

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 30, 2019
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

A meeting of the Economic Development Advisory 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 January 30, 2019. The Economic Development Advisory Committee meeting was called to order at 12:20 P.M, with Jenn Steinfeld, Chairperson, presiding. Roll call of the members and legal counsel was conducted upon the motion of Kas DeCarvalho that was seconded by Michael Solomon. A quorum was present.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Members in attendance included Jenn Steinfeld, Director of Strategic Partnerships and Mayor Elorza's Designee (Chairperson), Kas DeCarvalho, Esq. (Treasurer), Stephen DelSesto, Esq., Mark Feinstein, Amahl Harik, Luis Martinez and Michael Solomon.

MEMBERS ABSENT

Members not in attendance were John (Jack) Bentz, Allyson Cote, Council President Sabina Matos, and Dr. Russell Ricci.

STAFF MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Staff members in attendance included Kathy Cosentino.

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Others in attendance were Michael A. Calise, Esq., Senior Assistant City Solicitor, City of Providence Law Department and Economic Development Advisory Committee legal counsel; Bonnie Nickerson, Director, City of Providence Department of Planning and Development; Thomas Hoagland, Executive Director, Providence Business Loan Fund; Alex Riddle, Andrew Kim and Levi Campello, Rhode Island School of Design.

MEETING MINUTES

The minutes of the December 6, 2018 Economic Development Advisory Committee meeting were submitted for review and approval. A motion was made by Kas DeCarvalho and seconded by Mark Feinstein to approve the minutes of the December 6, 2018 Economic Development Advisory Committee meeting. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON

The next agenda item entertained by the committee was the Report of the Chairperson. Jenn Steinfeld presented the report. The first topic of discussion was the election of officers and the election of Michael Solomon as position of Vice-Chairperson. Upon a motion made by Kas DeCarvalho and seconded by Mark Feinstein it was voted to elect Michael Solomon as the Vice-Chairperson of the Economic Development Advisory Committee. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

The next agenda item under the Report of the Chairperson entertained by the committee was the election of new members of the committee. Luis Martinez has now been appointed to the committee. Upon a motion made by Mark Feinstein and seconded by Stephen DelSesto, Esq, it was voted to approve the election of the new member of the committee. Mr. Martinez was welcomed to the committee.

The next agenda item under the Report of the Chairperson entertained by the committee was the discussion of economic and workforce development within the Urban Innovation Partnership and its anchor partners related to demand for and training of healthcare professionals. Ms. Steinfeld provide a quick update regarding the city's partnership with Rhode Island College (RIC) and the collaboration with Mount Pleasant High School and RIC with our teaching workforce and building upon the success of this pilot program to do the same high school program around health care. The funding issues were

discussed, particularly the funding issue around students having dual enrollment. For certain funding pipelines the students cannot be both in high school and college.

NEW BUSINESS

The first agenda item entertained by the committee was further discussion regarding the presentation provided at the last meeting by Bonnie Nickerson, Director of the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) relative development projects happening in Providence. Ms. Nickerson was present to answer any questions of the committee from the last meeting. The handout from the last meeting outlining the development projects that were presented was redistributed to the committee members at the meeting.

Ms. Nickerson answered questions of the committee. Questions were raised regarding other projects in the pipeline, whether analysis is being done regarding those that do not go forward to know why or issues for not proceeding. Ms. Nickerson indicated that the other projects are DPD approved projects but do not go forward most commonly due to financing. The committee questioned whether the city has been able to identify current themes besides financing that the board can look at and maybe be a resource to do something about. Ms. Nickerson responded that would be great, that she will think of the committee as a resource and will compile a challenge to herself.

Questions were raised with regard to types of development the city would like to see that it is not seeing and what resources are at the city's disposal to attract them. Ms. Nickerson discussed the Woonasquatucket River Corridor, key industries for that area, and the state's Opportunity Zones.

