



CITY OF EAST PROVIDENCE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Minutes of September 16, 2021

Held through Zoom Virtual Meeting Conference Session

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Botelho at 7:02 pm. Those identified as present were Chairwoman Botelho, Mr. Leonardo, Mr. Killian, Mr. Brun, Mr. Corria, and Mr. DeCosta, legal staff.

A. Approval of Minutes of June 17, 2021

Chairwoman Botelho asked that the powers and duties descriptions within the draft minutes and her notes from these descriptions be removed since the comments are in draft form and can be discussed more in the fall term when the Commission returns from summer break. She also referenced a misspelling in item B where the word toll should be replaced with tool.

On a Motion by Mr. Corria and seconded by Mr. Leonardo, the Commission unanimously voted to approve the June 17, 2021 meeting minutes with the noted modifications.

II. New Business

A. Use of ARPA funds for Economic Development

Mr. Moran provided a status update on the Planning Department's efforts to see ARPA funding being utilized for additional funding for the loan program and new funding to capitalize a façade improvement program. Planning has requested that \$500,000 in ARPA funds be appropriated to the UDAG account to be utilized for future commercial and microloans and \$250,000 in funds that would be utilized for façade improvement grants akin to the prior 2+2 grant program the City offered to area businesses a few years back. He stated that the Mayor's office is deep in the budget process right now but anticipated that consideration toward these funds will be applied should start to take place in October or November.

Mr. Leonardo said there is also funding in excess of \$1 billion that is going to the State and many municipalities are holding off on using their funds until they see how the State is going to allocate their funds.

B. Discussion on loan program lending rate

Mr. Moran said that the Planning Department had discussed the potential to change the lending rate from an adjustable rate loan program to a fixed rate loan. After deliberation on the possibility of making the changes, the Commission determined that the loan program should remain an adjustable rate loan but that it made sense to apply the annual 1% maintenance fee to a set date for all loans rather than the anniversary date of each loan as is the practice now.

III. Old Business

A. Economic Development Commission Powers and Duties Discussion

Chairwoman Botelho said that when new members are appointed they can be provided with the listing of the powers and duties of the Economic Development Commission to make them aware of what the Commission is tasked with. She indicated that they would also receive information on the survey to indicate how the Commission members feel regarding how well they are accomplishing these powers and duties. She also stated that the Commission as a body could also take a look at establishing sub-committees on different economic development efforts including a loan review sub-committee and other sub-committees on business outreach etc.

She asked if anyone had comments or potential revisions to the draft she prepared for the Commission's review. She said this draft is fluid and she would welcome any feedback from the group. Mr. Killian said he had gone through the draft and gave her a copy of his review comments to provide potential edits to her document. Chairwoman Botelho said she will add his revisions to her draft and bring it back the Commission to review.

Mr. Moran suggested the potential of having business open houses once or twice a year to hear back from the City's business communities on issues affecting them and how the Commission might be able to recommend changes that would support the business community. The Commission discussed the Chamber of Commerce's involvement in this effort. Mr. Moran said that as Chamber Executive Director Laura McNamara is a liaison member of the Commission, this could be a good fit for her involvement.

IV. Staff Report

A. Discussion on active and recently approved projects in the City and other economic development relevant activities underway

Mr. Moran discussed projects underway in the City at the current time including recent purchases of the Chevron property by Waterfront Enterprises, land purchases on Valley Street. Developments include the new apartments on Circle Drive in Rumford, completion of the apartments on Veterans Memorial Parkway the commencement of construction at Newport Center a mixed use development containing 142 residential apartments a convenience/gas retail use and a 19,000 square foot retail building. Wampanoag Meadows, a more than 400 unit apartment development, is also moving forward and should be starting construction soon.

The Commission discussed how the dog groomer Chibi's Choice was doing. Mr. Moran noted that it appeared he was doing well and that the owner has many new clients.

Mr. Moran mentioned the new mixed use overlay ordinance and how it will hopefully promote new development on Taunton Avenue, Warren Avenue, Waterman Avenue and Riverside Square.

The Commission discussed when the new microbrewery, Crook Point Brewing will be opening. It was indicated by Mr. Moran that the brewery would be opening by the end of the year.

There was also the nutritional drink retail stores on Taunton Avenue, Café Zara and a candle making and wine retail establishment (Scentique)

Mr. Moran announced the City's cooperative effort with the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council (BVTC) as a result of the legislature approving the City's allocation of its tourism funding. The City anticipates working with BVTC and Laura McNamara who will be working as a liaison between the City and the BVTC to promote tourism. Betty Galligan from Newberry Marketing will also be a partner in this effort. Mr. Moran indicated that more details will be discussed at the Commission's next meeting as the discussions will be more advanced at next month's meeting.

Mr. Moran discussed the City's new Soofa signs that were installed at Watchemoket Square and near City Hall. The signs will act as a wayfinding sign but will also have an electronic bulletin board that will inform the public of events. Local businesses can also advertise on the board and the City gets a portion of the revenue generated through advertising. East Providence is the first City in Rhode Island to install these signs. The signs were funded through a \$75,000 Rhode Island Commerce Department grant. The City will also be installing lantern trail art kiosks in the Square as part of the Commerce Department grant. These kiosks are currently be fabricated by Amaral Custom Fabrications. The City is working with the Arts Council's Jennifer Cahoon on these kiosks and she will be coordinating with the City on the location for these kiosks and the art that will be placed in the kiosks themselves.

Mr. Moran indicated that Nick Rabar's loan for the Honeybird Kitchens had closed and that the restaurant would probably be opening sometime in November.

The Commission briefly discussed the status of the Exxon Mobil land sale and its current marketing status. Mr. Moran indicated that he would update the Commission in a future meeting

once the parcels that are being placed on the market are identified and posted on the real estate broker's (MG Commercial) website.

IV. Adjournment

On a Motion by Mr. Leonardo and Seconded by Mr. Killian, the Commission unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 pm
Respectfully submitted,

James Moran

Recording Secretary