

**Economic Development Subcommittee**  
**May 12, 2021**  
**5:30 PM**  
**Remote Meeting Held on “Zoom” Platform**

**MINUTES**

**Members Present:** Councilors Melanie Hamblen, Glenn Jones, Andrew Bissanti, and Cobi Frongilo

**Town Staff also in attendance:** Town Administrator Jamie Hellen, Chrissy Whelton - Assistant to the Town Administrator, Town Attorney Mark Cerel, Bryan Taberner - Director of Planning and Community Development, Amy Love - Town Planner, Alecia Alleyne - Administrative Assistant.

Councilor Hamblen called the meeting to order at 5:33 PM

**1. Restaurant Revitalization Fund Discussion:**

Town Administrator Jamie Hellen gave an overview of the Restaurant Revitalization Fund which is the first installment of a series of installments regarding the American Rescue Act. He explained that this fund gives eligible businesses up to \$10 million dollars to help cover their losses during COVID. Mr. Hellen noted any restaurant, food stand, food truck, food carts, caterer, bar, saloon, lounge, tavern, bakery, snack and nonalcoholic beverage bars, brew pubs, tasting rooms, taprooms, breweries, microbreweries, wineries, distilleries, and inns may apply for this grant. He also noted that this loan does not need to be paid back, however the funds need to go towards eligible uses and be spent by March 11, 2023. Councillor Hamblen thanked Mr. Hellen and his staff for getting the information out to the public. She also asked how long the application runs for or when it ends. Mr. Hellen noted that he suggests applicants apply as soon as they can however he believes that the application period will extend on well over a year. Mr. Frongillo asked if there was a graphic to share on the Towns Social Media. Mr. Hellen assured him that the announcement has already been sent out but that we plan to send the information out to Franklin's business owners. Councillor Hamblen added that we should get the word out to as many people as we know. Councillor Bissanti stated that this is fantastic news and wonderful that they are making these funds available to restaurants. Mr. Jones agreed and looks forward to seeing how many people take advantage of this opportunity.

**2. Downtown Parking Commercial & C1 Zoning Draft Bylaw Amendment:**

Mr. Hellen stated that the Administration was requested by a majority of the members of the Town Council to have a discussion on the parking requirements for Downtown Commercial and C1 and after that discussion they were instructed to propose through the EDC a bylaw change that reflected reducing the parking requirements for residential in those two zoning districts. He also noted that in the proposal the parking requirement has been reduced to a half or a parking space per unit. Mr. Hellen also stated that the reasoning why not to go to zero parking spaces has an unintended consequence. Attorney Cerel stated that we would not recommend this because the number stated in the bylaw is a ceiling and if this was zeros out the Planning Board would not have authority to impose that requirement and under their special permit criteria adequacy of parking is one of the considerations that they are required to address and their hands would be tied and they would not be able to impose a parking requirement if it was not supported by the underlying bylaw. Councillor Bissanti said this is the best he was hoping for but understands that a zero would preclude the Planning Board's involvement and he does want the Planning Board involved in these measures. Councillor Bissanti also thanked the staff for putting this together. Councillor Frongillo asked why we did not address non residential uses and why don't we delineate non residential uses as we do in other zoning districts. Mr. Hellen stated that the discussion was only regarding residential; however its a zoning bylaw and requests and amendments are within the towns purview. Councillor Frongillo stated that he would like to request that we address non residential. He also stated that excess parking is harmful to the downtown due to the direct costs of parking for builders which makes it harder to build and create new spaces, opportunity costs where parking takes up valuable real estate that could be producing tax dollars and economic benefits to the town and those costs are often past on to tenants, indirect costs such as harm to walkability and interferes with the type of walking environments we are trying to create. He also mentioned that it encourages impervious surfaces which has a large impact on our stormwater issue. Councillor Frongillo also asked if we could possibly count shared spaces for use. Mr. Taberner stated that this is already a possibility if there is an agreement. He also noted that in years past there were developments being built downtown with no parking requirements and we are still paying for that now because the developers said they would create enough parking spaces but they did not. Councillor Frongillo stated that he has full faith in the developers that they know the amount of parking that produces the right amount for a productive downtown. Councillor Bissanti stated that we need some Planning Board authority over the parking spaces and that we should all work together to make sure we get the best product. Mr. Padula noted that they

