

Essex Economic Development Commission (EDC)

Meeting Minutes

Date	March 4, 2021
Location	Online via Microsoft Teams
Members	Annie Cooper, Chair, Brian Shelden, Vice-Chair, Botur Kosimi, Clerk Jeff Benjamin
Staff	Evan Teich, Owiso Makuku, Robin Pierce, Darren Schibler
Partners	Sam Andersen (GBIC)
Public	Irene Wrenner, Ken Signorello

Chair Cooper called the meeting to order at approximately 8:03 am.

Chair Cooper stated she did not give her permission to be live streamed to Facebook,

There was no public to be heard or changes to the agenda.

Approval of Minutes

- Chair Cooper clarified that there were 2 sets of minutes for review and approval, one from last EDC meeting and the other from special local option tax meeting. Mr Benjamin noted that Chair Cooper had a comment with a question mark on one of the minutes and Mr Schibler shared his screen to show that he removed that highlighted "missing" remark before posting it as draft on the website. Vice-Chair Shelden motioned to approve the minutes with minor grammar and spelling corrections and Mr Benjamin seconded it, so with all members in favor Chair Cooper announced them approved.

Updates from Partners/Staff

- Mr Teich updated participants about the merger vote and the outcome of Selectboard elections. He also spoke about GlobalFoundries' request to visit them and accept their monetary donation and a plaque in form of a wafer they make in appreciation of Essex and Underhill fire department's support during a major water leak about a month ago. Mr Teich mentioned that without local fire department's support the company would have had to shut down at least for a week and incurred big losses. He quoted GlobalFoundries executives that rumors about them leaving Vermont is ludicrous and they are actually putting in over \$50 million into Fab-9 that is their Essex plant.
- Mr Benjamin asked if the multimillion-dollar investment by GlobalFoundries will affect the empty office space that they have to which Mr Teich replied that they did not go into the details of expansion, but a lot of their money is for upgrading of equipment and bringing in the latest cutting edge technologies their industry uses. He said that based on what he was told GlobalFoundries is actually operating at overcapacity and cannot make chips fast enough for demand.
- Ms Andersen commented that the legislature is on break, so there is really no news this week. She shared updates about issues that legislature is going to address upon return from break such as broadband bill, economic development bill, toxins spill and ground fill. She also spoke about 20,000 sq feet of space available at 84 Red Pine Circle in Essex and being in touch with JL Davis to understand details of that property in case they come across any businesses that may be looking for more space.
- Mr Schibler talked about the application for expansion of operation at 123 Old Colchester Road, which is the Greystone industrial park, and Omega Excavations' new headquarters where they had been extracting stone and crushing on site. He remarked that the company is requesting approval of another 150,000 cubic yards and 2 new 20,000 sq foot warehouse buildings which is on the Planning Commission's agenda for next Thursday.

- Ms Makuku said that she and Mr Pierce reached out to Vermont Federal Credit Union and set up an introductory meeting to discuss ways of tapping them as a resource in some of the future events. She also mentioned about attending a webinar on Hello Burlington, which is a regional destination marketing campaign and a division of Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce. Ms Makuku explained that they are trying to connect with local municipalities in promoting tourism and overall scheme of their initiative.
- Mr Pierce discussed some of the projects in the works, including discussions with GlobalFoundries on creating affordable housing and possibility of collaborating with developers on some of the land they have available. He shared updates about the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission voting on a project to connect Burlington to Essex and upgrade passenger rail from tier 3 to tier 2. He underlined that a lot of money has been spent on improving the tracks from Burlington to New York, but not enough invested to develop more competitive routes to Boston and Montreal and connecting these destinations and populations to generate more growth for local economy. Mr Pierce also mentioned about Master Class Weekends event that they are planning for summer and early autumn during which vendors would offer some services to residents as a marketing and promotion for them such a classes on making barbeque and sauce, home brewing, fixing toilets, sinks, car, tires, arts and photography.

Discussion from Village Planning Commission Meeting

- Chair Cooper noted that members of the Village Planning Commission wanted to know our thoughts on possibility of incorporating a fee into development projects, which then could be used by the Economic Development Commission to attract businesses to our area or find out what we can do to better engage with them and ensure they are happy here. She mentioned that this initiative is being considered in order to find ways to fill in many vacant retail spaces that are currently available in buildings around Essex. Mr Benjamin commented that if we do get that additional funding that is built-in to development projects we need to figure out how to use it, whether it will be mostly for marketing, community outreach or how to approach businesses to relocate within or out of town to take up the vacant spots in buildings.
- Ms Makuku asked if it would make sense to conduct outreach to developers and find out what their thoughts are since they have engaged commercial brokers to occupy spaces in buildings. Chair Cooper agreed that it is a good idea and we are just starting to discuss this proposal by the Village Planning Commission. Mr Pierce commented that there are already fees for developers, but there are some savings when it comes to village center neighborhood and maybe that is where such fee could be incorporated since developers get some savings there. Ms Andersen cautioned about adding other fees without adequate explanation of details to remain as business friendly as possible and Mr Pierce suggested naming it a donation fee for healthy communities.
- Mr Kosimi remarked that it would be nice to get back to Village Planning Commission with our detailed opinion and proposed to research the subject to determine what is the potential estimated size of this economic development fund, so we can then figure ways the money can be used to achieve desired outcomes. Chair Cooper offered to bring our thoughts to both the Village and Town Planning Commissions and foster a thorough review process that will eventually determine specifics of this proposed fund. She said that if all EDC members agree, she will attend the next Selectboard or joint meeting to apprise them of these big ideas as some of the decision-making belongs to that table. Agreement was made.

2021 Work Plan

- Chair Cooper suggested moving other agenda items to the next meeting and made a motion to adjourn at approximately 9:13 am, moved by Vice-Chair Sheldon and seconded by Mr Benjamin, passed 4-0.

Prepared by Botur Kosimi on 03/17/21

Approved 03/18/2021