

Town of North Kingstown
Economic Development Advisory Board
Summary Report 2015-2016

This report summarizes the activities and results of the North Kingstown Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB) from January 2015 to December 2016. The report includes the Wickford Economic Development Advisory Board (WEDAB), a permanent committee of the EDAB. Documents referenced in footnotes are available in the economic development section of the town's web site.

The EDAB duties are to (1) monitor and advise the Town Council on progress of economic development in North Kingstown, (2) advise the Council on issues of economic development policy and implementation, at the Council's request or the Board's own initiative, (3) collaborate with the town management on matters of economic development, (4) engage the business community and the public at large in the town's economic development policies and initiatives and in the implementation of community-wide economic development efforts, and (5) advise the Council on other matters that the Council may, from time to time, refer to the Board.¹ In 2015-16 the EDAB and WEDAB have been active mainly on items 2-4.

Economic Policy and Implementation

The EDAB and WEDAB took initiatives to promote economic development, remove impediments to development, and balance development with preserving the town's character. Ongoing work addresses major development constraints (power grid easement) and opportunities (harnessing Quonset) to revitalize the Post Road corridor. Other initiatives have been on improving use of Wickford's privileged waterfront location, developing a master plan for the town beach, and conserving Brown Street character after sewers.

National Grid Easement In June 2015 the EDAB formed a working group to address the issue of National Grid's Seaview Railroad easement, a well-known but poorly documented obstacle to revitalizing the Post Road corridor. The working group found that in North Kingstown the easement cuts across 48 properties along Post Road with a total area of 150 acres. Twenty six of these properties are zoned for commercial use. Thirteen properties, accounting for 55 percent of total affected acreage, remain undeveloped. The EDAB, in consultation with the town's Department of Public Works (DPW), recommended shifting the easement to overlap the roadway right of way and consolidating all utilities onto a single set of uniform poles on one side of Post Road, continuing south what was done to cross over RI 403. This would remove a major constraint on economic development along Post Road as well as enhance public transportation, accessibility, and safety, and improve aesthetics.² The Town Council endorsed

¹ The EDAB is governed by Division 11 sections 2-388 to 2-390 of the town's code of ordinances, as amended on May 18 and August 7, 2015 at the EDAB's initiative. A consolidated version of the amended EDAB ordinance is attached.

² *Power Lines Easement in North Kingstown – Removing a Barrier to Revitalizing the Post Road Corridor*. Town of North Kingstown, Economic Development Advisory Board, May 2, 2016.

this approach on September 28, 2015. Following initial discussions between DPW and National Grid, on May 2, 2016 the Council voted unanimously to ask National Grid to examine the feasibility of this solution. A letter signed by all Council members was sent to National Grid on May 16, 2016. A follow-up letter of September 30, 2016 from the town manager gave further details as requested by National Grid. The town's state legislative representatives will be briefed on the issue and proposed solution.

Harnessing Quonset for Post Road Revival About 11,000 persons work at the Quonset Business Park (QBP) but only about 1,200 live in North Kingstown, and new recruits mainly come from other towns.³ About half a billion payroll dollars thus flow out of North Kingstown each year. In January 2016 the EDAB formed a working group to examine how QBP employees could be further integrated with North Kingstown. Attracting more workers to live and spend in North Kingstown would benefit the workers, the employees, and the community, and could contribute to restoring vitality to Post Road. Shortage of housing that meets the needs and price ranges of Quonset employees is likely to be a major constraint.⁴ The approach was endorsed by the Town Council on July 18, 2016. A draft survey of housing demand has been discussed with the Quonset Development Corporation and several human resources managers of QBP firms and is expected to be distributed in early 2017. A consultant from academia would be retained to analyze survey results and assess the impact of growing population on the town's economy and finances.

