

Essex Economic Development Commission (EDC)

Meeting Minutes (draft)

Date	May 20, 2021
Location	Online via Microsoft Teams
Members	Chair Brian Shelden, Vice Chair Jeff Benjamin, Clerk Botur Kosimi, Ms Ta-Tanisha Reddita
Staff	Greg Duggan, Owiso Makuku, Robin Pierce, Darren Schibler
Partners	Sam Andersen (GBIC)
Public	Megan Humphries, Irene Wrenner, Ken Signorello

Call to Order

- Chair Shelden called the meeting to order at approximately 8:06 am.

Changes to Agenda / Review and Approval of Minutes

- Mr Kosimi made a motion to move “Updates from Partners and Staff” above “Business Contact List Status” in the agenda order and Mr Benjamin seconded, passed 3-0. The idea was to give the floor to guests first and then discuss internal committee projects.
- Mr Kosimi said that he sent the minutes from the last meeting late night. Ms Andersen confirmed the receipt, but Chair Shelden and Mr Benjamin said they did not have a chance to read through yet. Chair Shelden suggested checking with public before deciding to vote on it at a later time.

Public to Be Heard

- There was no public to be heard and members decided to review and approve minutes next time.

Updates from Partners and Staff

- Ms Andersen commented that GBIC is watching the legislature which is said to be in its last week with adjournment planned by Saturday. She said they are hopeful the legislature will work out remaining budget issues in close coordination with the administration. She noted that conflict is not so much about where the money goes, but where it will have to come from. Ms Andersen remarked that Governor Scott would like to use ARPA funds to make significant structural changes and for other areas of legislature’s interest use the general funds. She expressed disappointment that the tax exemption for manufacturers on integrated production process machinery may not make it through this session, so they will bring it up again.
- Ms Makuku shared about her work with town’s equity committee and town and village-wide racial justice equity and policing task force regarding economics of diversity. She noted that conversations we are having in our community are very important and even though diversity, equity and inclusion are hot button topics these days, overall, our workforce is diversifying nation-wide and companies are looking closely at these dynamics. She expressed hope that with these conversation going on in the community we figure these things out in civil and respectful manner.
- Mr Benjamin asked Ms Makuku if she knew about any types of outreach efforts that were carried out such as targeted job fairs at high schools to get more students and diverse populations to apply with local businesses which are struggling to fill in their vacancies. She replied that she was not aware of any and during our last meeting there was a general discussion about this topic without any conclusive

action steps agreed upon. Mr Kosimi inquired if this phenomenon is temporary due to transition from lock down to opening as he expected or whether hiring situation is getting worse/better for businesses with hiring. Ms Makuku commented that it seems to be a nationwide issue and the reasons are many, including federal additions to unemployment payments, child care availability, and change in people's values after COVID as well as Gen Z's emphasis on companies' commitments to social change.

- Mr Benjamin asked if the state has any funding available for communities to help them address labor shortage problem by organizing outreach events. He cited examples of Bagel Market that had to close down on Wednesdays because they don't have enough staff and Hannaford supermarket that's offering bonuses and livable wages, but still can't fill all their vacancies. Ms Makuku said that the town and village could work on increasing communication and providing more relevant information for the entire community and that EDC's business contact list could be very useful in establishing such vital connection and feedback loop. Mr Benjamin offered to start with contacting some companies that are posting their job ads online to see if they would be interested in participating at a job fair.
- Ms Humphries said that it's her passion to contribute to strong and vibrant Essex community and offered to help with communications and marketing in which she has over 25 years of experience. Ms Wrenner suggested to get in touch with high school which has some experience in holding job fairs to tap into their expertise.
- Mr Robin shared about his work with Mr Morgan on an application for the train station to the Leahy Congressional Directed Spending Program that is due tomorrow. He said they are hoping 11 Park St building is going to have an opening in end of June and a farmer applied to have a stand-alone farmer's market beside Firebird Café. He mentioned that work is ongoing with the land development code and that Autumn Pond 2 came in for conceptual work which is projected to add about 120 new apartments. He also updated participants about connector road developments.

Business Contact List Status

- Mr Kosimi shared updates about business contact list and results of separate meeting on this topic with Mr Makuku. He said additional columns were added to database per Mr Makuku's recommendations and final format has been established. Mr Kosimi commented that the workload has been split equally and it is time to reach out to businesses gather missing information. He offered to meet up and coordinate in person our outreach efforts.
- Ms Reddita said that she's willing to help out with any outreach and asked to get business cards that can help with facilitating contact with businesses. Mr Kosimi noted that business cards are being prepared by town staff. Chair Shelden offered to set up an online Doodle page to help members vote for the most convenient date and time of future meetings on business contact list initiative.

Next EDC Meeting

- Chair Shelden mentioned that the next meeting will be held on Thursday, June 3, 2021.

Adjournment

- Chair Shelden asked for a motion to adjourn at approximately 9:07 am, moved by Vice-Chair Benjamin and seconded by Mr Kosimi, passed 3-0.

Submitted by Clerk Botur Kosimi

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