

Town of North Kingstown
Economic Development Advisory Board
Summary Report 2019-2020

This report summarizes the main activities and results of the North Kingstown Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB) from January 2019 to November 2020.¹ The report includes the Wickford Economic Development Advisory Board (WEDAB), a body of the EDAB that was active until mid-2019. Documents referenced in the footnotes are available on the Town's web site.

Summary

The EDAB continued to engage the Post Road community on concerns and possible measures to improve the quality of life and reduce constraints on doing business, and the findings and recommendations were presented at the Post Road workshop of September 2019. Work continued on the complex and data-intensive design of a tool to measure progress of economic development in North Kingstown. A review of the effectiveness of EDAB activities in 2015-2020 is underway to inform the EDAB's future agenda. Other matters included working with the Wickford Plan Committee on residential parking, reviewing and supporting the draft RFP for Wickford Elementary School development, and commenting on the draft ordinance to create the Wickford Advisory Committee. EDAB work in 2020 was affected by the Town's COVID limitations.

Engaging Post Road communities

Revitalizing the Post Road corridor has been a long-standing concern of North Kingstown residents, businesses, and authorities. In 2016 the EDAB formed a working group to explore how the Quonset Business Park could be harnessed for Post Road development.² The group focused on how Quonset employees, some 11,000 at that time of which about 90 percent lived in other towns, could be attracted to live in North Kingstown and provide a market base for sustainable commercial development along Post Road. Shortage of housing that meets the needs and price ranges of Quonset employees was found likely to be a major constraint. Following the provision of sewers, however, the housing market seemed to be responding to this potential demand, so no new incentives or regulatory actions by the Town were deemed necessary at the time. Monitoring progress and possible revision was advised. A memorandum to the Town Council in November 2017 reported these conclusions.³

But it was also clear that much could be done to improve the quality of life of existing residents and to remove constraints on doing business. In January 2018 the EDAB met at the Davisville Middle School with over 40 members of the Post Road community and Town officials as a first

¹ The EDAB is governed by Division 11 Sections 2-388 to 2-390 of the Town of North Kingstown's Code of Ordinances, as amended on May 18 and August 7, 2015.

² The working group on engaging the Post road community comprises Kerrie Lanoie, Sheila Brush, Bob Jackson, and Jeff Owen.

³ *Harnessing Quonset to Promote Post Road Revitalization*, EDAB memorandum to the Town Council, November 20, 2017. Available on the Town web site under EDAB Related Documents.

step toward engaging the community to identify concerns and possible solutions. This was followed by several separate meetings with residents and businesses.

The EDAB's findings and recommendations resulting from this engagement with the Post Road community were presented at the Post Road workshop convened by the Town Council in September 2019.⁴

Monitoring economic development

One of the duties of the EDAB is to monitor and advise the Town Council on the progress of economic development in North Kingstown. Economic development comprises building a strong and vibrant economy that enhances the residents' income, quality of life, and sense of place, and protects the environment.⁵ Measuring economic progress can provide valuable information for formulating Town policies and budget.

In mid 2017 the EDAB started to explore ways to monitor progress of economic development in North Kingstown. By the end of the year a working group was set up to develop metrics to quantify change.⁶ Work progressed in consultation with town staff.

By early 2019 work on this complex and data-intensive task was well advanced. Dr. Leonard Lardaro, Professor of Economics at the University of Rhode Island, agreed to review the project. Dr. Lardaro gave the project high marks and proposed some improvements to facilitate interpretation of results and comparison with other towns. An overview and progress report were presented to the Town Council in July 2019.⁷ By early 2020 Dr. Lardaro's recommendations had largely been incorporated, and a data collection manual was well advanced.

Progress slowed down in the context of COVID limitations. A complete draft of the monitoring tool, with data for recent years, will be distributed to town staff for review and comment as soon as conditions permit.

Reviewing EDAB effectiveness

The EDAB is reviewing the effectiveness of its work of the last six years (2015-2020). The objective is to draw lessons that might inform its future work agenda. Although meant to be primarily for EDAB's consumption, this review may also help inform the incoming Town Council of what the EDAB does and provide a basis for revisiting how the EDAB could best help the Council lead and support economic development in North Kingstown.

In February 2020 the EDAB circulated a draft summary table of its main activities and products and related Town actions. A review with the Planning Director scheduled for March 2020 was canceled due to COVID limitations. The review took place in September 2020 and the summary table was finalized in October. An analysis and draft conclusions are expected to be circulated by the end of the year.

Other

⁴ *Engaging Businesses and Residents in Post Road Revitalization*, EDAB presentation at the Post Road Workshop, North Kingstown Town Council, September 30, 2019. Available on the Town web site.

⁵ EDAB ordinance, Sec. 2-388

⁶ The working group on economic development monitoring comprises EDAB members Sheila Brush, Tom Charlton, and Toby Sonder. Jerry Schifrin, a statistician, member of the public, joined the group in late 2019.

⁷ *Progress Report on Monitoring Economic Development Progress in North Kingstown*, EDAB presentation to the Town Council, July 15, 2019.

A joint working group of members of the WEDAB and the Wickford Plan Committee was established in February 2019 to examine the situation of residential parking in Wickford. The group recommended updating the parking signs for consistency with the current restricted parking ordinance and installing signs directing visitors to public parking spaces. It also recommended that the Town undertake a parking study.

The EDAB reviewed the draft new RFP for the development of the former Wickford Elementary School in June 2019. It wrote a letter of support and suggested adding some historical context.

In September 2019 the EDAB recommended revisions to the draft ordinance that would create the Wickford Advisory Committee, which would take over the functions of the Wickford Plan Committee and the WEDAB.