Wickford Waterfront Development and the Rune Stone A draft concept note on harnessing Wickford's waterfront potential of September 28, 2014 and revised by the WEDAB on January 2, 2015, proposed measures to better use Wickford's privileged location on the bay to make the village more attractive to visitors and residents, help develop local business, and generate new sources of town revenue.⁵ One measure was to locate the Narragansett Rune Stone in an extension of the Old Library Park. This was approved by the Town Council on May 11, 2015, following the WEDAB's presentation of the findings from the Wickford Walking Workshop of January 17, 2015.⁶ The stone and an information plate were eventually installed on October 30, 2015. Provisional railings would be replaced by a gazebo.

Town Beach Master Plan A master plan for the town beach developed by the DPW at the initiative of the WEDAB and a group of interested citizens in June 2015, supported by an extensive consultative process, and endorsed by the town's Leisure Services Committee was approved by the Town Council on September 26, 2016. The plan, which takes into account several earlier plans and initiatives, seeks to improve traffic circulation and signage, facilitate disabled parking and access, modernize the playground possibly also adding volleyball courts, create a 0.5 mile walking loop, add bicycle racks and seating, and provide path lighting as needed for safety during events, among other features. Next steps include seeking CRMC approvals and mobilizing funding with participation of the community.

³ QBP employment is expected to grow to about 16,500 by 2030.

⁴ *Post Road Revival – Harnessing Quonset*. Town of North Kingstown, Economic Development Advisory Board, July 18, 2016.

⁵ *Harnessing the Potential of Wickford's Privileged Location on the Bay - Concept Note*. January 2, 2015. The town's market study of 2014 had highlighted the opportunity for making better use of the waterfront.

⁶ *Wickford Walking Workshop*. Presentation to the Town Council of May 17, 2015. The workshop engaged the community in discussing Wickford's future and was organized by the Planning Department, EDAB/WEDAB, and consultants Will Gates and Don Leighton. It attracted about 50 participants despite a frigid 20F weather.

Conserving Brown Street Character In January 2016 the WEDAB launched a public discussion on how the character of Brown Street in Wickford could be preserved without unduly constraining commercial development that will follow the provision of sewers. The town's Planning Department, the Town Historian, and the Wickford Plan Committee have been involved in the debate. Consultation with stockholders and the community at large will help clarify the scope and tools of preservation. Simple building design guidelines would be developed to complement existing land use regulations.

Support for Town Management

The EDAB and WEDAB supported town management on operational matters impacting economic development. The main product was the economic development support matrix, adopted by the Town Council as roadmap for economic development and staffing. Other activities referred to climate change and resiliency, Post Road improvements, and the new comprehensive plan.

Economic Development Support Matrix On March 24, 2015 a working group led by the EDAB and WEDAB chairs and including the director of planning and the town manager presented to the Town Council recommendations on the main functions needed to enable and facilitate economic development. A matrix divided these functions into those that should be performed regularly by the town government itself and others that could be provided by non-government organizations, the EDAB, and others.⁷ In February 2015 the planning director had recommended to the town manager that economic development staffing decisions, then being discussed by the Council, should be preceded by a better understanding of economic development. The Council adopted the matrix as a roadmap for economic development and staff hiring. In August 2015 the EDAB participated in drafting the job description for the town's economic development administrator (EDA) and the outline of a request for proposals for external support. The EDAB and WEDAB chairs participated in the selection of the EDA, who joined the planning department in April 2016.

Climate Change and Resilience In October 2015 the EDAB assisted the planning department in responding to a request from the Environmental Protection Agency for testing a framework for planning climate-resilient local economies. In November 2015 the WEDAB discussed the Shore Area Management Plan (SAMP) and the Green Resilience Infrastructure Project (GRIP). At a GRIP workshop on March 16, 2016, URI landscape architecture students presented proposals to improve parking in Wickford using green infrastructure. A report is pending.

Post Road Improvements The EDAB reviewed and supported the Town Council's initiative to revise the Post Road zoning ordinance and design standards, which would provide quick relief from some constraints on development along the Post Road corridor. The Council approved changes in January 2016. The EDAB also reviewed and supported the DPW's initiative for a trial road diet in Post Road. The trial was successfully completed and the road diet was made permanent in September 2016.