dropped the parking to 1.5 spaces which he believes is the lowest we should go in town and that any less scares away retail use and development. He also noted that there have been many parking surveys over the years and 1.5 parking spaces are needed for Franklin as we do not have the space or money for parking garages. Councillor Hamblen agreed that she is not for zero parking. Ms. Williams asked if a comprehensive parking study has been done by an outside professional to evaluate the existing or pre covid quantities, and utilization of parking downtown and projections moving forward. Mr. Taberner stated that the town has not had an outside professional study done however they did about 8 years ago have staff do a study. He also noted that there is a future plan to contract with MAPC on a study. Ms. Williams noted that she is in support of lowering the parking to .5 spaces but believes we should look at changing the actual zoning requirements regarding setbacks to keep the walkability in the downtown and have all parking in the back of buildings. Mr. Hellen noted that the Town removed the parking meters over a year ago to encourage people to park for free. He also mentioned that the last comprehensive study was done in 2003 and the Town is looking to use some capital funds in the future to have another study completed. Mr. Halligan stated that decreasing the parking down to zero would not work; the planning board has to look at both Residential and Business. He stated that with Commercial zoning there still needs to be parking areas for trash pick up and deliveries. Mr. Halligan also noted that they need to look out for ADA accessibility as well. Councillor Jones noted that this discussion has gone back and forth for many years now and he has faith in the Planning Board. He also asked why 1.5 would be reasonable. Mr. Padula stated that 1.5 was based on units because it was trans oriented development and was figured by bedroom units. He also stated that most of the parking in the downtown is privately owned and is not openly available to the public. Councillor Jones stated that he agrees that space is needed however is 1.5 too much. He also mentioned he looks forward to seeing what the study says. Ms. Weirling stated that taking any parking away could be detrimental to the Town. Councillor Hamblen noted that this bylaw amendment is not to totally eliminate parking but to reduce the amount of spaces needed to .5. Councillor Bissanti stated that we need residential downtown and he believes the .5 spaces is a good compromise. Mr. Halligan asked why C1 and downtown are together. He also mentioned all of the Downtown Festival block off Main Street and takes away from the residential parking. Councillor Bissanti stated C1 parking came up because it was originally in the downtown and at zero parking but that we are here not to change it to .5 spaces per unit. He also stated that bringing the parking down to zero would negate the planning board and that is

not something he wants to do. Councillor Frongillo stated that he did not want our fear of making a place that too many people want to go to prevent us from making a place anyone wants to go to. He also stated that we should not wait to make these changes and he is in favor of the proposal. Councillor Frongillo asked if for any new building can we request that the parking be in the back of the facility to create an attractive and walkable downtown. Mr. Taberner did mention this to MAPC and can look into a design standards discussion during the Master Plan Project.

### **3. Housing Production Plan Draft:**

Mr. Hellen thanked the staff for getting this draft plan together in such a short time frame. He gave a quick overview on what is needed in a Housing Plan. He also noted we will continue to get updated information from the census, school enrollment, median income, and median land value. Mr. Hellen stated that tonight's goal is to have a brief overview from the Planning Director about the process for approval of this plan, some key dates and set up a June EDC meeting to get into the details as well as have some additional public comment. He also notes the June 4th deadline for public comment and asks that the comment period be extended to June 30th to give some committees time to debate this and give the community a bit more time to get their feedback in. Mr. Taberner mentioned the series of meetings including the Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Community input Hearing. He stated that we can have another meeting in June and any comments or suggestions go into the back of the plan. Mr. Taberner noted that later in the year we will update the document and send the final document to the Town Council and Planning Board after which it goes to the MAPC and the State for approval. Councillor Hamblen noted that suggestions should be sent to the Planning Board in writing by mail or email. Councillor Bissanti thanked the staff on an outstanding document and hopes this leads the way for affordable housing in the Franklin Area. He also mentioned that we are above the affordable housing component however we can consider Friendly, innovative smart growth 40bs in the future. Councillor Frongillo also thanked the staff on a great document. Councillor Jones thanked the staff and looks forward to continuing the discussion. Ms. Weirling asked if the public hearing will be posted on the website or at Town Hall. Mr. Taberner did say that it will be posted and hosted over Zoom. Mr. Hellen proposed June 16th at 7pm for the next EDC meeting to look through the report in a public hearing setting. Councillor Hamblen asked members if that date worked for them. All were in favor of June 16th at 7pm.

Councillor Jones made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Councillor Bissanti. Vote was unanimous by Roll call vote. Vote 4-0

**Meeting Adjourned at 7:16 PM**