



**Leesburg Economic Development Commission  
REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES**

**June 2, 2021**

**7:00pm.**

**WebEx**

**Commission Members Present:**

Curtis Allred, Eric Byrd, James Choi, Marantha Edwards, Jason Miller, Britta Neel and Brittany Youkers

**Commission Members Absent:** None

**Staff Liaison Present:** Mayor Kelly Burk

**Staff Present:** Economic Development Director Russell Seymour; Business Development and Retention Manager Melanie Scoggins

**Presenters Present:** Kate Trask, Deputy Director for Parks and Recreation

**AGENDA**

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**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 by Chair Byrd.

**2. Roll Call**

Chair Byrd asked for the Calling of the Roll by Director Seymour; Director Seymour stated a quorum was present.

**3. Adoption of the Agenda**

Motion by Commissioner Edwards to adopt the Agenda; seconded by Vice Chair Youkers. Motion carried.

**4. Approval of Minutes**

Motion by Vice Chair Youkers to adopt the Economic Development Commission Meeting Minutes of May 5, 2021; seconded by Commissioner Edwards. Motion carried.

**5. Petitioners**

None.

## **6. Liaison Comments**

Mayor Burk emphasized the importance of the presence of a quorum at the EDC meetings. Mayor Burk added that the EDC is an important commission, and encourages participation. Chair Byrd indicated that attendance issues have been discussed with the members of the Commission.

## **7. Staff Report**

Director Seymour opened the floor for discussion of the return of in-person EDC meetings beginning in July 2021. The EDC members agreed that in-person meetings will resume with the next scheduled meeting on July 7, 2021, at 7:00pm, at Town Hall Lower Level Conference Room 1.

Director Seymour mentioned that throughout the summer the Economic Development Department will have numerous items to present to the Council work sessions.

- June 7<sup>th</sup> – Discussion on arts, culture, and history and its impact on Economic Development.
- Leah Kosin to provide to Council an update on COPA; also mapped out a plan for promotion and marketing Leesburg as a destination.

Director Seymour will advise the EDC whether it is approved by Council. Commissioner Edwards expressed her interest in providing to the EDC presentations being made to Council; Director Seymour indicated that presentations will be sent to the EDC at the point of posting onto the website.

## **8. Liaisons to Other Commissions and Committees**

Commissioner Edwards will attend the next COPA meeting, and mentioned the Virginia Museum of Arts' plan for a tractor-trailer at Virginia Village on July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend. Chair Byrd indicated that an update on what COPA is doing would be useful, and emphasized the importance of the EDC's involvement. Commissioner Edwards will provide comments to the EDC after the next COPA meeting.

Vice Chair Youkers mentioned the Planning Commission meets twice a month in-person, and indicated her inability to consistently attend both monthly meetings. Commissioner Edwards offered to attend a meeting in Vice Chair Youkers' place. Vice Chair Youkers mentioned Town Plan comments were reviewed, and that she plans to meet with the Chair and Susan BerryHill to gain knowledge on the direction in which it is headed

Chair Byrd mentioned the Airport Commission is working group to discuss development of the airport property, and that Commissioner Choi will be its EDC representative. Chair Byrd will also work with that group, and report back to the EDC with a schedule of meetings and further information.

Chair Byrd indicated he will consider commissions on which Commissioner Miller may wish to participate, and noted that a representative for Parks and Recreation is needed.

## 9. Old Business

### a. Liberty Street Update

Chair Byrd opened the floor for discussion the concept of redevelopment of the Liberty Street Lot, and that consideration be given to an EDC recommendation to Council for its best use for the Town. Director Seymour indicated that Council looked at number of options, in particular RFPs, and that it is aware of requests for something to be done with this site. Director Seymour referenced a presentation to Council made by himself and the Town Attorney, and added that they will collaborate with the Town Manager on drafting an RFP to send out as a public request for options for the site. Director Seymour indicated that an RFP will be finalized in the next two weeks, and sent out by the summer.

Chair Byrd mentioned that the EDC may wish to be involved in the review of the RFPs, and in making recommendations. Director Seymour suggested exploring the option for an EDC member to sit on that committee to offer a more defined recommendation from the EDC.

**Action Item:** Chair Byrd agrees with placing the request for a member of the EDC to sit on the committee, and encourages commissioners to support that option.

## 10. New Business

### a. Sidewalk Dining

Director Seymour opened the floor for discussion of closing one block of King Street and indicated the following:

- Monumental task to achieve as the Loudoun County Fire Marshall's office does not allow streets to be closed.
- Possibility of allowing tables to be set up in the street, and Fire Marshall was clear that was not an option.
- Only option available was to allow tables to be on sidewalks, with the street becoming the sidewalk.
- With COVID restrictions being lifted, the question is whether to keep the streets closed as has previously been done.
- Decision to resume the normal first Friday event.
- Other events may come up which may prevent street closure.

