

Easthampton Master Plan Committee
Economic Development Subcommittee
Minutes – January 22, 2007

Attendees: David Boyle, J.P. Kwiecinski, Julie Smith, Jason Bachand, Christine Yario, Dana Salisbury, Janet Muzzy, Deb Hamel, Ed Sparko, Brett Gurney

The purpose of the meeting was to prepare for the March 14th speaker session. Discussion centered around who to invite, and how to do so. It was agreed that we would first brainstorm to identify individuals, then decide who would invite which people. Then we would discuss crafting an invitation letter.

A number of names were suggested --

- Gene Talsky
- Eileen Koteen
- Dennis Fitzpatrick
- Kristin Wood (from John Olver's office)
- Jim Burke (Economic Development person from Windsor CT)
- Samalid Hogan
- UMass Professor John Mullin (possible moderator?)
- Bill Terry (Belchertown EDIC)
- Jack Dugan (Econ Development person from Keene, NH)
- Lorne Schafer (Amherst Town Manager)
- Some discussion centered around identifying an economic development expert from the Five Colleges consortium.

Post-meeting update: participants who have agreed include
Jack Dugan
Eric Nakajima
Tim Brennan
Kristen Wood
Ellen Koteen

(Bios of each to follow)

There was also a discussion about taking a few steps back – while it seems to be a good idea to invite economic development experts to talk with us, we should consider talking with businesses, or at least people who can speak about the business community.

(Note: this discussion received broader treatment after the meeting, via email – and it was agreed that we will conduct a focus group with businesses in the area at a later date. One question we'd like to ask some of the employers in the area is: "Project your business forward ten years. Do you see yourself remaining in (or moving to) Easthampton? Why or why not?")

During our meeting, we also discussed finding individuals who could talk about broader topics such as "economic development in communities with strong natural resources" such as Portland, Oregon or Providence, Rhode Island.

Discussion then turned to the **questions we would ask of our panelists**, and the format the event would take. It was decided that we will draft the questions ahead of time and send them to participants with our confirmation letter. The questions are below.

1. Describe the challenges you've overcome when dealing with downtown development (some people felt this should be broader, as in "dealing with economic development")
2. Describe some successes or lessons learned from those challenges.
3. Talk about some of the most promising ideas you are investing time and energy in right now that could work for Easthampton.
4. Describe the changes you believe Easthampton has to make in order to have a successful future.
5. How could local colleges & universities work with Easthampton to invigorate economic development?
6. As Easthampton's Economic Development subcommittee for our town's Master Plan, what questions should we be asking?

The format of the event would include

- sending an invitation after obtaining preliminary commitment from invitees which would include
 - a town "bio" (Julie to write)
 - list of questions (Julie to write, based on list above)
 - description of the Master Plan project (Janet to write)
 - list of all subcommittees (Janet to write)
 - mission of econ subcommittee (Janet to write)
 - purpose of the panel discussion (to educate subcommittee members on issues surrounding econ dev) (Janet to write)
- including a list of questions with the confirmation letter
- each panelist is given five minutes to discuss one of the six questions listed above

Following this discussion, some brainstorming occurred around various ideas for economic vitality in Easthampton.

What do we want our final content in the master plan to look like? We feel it's imperative that we include language that states, "whatever is in the master plan must coincide with any plan that's before the city council and/or planning board."

Economic development that utilizes existing parks and natural resources – critical to Easthampton. Includes our "linear park", the bike path. Water elements a key part of our town. How do we use these effectively? How do we link our open spaces to create a "greenbelt" within the town that can be marketed and utilized? Tangible example: food vendors or water kiosks on the bike path.

How do we get commuters to work from home? How do we make that viable and attractive for businesses? How do we market it?

Promote "out of the box" thinking within our committee. Keep making it a point to "blue-sky" ideas, not dismiss anything out of hand. Always keep in mind our local sustainability.

Neighborhood businesses that once served communities are gone. Need local, walkable commerce spots. Tangible example: think about how far someone on Oliver Street has to travel for a cup of coffee. Why is that? A few ideas:

- A. Consider amending the zoning regulations to allow for low intensity business uses (such as a small neighborhood market) in certain residential zones by special permit.
- B. Consider establishing "overlay districts" which would take precedent over the requirements of the underlying zone (i.e. a neighborhood business overlay district in a residential zone).

Certain conditions (through the special permit process) would be necessary to protect nearby residential properties. The city would also have the discretion of approving or denying an application based on various factors (i.e. suitable location, adequate buffers, etc) and there would be an opportunity for public comment.

Create a walkable path around the pond. It's our greatest resource it's barely accessible. Don't need to take property, could do a path in Nonotuck and a footbridge across to public boat access on Water Lane....

Next meeting: Monday, February 12th from 4:30 – 6:30 at Dave's office.