

# Memorandum

To: North Kingstown Town Council  
From: Palmer Beebe (WEDAB), Michael Embury (Town Manager), Nicole LaFontaine (Director of Planning and Development), and Björn Wellenius (EDAB)  
Subject: Economic development  
Date: March 24, 2015

At the Town Council meeting of March 9, 2015 Beebe and Wellenius presented a brief outline of the concept of economic development as it applies to North Kingstown. A short note prepared by the WEDAB had been sent to the Council before the meeting. The Council asked Beebe and Wellenius to constitute a small working group with Nicole LaFontaine (Director of Planning and Development), in consultation with Michael Embury (Town Manager). The group would identify the main functions that the town should undertake regularly to enable and facilitate economic development, and who might be best positioned in the community to carry out these functions. The group would report back to the Council for its meeting of March 30. The group met five times and reached out by email to members of the Town Council, the planning and zoning commissions, and the EDAB and WEDAB. This memorandum and attachment are the result of the group's work and reflects consensus among the four participants. A list of reference documents is available.

## **Economic development**

Economic development of North Kingstown is broadly understood as the sustained improvement of the standard of living of the town's population. Economic development is expected to result in a strong and vibrant local economy that enhances the residents' income, quality of life, and sense of place, and protects the environment. This can be achieved mainly through private and public investment, expanded employment, improved business environment, and the resulting increased fiscal revenue. Economic development is primarily the responsibility of the private sector, but the town government can play key enabling and facilitating roles.

## **Main functions**

The main functions that are necessary to enable and facilitate economic development in North Kingstown can be grouped into eight categories. The attached economic development function matrix lists the main functions under each category:

- *Information* – maintain a database of demographic and economic information
- *Assistance* – help businesses and investors find local information and resources and navigate the necessary processes

- *Promotion* – market North Kingstown as a place to do business, visit, and live in, with emphasis on attracting investment
- *Regulations* – maintain a continuous effort to update and simplify the town's code of ordinances
- *Regulatory process* – develop clear, predictable, and cost-effective processes to apply the town government's code of ordinances
- *Incentives* – provide fiscal and other support if needed to encourage economic development in priority directions
- *Planning and monitoring* – develop and maintain the town's economic development program and plans, and monitor progress
- *Outreach* – maintain strong relations with the business community, government agencies, the media, and the public at large

### **Responsibilities**

The functions needed to enable and facilitate economic development in North Kingstown can be performed by the town government itself, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and others. The town government would coordinate all participants.

The attached matrix proposes how primary and support responsibilities for each economic development function could be allocated among these categories of entities. While most functions would involve two or more categories of entities, and the town government would participate in some capacity in most functions, primary responsibilities would be distributed roughly as follows:

- *Town government* - information, regulation, incentives, planning, outreach
- *Non-governmental organizations* - assistance, promotion
- *Others* - assistance

The matrix also suggests roles of the EDAB (including WEDAB) in this context. The EDAB could primarily monitor economic development progress overall and advise on regulation, incentives, planning, and outreach.

The town government could develop long-term relationships with selected NGOs to lead or support economic development functions for which they may be particularly well suited. NGOs are organizations that are neither part of the government nor conventional for-profit businesses. Examples include the North Kingstown Chamber of Commerce, business incubators (e.g. Hope & Main, Betaspring), collaborative working spaces (e.g. The Hive, WorkDigz), and vocational and training schools.

The town government could also resort to other entities to carry out specific tasks as and when needed. Other entities include, for example, business schools and other academia, engineering and architectural firms, realtors, banks, and individual experts and consultants.

## **Next steps**

An internal review of the town government's organization and capabilities would enable the Town Council and Manager to determine which economic development functions can best be handled by each department, and the staffing implications. It is important that the town government remains focused on economic development as an integral part of policy and management, and establishes a defined point of contact and oversight of economic development functions.

Exploratory meetings with various non-governmental and other organizations would help decide which functions can be best performed by each and what partnerships are in order.

Since economic development is primarily the responsibility of the private sector and the town government's role is to enable and facilitate this growth, it seems fitting that public-private partnerships would be established whenever possible. The partners would share responsibility and hold each other accountable for a continuous sustainable process by which North Kingstown can become a model for economic development to benefit the whole population.

North Kingstown will evolve. We are blessed by privileged location and resources. As we compete with neighboring towns while preserving our unique sense of place, economic development will ensure that our next evolution will feature a healthy and prosperous community.

Attachment: Economic Development Function Matrix