⁷ Memorandum – Economic Development. Attachment: Economic Development Functions Matrix. March 24, 2015.

Comprehensive Plan At the request of the planning department, in August and September 2016 the EDAB reviewed and commented on the draft of the new comprehensive plan. The WEDAB separately reviewed the plan from the viewpoint of Wickford. The EDA kindly agreed to review the plan for consistency with the economic development matrix adopted by the Town Council in March, 2015. The EDAB and WEDAB chairs are members of the plan's steering committee.

Public Engagement

Facilitating public engagement in town projects with potential to benefit economic development has been a priority of the EDAB and WEDAB. This has mainly focused on redeveloping Wickford El and, more recently, repurposing the Annex building. Discussion on future uses of the Town Hall has started.

Wickford Elementary School The EDAB and WEDAB undertook a major effort to engage the public in discussing the proposal to redevelop the former Wickford Elementary School into an arts-themed cultural and residential center expected to spur economic development in Wickford. In August 2015 the town had entered into a purchase option agreement with the developer. On September 15, 2015 the EDAB hosted the first public presentation of the project by the developer. An email list of participants interested in following up on the project was created and grew to more than 100 names. For the next six months the WEDAB provided a continuous forum for public engagement, seeking to provide the public accurate information on the project and address their questions. Questions for which the WEDAB did not have good answers were researched, reported back in subsequent meetings, and added to a note on frequently asked questions circulated to the email list.⁸

The Annex and Wickford Art Association As directed by the Town Council, the WEDAB and EDAB organized a Public Forum on the Wickford Art Association's initiative to move into the Annex at 55 Brown Street. The meetings of October 4, 2017 (WEDAB) and October 18, 2017 (EDAB), primarily dedicated to this matter, were widely announced and well attended and reported in the press. Representatives of the Asset Management Commission and Wickford Art Association participated and made presentations. A report reflecting the widespread support for the initiative was sent to the Council on October 20, 2016.

Town Hall Future The WEDAB has initiated an informal public discussion on the future use of the Town Hall. The Asset Management Commission has recommended that the EDAB and the commission work together on this matter.⁹

⁸ Clarifying the concept and experience on tax increment financing and the project's risks from sea level rise and storms were major themes addressed by the WEDAB in consultation with legal and climate change experts.

⁹ *AMC Report and Recommendation – Future Use Town Hall and Brown St. Library (Annex)*. October 20, 2016.

DIVISION 11. - NORTH KINGSTOWN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY BOARD

Sec. 2-388. - Purpose. *[approved by the Town Council on August 3, 2015]*

The Town Council (herein "Council") recognizes the need to develop a strong and vibrant economy in North Kingstown that enhances the residents' income, quality of life, and sense of place, and protects the environment. Economic development can be achieved mainly through private and public investment, expanded employment, improved business climate, and the resulting increased fiscal revenue. The Council acknowledges that economic development is primarily driven by the private sector, but the town government can play key enabling and facilitating roles in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and others and with community participation.

Sec. 2-389. – Created; appointment; composition. *[approved by the Town Council on May 18, 2015]*

- (a) The Council hereby creates the North Kingstown Economic Development Advisory Board to serve in an advisory capacity to the Council.
- (b) Members shall be appointed for three-year staggered terms.
- (c) The Board shall consist of seven (7) members and two (2) alternate members appointed by the Council, each of whom shall serve a three-year term. A majority of the members of the Board shall be qualified electors or residents of the town of North Kingstown.

Sec. 2-390. - Duties. *[approved by the Town Council on August 3, 2015]*

The Economic Development Advisory Board shall:

- (1) Monitor and advise the Council on progress of economic development in North Kingstown;
- (2) Advise the Council on issues of economic development policy and implementation, at the Council's request or the Board's own initiative;
- (3) Collaborate with the town management on matters of economic development;
- (4) Engage the business community and the public at large in the town's economic development policies and initiatives and in the implementation of community-wide economic development efforts; and
- (5) Advise the Council on other matters that the Council may, from time to time, refer to the Board.