

# Joint Town Council/Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Captain Isaac Paine School, Foster, RI  
Wednesday, March 22, 2023, 7:00 PM

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## A. PRESENTATION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Rachel Selsky of Camoin Associates presented the Town of Foster Economic Development Plan Final Presentation.

## B. DISCUSSION/QUESTIONS

Ms. DiFranco noted that council and board members can address specific questions at meetings. Mr. Renzi stated that the Planning Board will work to make recommendations to the Town Council, but it will be up to the Town Council to make things happen.

### Public Comments

1. Ron Cervasio, Old Plainfield Pike:
  - In the past proposed 6 bike trails past historic structures, was turned down
  - Foster has land, just needs coides
  - The 395 interchange is an asset
  - Foster is not a “rural community”; rather it is a suburban community of commuters. The report cites “rural character” 21 times.
  - Encouraging agriculture or recreation doesn’t bring money to the town.
  - Foster is not a destination for retail.
  - Cluster development would bring in money from housing or commercial development.
2. Julie Parmentier, Biscuit Hill Road:
  - Question regarding Tax Increment Financing (TIF); can Ms. Selsky give an example? Ms. Selsky named a few but said the town would work with the state to do a feasibility study.
  - Ms. Parmentier asked what kind of infrastructure is typically funded this way. Ms. Selsky replied that in one town it funded a wastewater treatment plant; others included sidewalks and sewers.
3. Bob Moreau, Central Pike:
  - What is the cost to get this project started, not specifically, but piecemeal?
  - What is the first step the town should take? Ms. Selsky said establish a committee and determine who is in charge.
  - Does this plan include a review of zoning ordinances? Yes.
  - In the past the town did have an Economic Development Advisory Board.
4. Lynne Rider, Burgess Road:

- On a scale of 1 to 10 where is input from property owners? Ms. Selsky stated that we have to start with the owners [of affected properties] or it could be a dead end.
  - Is it wise to develop a 10-year plan? Or how long range? Ms. Selsky replied that we plan for 0-5 years then reassess; we should also use the plan as a living document and adjust as things change.
  - Where does she place improving the appearance of Route 6? Ms. Selsky said there are other lower hanging fruit.
  - Warren Ducharme, Planning Board, commented that he worked with Mr. Cervasio on the trails project for the Recreation Committee; the goal was to bring in people to visit existing businesses. He noted that the A/R Zoning allows for farmstands, etc. and he stated that we need to get all the various town committees to coordinate, and perhaps even merge some, instead of the current “sandboxes” situation. He noted that communication with property owners is essential, and he gave an example of a TIF, the Burrillville Industrial Park. He also noted that we may need to look out 20-25 years.
  - Anthony Renzi, Planning Board, then stated that we need to forget the past: people may be unhappy at first but we need to look to the future. He noted that if we give an initial tax break to new businesses in a few years we will be getting taxes from them.
5. George Sackal, Snagwood Road:
- Mr. Sackal stated that we can get buy in for development through design standards, for example Dark Sky Lighting, and then enforcement of those design standards. Mr. Renzi interjected that the onus is on the town council for this.
  - Mr. Sackal also stated that we need to invest in businesses that will not cost the town more due to increased services than the tax revenue brought in by them. He noted that solar farms take taxable land off the tax rolls with no income.
6. Amita Rodman, Tucker Hollow Road (via ZOOM):
- Has Ms. Selsky seen an example of development such as a high-end 55+ community, and how do you intend to create traction for development? Ms. Selsky replied that this is certainly an idea that could fit into the Route 6 area, and it ties in with Mr. Sackal’s idea of a tax-rich development.
  - Mr. Paolino, Town Council, stated that the town began working on sense-of-place signage 3.5 years ago but COVID intervened and changed the focus. He noted that the town council decided to use ARPA money to hire this economic development consultant. Mr. Paolino also noted that enactment of this plan will require unity and sacrifice.
  - Ms. Rodman stated that she doesn’t think the signage program would have interfered with the Economic Development Plan.
7. Helen Dulce, South Killingly Road:

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- Ms. Dulce said she agrees with the consolidation of boards; to her they sound disjointed.
  - We need more community outreach for public engagement.
  - All of our bills are going up and we need to expand our tax base—her kids want to be able to move back to Foster.
8. Anna Rao, Central Pike:
- She has lived here for 44 years, loves the clean air and clean water in the watershed. Ms. Rao stated that she doesn't want businesses to come that make garbage or pollute wells.
  - What are the plans for Central Pike, a public road--will there be a new bridge?
  - Ms. Rao also stated that the town needs a hotel [besides the existing motel on Route 6].
9. Lynne Rider, Burgess Road:
- Is there a rubric for "tax-rich businesses"? Do other communities cherry pick potential businesses? Ms. Selsky replied that it could be part of a financial assistance package. Otherwise we would have to use zoning and design guidelines as levers, but we need to make sure there is clarity for developers.
  - Mr. Renzi stated that we could put out an RFP for development of land the town owns; he noted that the town gets taxes on real estate but very little on tangibles.
  - Mr. Paolino referred to Ms. Selsky's recommendations on where to start. He said we're going to implement the low-hanging fruit and we won't be able to cherry pick unless businesses want to come to Foster. He also noted that at the state [legislature] there is the perception that Foster hates Providence [i.e., state legislature] but others responded that "just the Republicans do."
10. Pam Fontaine, Danielson Pike:
- Is the town planning to look at more than just Route 6 for a potential industrial park, such as Route 101 or 102?
  - Will development affect the police department and traffic? Did they do a traffic study and watershed study? Ms. Selsky replied that no studies have been done but that would depend on the proposed uses or businesses on a parcel-by-parcel basis.
11. George Sackal, Snagwood Road:
- Mr. Sackal stated he is concerned with water and wells, then asked about overlay districts. Mr. Renzi replied that would be part of the re-zoning process. Grant McGregor, Town Planner, noted there may be "floating zones and overlay zones."
12. Anna Rao, Central Pike:
- Ms. Rao asked when Route 6 will get cleaned up. Mr. Paolino stated that we have in place policies and procedures that we will still adhere to. He said that we will see positive change starting with small changes.

**C. ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted.

Hilary Downes Fortune, Secretary, Planning Board