A question was raised regarding demolition within the city with the hopes of development that then turn into surface lots and what can be done about that to prevent it from happening. Ms. Nickerson responded to the question noting the example that was in the paper this week and discussing the project at LaSalle Square as well. Permitting required for surface lots, full building permits being required before developers can start demolition in downtown as well as the very strict and restrictive requirements for demolition in the downtown area were discussed. It was also questioned whether the strict permitting requirements for demolition could be extended to the neighborhoods. Ms. Nickerson welcomed the committee's feedback on this issue. Situations where deterioration makes demolition possible was then questioned and discussed. The case in Olneyville of the property owned by the city was discussed. Ms. Nickerson indicated that the city is going after those cases that use disrepair and deterioration as a strategy to get to an emergency permit for demolition of a property in court. The procedure for determining an emergency demolition was questioned and discussed by Ms. Nickerson.

The office occupancy rate in downtown was then questioned. It was also questioned whether the city has a list of properties intended for demolition. Ms. Nickerson indicated that there are not any others other than the one in Olneyville and she does not think that there are any slated in the private market.

A discussion followed with regard to the city's preferred type of development. Ms. Nickerson responded that the ideal development would be mixed use with an active retail ground floor and a mix of uses in the upper floors. It was questioned whether there are potential projects that are that type of development. Ms. Nickerson responded in the affirmative. It was then questioned whether the city has a sense of projected population growth, which Ms. Nickerson briefly discussed. It was noted that a map of all projects may be found on the planning department's website. It was questioned how the committee could help the department. Ms. Nickerson responded that she is going to take that as a real question and challenge that she will take to her team and will come back to the committee. Ms. Nickerson stated that she appreciated the committee's help and thanked the committee.

The next agenda item entertained by the committee was the discussion and adoption of the draft committee charter. The draft charter was distributed to the committee at the meeting. Questions were raised and discussion followed regarding the committee's meeting schedule, whether discussions can take place without being part of the open meetings law to eliminate hesitancy to bring certain things to the committee, whether people with development, financing, education and transportation related backgrounds could be appointed to the committee, whether there was any way the committee could put a group together outside of the open meetings law, and having involvement and input in the mayor's drafting of the city's economic development plan.

Attorney Calise responded to the committee's question regarding whether there was any way to put a group together outside of the open meetings law stating that it is a challenge doing so. The committee is a public body, which triggers the open meetings law. However, the committee can meet in closed session and seal the minutes. Another member of the committee expressed that trying to do anything outside of the open meeting was a terrible idea and that the open meetings rules are there for a reason.

The committee requested a list of top priorities for the city and how the committee may be helpful in those priorities. The question was also raised with regard to what studies are out there regarding other successful models that exist regarding development strategies. Ms. Steinfeld discussed the anchor strategy, the one that the city is using, and using all of our anchor institutions. This development strategy is also being used in other places.

At 1:15 P.M., Stephen DelSesto, Esq. left the meeting.

The committee discussed the advisory committee that was formed by the city council was well as the report that was generated by the council and it was questioned whether there should be more coordination instead of there being two advisory groups. It was suggested that we should think about how the committee interacts with both the mayor and the city council.

The meeting frequency was further discussed. The committee requested that it be copied or forwarded information regularly as it becomes available so that it is more informed prior to the meeting time. It was questioned whether information could be disseminated electronically. Attorney Calise responded that information being disseminated does not constitute the convening of a meeting. However, if all or some of the members start replying, it convenes a meeting. Attorney Calise also noted that if information or a document is sent out to the committee, it becomes a public document and record. Attorney Calise then discussed with the committee the meeting's discussion topics having to have reasonable specificity on the agenda and also give notice with regard to what the committee is going to be discussing in closed session. The committee was advised to provide any meeting topics to Kathy Cosentino and attorney Calise will work with her to get the topics properly noticed to discuss at the meetings.

The next agenda item entertained by the committee was the 2019 annual meeting calendar. Ms. Steinfeld noted that based upon the committee's discussion, the committee will aspire to bi-monthly meetings. A vote was not taken on this agenda item as the annual meeting calendar will be amended.

Committee Treasurer Kas DeCarvalho, Esq. noted that since there is nothing budgetary or financial that the committee is accountable for any longer, he is uncomfortable with remaining as the committee's Treasurer and would like to resign from the office of its Treasurer. Ms. Cosentino requested that Mr. DeCarvalho forward a written communication regarding his resignation for the committee's records.

A motion to adjourn was made by Michael Solomon and seconded by Kas DeCarvalho, Esq. and the meeting was adjourned at 1:32 P.M.