Director Seymour referenced a recent survey compiled by staff of the Economic Development and Parks & Recreation departments regarding the sidewalk dining and the closing of King Street. Director Seymour indicated the survey was sent to 58 businesses, and that 70% of the businesses responded. Director Seymour shared information from the survey which included statistics such as the number of outdoor tables; including a breakdown of number of tables prior to and during COVID.

Director Seymour indicated no negative comments were received. He added that those who did not participate in the closure were due to the business not being a restaurant or not part of a closed block. Director Seymour mentioned that 75% of the businesses that responded were not located in that particular block. Director Seymour mentioned that responses to whether the closing should continue, 75% still see a benefit. Director Seymour mentioned comments such as "increased foot traffic; right around the corner, great to see so many people downtown,

helpful, absolutely, continue this.”

Director Seymour mentioned that the Sidewalk Dining Program started in 2020 in response to COVID, and added dining times were Friday/Saturday 4-10pm; and Sunday 10am-4pm. Director Seymour indicated that staff from multiple Town departments participated in shifts to support the program.

Director Seymour also discussed comments provided from five businesses that participate in the street closing:

- All indicated they would continue despite returning to full capacity.
- Not all agreed it would be needed; one or two dropped off (perhaps due to lack of staffing).
- Regarding the benefit to reducing number of days, comments were: “like weekdays; weekends; evening are best.”
- Heat is a factor as not enough room to use umbrellas.
- A few would like to see that section of King Street permanently closed.
- Despite a \$250 signing bonus, businesses unable to obtain staff to take the offers.
- Positive comments received – “make it permanent.”

Ms. Trask noted that funding for the street closure in 2020 was supported by the CARES Act, and that in 2021 Council voted to use general funds for Saturday/Sunday street closure for seven months. Ms. Trask added that funds pay for required staff of one Public Works person, one Parks & Recreation person, and one Police Officer.

Commissioner Allred expressed his appreciation of the program, and added that he has seen a general increase in headcount/density of people in Town. In response to Mayor Burk’s inquiry of the impact on Commissioner Allred’s establishment, he indicated that the overall guest counts versus 2020 have increased, and that over the last eight weeks headcount is almost on par with 2019 counts.

Ms. Trask provided the EDC with information regarding VDOT regulations and requirements. Commissioner Allred suggested the possibility of the Town or a business to apply for a special event license within a more delineated area where alcohol could be taken off premises. Mayor Burk questioned whether this is something the Town would be in favor of.

Mayor Burk mentioned that several local downtown residents have experienced an increase in traffic on their streets. Mayor Burk added that the residents are not opposed to closing the street on Fridays and Saturdays, but are *strongly opposed* to Sunday. Ms. Trask confirmed that reports of increased traffic are in areas North and West of Town. A discussion ensued, including the possibility of looking at traffic counts.

Chair Byrd opened the floor for discussion on recommendations from the EDC on whether to end or continue the Sidewalk Dining Program put in place by the pandemic. Commissioner Edwards indicated that bringing people out Friday and Saturday evenings is important to help businesses, and supports a Main Street Organization.

In response to Commissioner Allred's inquiry regarding giving up Sunday, Commissioner Miller mentioned the positive and negative aspects of doing so, and added that being downtown when streets are closed presents a more congenial environment than on a normal day.

Mayor Burk added that Council is looking whether this program is working and cited several points for discussion:

- Has there been an increase in patronage on Friday/Saturday/Sunday?
- Do businesses wish to continue the use of tents?
- Is the program worth the money?
- Increase in traffic is a consideration.
- Is the program making a huge difference, as opposed to First Friday?

Commissioner Miller responded "unequivocally yes," and mentioned the significant increase in tables of 50%. Commissioner Miller added that his business benefits from placing more people on the street. The group indicated that Sunday is still a significant driver for businesses.

Chair Byrd mentioned the benefit of sidewalk dining outweighs the downside, and that summer is an opportune time to have people downtown. Chair Byrd emphasized the importance of being conscious and responsive to resident complaints regarding increased traffic. Commissioner Allred inquired as to the possibility of a traffic count through the surrounding neighborhood. Mayor Burk indicated a traffic study is extremely expensive.

Vice Chair Youkers suggested keeping the subject on the agenda for next few months. Vice Chair Youkers expressed her concern regarding staff burnout, and seeks a solution to obtain some relief.

Commissioner Miller inquired as to whether traffic barriers may be a worthwhile investment if the program continues. Ms. Trask indicated that research found the use of traffic barriers would not reduce staffing requirements. Ms. Trask noted that Department of Public Works staff would have to set up the barriers, and remain on the clock to retrieve them. Ms. Trask indicated the likelihood of requiring increased staff as streets gain more pedestrian usage. Mayor Burk indicated this requirement has been included in the budget.

**Action Item:** Motion by Chair Byrd that the EDC recommend to Council that the Sidewalk Dining Program be kept in place as it presently exists due to the vibrancy it adds to the Town, and we will revisit it in three months and update recommendations as appropriate; seconded by Commissioner Edwards.

