

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2016
DRAFT SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

A meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Committee Sub-Committee was held at the office of the Department of Planning and Development, 444 Westminster Street, Providence, Rhode Island, in the 1st Floor Conference Room on February 25, 2016. The Sub-Committee meeting was called to order at 12:02 P.M, with Donald Gralnek, Executive Director, presiding.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Members in attendance included Adriana Dawson, Amahl Harik, and Shomari Husband.

MEMBERS ABSENT

Members not in attendance were Daniel Baudouin, John (Jack) Bentz, and Allyson Cote.

STAFF MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Staff members in attendance included Donald Gralnek, Executive Director, Providence Economic Development Partnership (PEDP); and Kathy Cosentino.

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Others in attendance included Thomas Hoagland, Director, Providence Business Loan Fund, Inc.

NEW BUSINESS

The topic of discussion for the Sub-Committee meeting was the city's responses and implementation of the three (3) economic development studies presented at the January 2016 meeting. Mr. Gralnek began the discussion by providing an overview of the purpose of the sub-committee meeting.

Clarification was requested of Mayor Elorza's targeted areas for the committee to establish as priorities to focus upon and provide strategy recommendations.

The recommendations and target industries of each of the reports were discussed.

Workforce development and skill development was briefly discussed and Mr. Gralnek stated that Jim Glover, the Acting Director of Workforce Development, would be invited to the next committee meeting.

Mr. Gralnek noted that the area of food is a big priority and briefly discussed the development of an industrial park at the former American Tourister site. The hope is to attract some food related businesses and co-packing companies. The Port of Providence was also briefly discussed relative to looking into demand for refrigerated warehousing at the port.

How to take advantage of economic development was then discussed relative to an organized effort, staffing, and joint ventures and partnerships.

At 12:31 P.M. Shomari Husband arrived at the meeting.

It was noted that the city or any related committee has not convened conversations to actively engage and foster new conversations around economic development.

A suggested project for the city to pursue was relocating Crossroads to promote economic development, the city's various neighborhoods and the development of the 195 land. Its current location is the gateway to the city's Southside and may have a potential impact on the 195 land to be developed due to its close proximity. It was also expressed that connectivity is an issue for the city such as the structure of its highway systems and also the location of the Bishop McVinney building. If the building was demolished and Westminster Street reopened, it would connect the city's West Side to Downtown. It was also noted that one of the reports treats the development of the 195 land as a capsule.

It was noted that too much of the focus is on retaining RISD graduates, which is a tough fight due to being a very transient group. There is little focus on people that are already here and the professionals that live and work here. The importance of improving the schools was noted in order to retain residents in the city. If the schools were better, people would not leave. Residents leave because of the schools and come back into the city on the weekends. The importance of encouraging bus use was also noted.

Mr. Gralnek questioned whether we should invite the educational institutions to a regular meeting. The sub-committee responded that we should have the conversation here first to see what we want to see them doing. We should develop ideas first before bring them into a meeting.

PRA projects on the west side were briefly discussed. A report of how many minority and women-owned businesses are connected to PRA projects and how many jobs were created was requested. It would be more of a community impact report than a black and white jobs report. It was questioned how much economic stimulus the projects provide in the communities in which they are in. It was also questioned what type of outreach and technical assistance is provided to loan applicants that are denied to support capacity building. We are now ramping up our marketing efforts and it was questioned whether the community knows that our product exists and that the city provides support services if an applicant does not qualify for a loan.

Mr. Gralnek stated that we can rank what we need to do and that he would email the committee regarding the three (3) top things we need to do and the three (3) top things the city should be doing.

The sub-committee then discussed the focus areas from the three (3) reports. Topics discussed were tax policy and TIF; transportation, workforce development; infrastructure improvements and education.

Mr. Gralnek reiterated that an email will be sent to the full committee regarding input relative to the focus areas.

It was suggested that we ask the committee to do some homework regarding reading information on TIF and come prepared to discuss at the next meeting whether it should be the city's policy.

An organizational chart with the department heads and capacity as far as staffing and authority was requested in order to see the internal real estate we have, who the players are with tentacles into economic development and that touch businesses.

Mr. Gralnek noted that the director of procurement would be invited to the March meeting as well as the director of Arts, Culture and Tourism.

Mr. Gralnek questioned who would be charged with the policies this group crafts and sends to the mayor. An implementing policy was also recommended, as we need some folks to be charged with carrying this out.

Mr. Gralnek briefly reviewed the target industries or clusters of the Fourth Economy study.

The city's deep water port was also briefly discussed. The city should promote and expand the port as well as build skills training around.

Mr. Gralnek noted that an email would be coming out quickly to the full committee for ideas and suggestions and thanked the sub-committee for their time.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:28 P.M.