need to be done relatively quickly so both the Select Board and the Finance Committee would have enough information to be able to discuss at the May town meeting. The reason for this is because Travis had earmarked the EDC budget increase to \$51,000 in an effort to enable the new hire to happen for FY24. We discussed how there could be some flexibility in exactly when the new hire would start and how exactly much they would be paid.

The discussion began with the group talking about how we this would look to us and agreeing on the desired outcome of this entire project. John, Glenn, Pat and Viktoria all made similar points on how we saw the focus being on setting up the incoming hire for success by trying to connect with the existing businesses in the town both in the industrial parks as well as the downtown and east and west Holliston areas. We agreed that our timeline would be to possibly hire this person in January 2024. As stated above there was flexibility in this.

Glenn brought up a point maybe trying to identify the top 50 or 100 businesses and try to connect with them first.

We discussed the importance of giving the hired person clear guidance with measurable performance objectives for both the short and longer term.

The concept of return on investment (ROI) was brought up by several people where the idea of being able to clearly articulate that was important for our recommendation. Comments were made that if we had a more accurate accountability of the businesses that there could be a potential increase in town income from personal property tax. In addition the simple concept of filling vacancies in the industrial park would obviously be a potential increase in tax revenue. These were examples of what a person working for economic development could do.

Another discussion point was the strategic value of a person dedicated to economic development with respect to the ongoing project of creating a more business friendly and attractive Downtown area (loosely termed as the "Downtown Renovation"). We discussed how the hire could be a centerpiece in this ongoing project particularly with respect to the potential possibility of a downtown sewer.

As was highlighted in the MAPC recommendations, we discussed that one of the duties of the hire would also be someone who would actively look for new business opportunities, particularly in the industrial parks. We also discussed that another important duty would be to work to implement and oversee the process for a business to start in Holliston. The emphasis would be to make it streamlined and easy.

The remainder of the meeting we discussed how this person would be hired, specifically would they be a full time hire or a contracted person. We highlighted that both Dan Alfred and Julie Winston from the Finance Committee indicated that possibly hiring a contractor could be better because that person might be more experienced based on the pay level that we are operating with. Glenn, Pat and Viktoria indicated that they would be in favor of hiring a full time person

because they felt that there would be a greater commitment level and this was important in what we were trying to accomplish. Travis emphasized that the MAPC recommendation was leaning away from hiring an outside consultant/contractor. Travis also discussed the idea of hiring someone in conjunction with another town in a “shared” role which would possibly enable getting a person with more experience as they would be in a higher pay bracket from combined salary.

We did not reach a conclusion on this by the end of the meeting and agreed that we would continue this next meeting and formulate our recommendation then.

Meeting adjourned at 1:05pm.