#### **b. Main Street Program Discussion**

Director Seymour reviewed the item as derived from Council's April 12<sup>th</sup> work session.

- Reevaluating the Town establishing a Virginia Main Street Model Program
  - Differences between the National and State models.
  - The National model focuses on grass roots evaluation (whether downtown needs revitalizing?)
  - The State Model is based on preservation (economic and community development program)

- Tiered System split into four segments.
  - Tier 1 – every locality.
  - Tier 2 – initiated in locality (Council makes a motion of interest in Main Street/complete application). Some grant programs are available.
  - Tier 3 – retain status for several years and establishment of a 501(c)3.
  - Tiers 3 and 4 – more grant money is made available; competitive application process.
  - Tier 4 – become a nationally accredit Main Street Program.

Director Seymour recommended that the Town participate in Tier 2 of the program. EDC members expressed several opinions/concerns:

- Number of hours placed into the program over the past 20 years.
- Length of commitment as Council’s change; ability to commit future budgets.
- Consideration of the big picture; how to help the Town Leesburg, not just downtown.
- Ability of the program to support downtown businesses.

In response to Director Seymour’s inquiry on specific benefits of a Main Street Program, Commissioner Miller indicated that it provides a voice to everyone; advocacy alone is worth it.

In response to Director Seymour’s inquiry on why the business community was not previously ready, Commissioner Edwards stated the businesses did not wish to be managed. Mayor Burk mentioned that businesses are independent, and they do not wish to be managed. Mayor Burk stated if the dynamic of downtown is prosperous and doing well, the rest of the Town will do well. Commissioner Allred mentioned that over the past five years the business scape of the historic district has changed; and the attitude of inclusiveness and collaboration provides a foundation; messaging is critical. Mayor Burk mentioned the term “management” is not effective, and that a downtown business organization has not been united. Mayor Burk expressed her hope for the downtown to be united.

Commissioner Neel is in favor of highlighting downtown. Commissioner Edwards indicated several real estate agents that use imagery of downtown, and potential partnerships that could come from the real estate community.

Mayor Burk expressed concern regarding space vacancies in the Town, and the amount of road construction particularly on Market and King Streets. Commissioner Allred indicated he is confident in the resiliency of the business community in Town, and believes vacancies will not be an ongoing issue.

Chair Byrd expressed interest in exploring the program, and that establishing a vibrant down is extremely important. Chair Byrd expressed taking the flavor of downtown and expanding it to the recent Crescent Design District. Commissioner Edwards added that the arts, culture, historic, and entertainment areas are the fabric of a vibrant downtown.

**Action Item:** Motion by Chair Byrd to pass a resolution to move Leesburg into the Tier 2 level for the Main Street Program to reinstate affiliate status. Seconded by Commissioner

Edwards. Motion carried.

**Action Item:** Director Seymour indicated the intention of the EDC to hold a Retreat to discuss the Main Street Program. Director Seymour will email the EDC with a potential venue, times, and dates.

#### **11. Commissioner Comments**

Chair Byrd welcomed newly appointed Commissioner Jason Miller to the EDC. Commissioner Miller introduced himself and indicated that he is looking forward to participating on the commission. Commissioner Miller is owner of the Wine Kitchen restaurants with locations in Leesburg, Virginia and Frederick, Maryland.

Commissioner Neel indicated that the Diversity Committee will be celebrating Juneteenth at Ida Lee Park. Commissioner Neel indicated she is working on a list of things the EDC may do to help the Diversity Committee. Mayor Burk mentioned that June is also Gay Pride Month, and that a proclamation has been issued.

Commissioner Choi is of the opinion that business owners are more open to things coming together, particularly concerning a Main Street Program. Commissioner Choi anticipates an invigorated downtown, with positive business energy and believes it would be a good time to jump into a program; and noted he is happy to be a part of that.

Commissioner Edwards welcomed Commissioner Miller, and added that she is proud to be part of the commission. Commissioner Edwards mentioned that Virginia Village Reimagined is holding neighborhood meetings on June 15<sup>th</sup> from 6-8pm, and on June 17<sup>th</sup> from 6-8pm, and that it would be beneficial to gain knowledge on the project.

Vice Chair Youkers welcomed Commissioner Miller, and added that she is looking forward to the July in-person meeting. Vice Chair Youkers indicated that there are going to be lots of changes to consider in management communications in order to get everybody on board with a successful Main Street Program and Leesburg branding.

#### **12. Chairman's Comments**

Chair Byrd thanked the staff, and added that he is encouraged by all work been done. Mayor Burk indicated that discussion at a future meeting should include whether the Town wishes to continue the use of tents and spaces for drop-offs for restaurants for the next 10 months. Mayor Burk indicated input from the restaurant community would be beneficial, and added that this input matters a great deal to Council.

**Action Item:** Place on the agenda for the July 7, 2021 meeting discussion of Tents and spaces for drop-offs for restaurants.

#### **13. Adjournment**

Motion by Commissioner Edwards to adjourn the meeting at 9:55; seconded by Commissioner Neel. Motion carried.