

Essex Economic Development Commission (EDC)

Meeting Minutes (draft)

Date	May 6, 2021
Location	Online via Microsoft Teams
Members	Brian Shelden, Acting Chair, Jeff Benjamin, Botur Kosimi, Clerk, Ta-Tanisha Reddita
Staff	Greg Duggan, Owiso Makuku, Robin Pierce, Darren Schibler
Partners	Sam Andersen (GBIC)
Public	Irene Wrenner, Ken Signorello

Call to Order/Agenda/Minutes

- Acting Chair Shelden called the meeting to order at approximately 8:05 am.
- There was no changes to the agenda.
- The minutes were submitted late and were not posted online, so Ms Andersen requested to be included in the email list when sending them out. Mr Benjamin motioned to accept the minutes with minor typo and grammar corrections and Mr Kosimi seconded, passed 3-0.

Public to Be Heard

- Mr Schibler made a comment that he received a notice in the mail from Burlington Telecom about the expansion of their services in Essex area.

Re-organization

- Acting Chair Shelden remarked that given Annie Cooper's resignation he has taken this role by default. He mentioned that Mr Schibler intended to pass on responsibility for recording the meetings to Chair, so given this change and the vacancy he asked other members to share their thoughts. Mr Benjamin said that it makes sense to nominate Acting Chair Shelden as the longest serving member with the most experience to become the next Chair. Mr Kosimi agreed with that assessment adding that Acting Chair Shelden has been an asset for the committee and it's exciting to tap into his skills and expertise. Mr Benjamin formally nominated Acting Chair Shelden to take on the role of new Chair and Mr Kosimi seconded, passed 3-0.
- Chair Shelden noted that he travels a lot and would like to have a Vice-Chair, so he motioned to nominate Mr Benjamin to this position. Mr Kosimi supported this nomination and seconded the motion, passed 3-0. Vice-Chair Benjamin welcomed the nomination and expressed his satisfaction with Mr Kosimi's efforts in carrying out responsibilities of EDC Clerk.
- Ms Andersen asked to continue sending agendas and minutes with the emails a day or two before the meetings.

Business Contact List Status

- Mr Kosimi commented that he was lately very busy at work and unfortunately, was not able to follow up with Ms Makuku regarding emailed suggestions on improving and finalizing the database. He apologized and said that right after the meeting he will be reaching out to Ms Makuku to formulate next steps needed to complete this project which he will share via email with the rest of the members. Vice-Chair Benjamin questioned if the business list is accessible for all team members and Mr Kosimi confirmed

that it is a shared Google spreadsheet which was emailed before. He said that he will email the information once again just in case.

- Ms Makuku informed that Ms Reddita is trying to join the meeting and having some technical issues. She asked Mr Schibler for the telephone number to dial in to the meeting in case Ms Reddita want to use it. Chair Shelden remarked that based on his understanding the current document is a committee work product and has not been shared publicly yet and Mr Schibler confirmed that it hasn't been handed over to the town as a public record. Chair Shelden underlined that the goal is to get this document into something useful that staff can benefit from when reaching out to local businesses. Mr Kosimi noted that the business list needs more email addresses and phone numbers to be collected and verified and Ms Makuku commented that she would like the file to include business type and size as well.
- Chair Shelden requested to define some metrics on when we can call this project complete and asked if the town is planning to hire a part-time staff who could help with it. Ms Makuku commented that the town has budgeted for it and they will have to go through hiring process sometime in summer. Mr Kosimi reiterated that he will connect with Ms Makuku after the meeting to come up with final format, necessary changes and specific action plan, including splitting the workload among committee members to speed up the process.
- Ms Reddita asked if EDC members have business cards that could be useful for introduction purposes during face to face community outreach initiatives. Mr Duggan said it used to be done in house, but the prior chair had printed some of his own in the past which he will find a sample of to duplicate for other new members. Vice-Chair Benjamin offered to send his copy of business card as sample to be used. Mr Kosimi suggested to update Ms Reddita about the re-organization and other matters that were discussed and decided before she was able to join the meeting. Mr Schibler noted that the link on the EDC website may be out of date, so he apologized and said he will correct it.

Low Unemployment Ideas

- Vice-Chair Benjamin shared his concern about local businesses struggling with hiring workers at the moment and the need to brainstorm for ideas to help them out, possibly by organizing job fairs, social media ads or targeted job ads at schools. He noted that some businesses actually were forced to shut their doors because they couldn't hire people and may need help addressing this problem.
- Ms Makuku noted that it could be partially due to people on unemployment making enough money to give that up to actually take a day job. She suggested that it may make sense to tap into emerging job seekers like high school students who usually take those jobs at restaurants, bakeries, groceries.
- Mr Kosimi commented that it is most likely a temporary phenomenon which is happening during transition from lockdown to full scale reopening. Ms Andersen noted that this is a universal, national problem happening all over the country and CBS this morning had a report on it from Massachusetts. She stated that it is not just a case of people staying on unemployment benefits, but also involves aspects of childcare, schools not being fully open, etc which presents a critical issue and a tough nut to crack. She mentioned over 6,000 job openings currently on DOL website and manufacturers having trouble hiring for entry level positions.
- Participants shared various opinions and information that contributed to lively and productive discussions. Partners and staff provided some updates on legislation, state-wide economic data as well as staff efforts to promote economic development.

Chair Shelden asked for a motion to adjourn at approximately 9:05 am, moved by Vice-Chair Benjamin and seconded by Ms Reddita, passed 3-0.