



Warren Economic Development Board Sara Volino, Chair

July 9, 2010

The EDB submits the following 2009-2010 Annual Report:

Accomplishments to Date

- Developed Work Plan for 2009-2010. The EDB has also undertaken projects and dealt with issues not in the original plan, as they have been presented to the board.
- Created a signage system for wayfinding, beginning with a parking signage program, and gateway banners.
- Clarified the Town hall navigation process for opening a business in Warren, resulting in a business services brochure and easier-to-navigate website.
- Rewrote the Economic Development section of the Warren Comprehensive Plan, incorporating work plan initiatives, resident surveys, and commissioned studies.
- Encouraged the town/private partnership in Main Street School's re-use for the Hope & Main kitchen incubator.
- Created an incentive program for Main Street storefront improvement, utilizing CDBG funds.

These accomplishments required contributions of time, expertise, and professional services by board members beyond the scope of monthly board meetings.

Work Plan for 2009-2010

- In the spring of 2009, the EDB held several visioning workshops to brainstorm specific economic development action items. Action items were prioritized and the Work Plan for 2009-2010 was adopted.

Comprehensive Community Plan

- **Economic Development Section**
The EDB has worked extensively with the Town's consultant to rewrite the Economic Development section of the Warren Comprehensive Community Plan.

Business Retention Program

- **Vacant Storefronts**
FOR LEASE signs for vacant stores were designed, printed and installed by the EDB, using the local Enterprise Zone phone number, to centralize inquiries to Town Hall, while conveying a positive message about Warren.
- **Business Workshops**
The EDB is planning a series of workshops for local business owners for the fall of 2010 and beyond. EDB members have participated in several workshops with the RI Economic Development Corporation.

Wayfinding System Plan

- **Parking Improvements**
A letter was submitted to the Town Council in July 2009 requesting the delineation of parking spaces for Main Street and Water Street. This will maximize parking availability on these streets.
[See attached letter.]
It has been 1 year since this recommendation was presented and the EDB we would like to see this completed.
- **Parking Signage**
A Power Point presentation was presented to the Town Council documenting obsolete signage and sign clutter. Working with the Public Works and Police Departments and a \$5,000 budget from the Town Council, a signage system for parking was designed and approved. Upon final approval of time limits, signs will be ordered and installed.

- **Welcome Banners**

Seasonal banners were designed for gateway entrances to the village district. They convey a welcoming message about visiting Warren, and as budget allows, additional banners can be designed for holidays and special events.

- **Wayfinding System**

A complete wayfinding system is being developed to identify Warren's points of interest for residents and visitors. As funds become available, the EDB will move forward on completing the wayfinding program.

Business Friendly Town Hall

- **Town Hall Analysis & Improvements**

Working with the Town Planner and Building Official, the EDB analyzed and defined the process for businesses to navigate the Town Hall. In December 2009, the EDB submitted a letter to Town Council and the Town Manager outlining recommendations for making Town Hall more appealing and business-friendly, including directory and welcome signs.

The EDB has not received any response to this letter.

[See attached letter]

- **Business Friendly Brochure**

The EDB has created a navigation system for opening a business in Warren, resulting in the first in a series of brochures designed to help business owners and convey a message of business-friendliness in town. This same information will be included on the Town's web site.

- **Website improvements:**

With input from the EDB, significant improvements have been made to the Town's website by our Town Planner. The elimination of several outside contractors has brought significant cost savings to the town.

Warren Arts Council

- **WarrenArts**

In August 2009, the board formed a work group identified as WarrenArts, dedicated to promoting Warren as an arts-friendly town with arts-based activities and businesses.

- **Town Hall Lobby**

Recommendations were made to the Town Council in April 2010 for improvements to the Town Hall lobby, through use of art and cultural exhibitions. The EDB is working on a policy to offer the use of the Town Hall lobby to local artists and arts organizations.

- **Town Hall Exhibits**

Currently, the Warren Preservation Society has an exhibition of historic photographs of Warren on display in the lobby. In mid-September, there will be a display organized by WPS and local artists relative to the history of Warren's Mill Culture.

Vacant Buildings & Village Beautification

- **Hope & Main Kitchen Incubator**

The EDB encouraged and supported the reuse of the vacant Main Street School for the Hope & Main kitchen incubator project, which will bring significant economic activity to Warren's village.

- **Storefront Improvements**

CDBG grant money is available for storefront improvements and the EDB has developed review guidelines. Warren businesses have submitted applications and the EDB is in the process of reviewing them. The EDB will continue to assist the Town Planner in implementing these projects and searching for more funding.

- **Building Inventory**

The EDB will be identifying vacant and neglected buildings, assessing their potential for use, and developing ways to promote them.

- **Ordinance Review & Revision**

The EDB will be working with the Building Official to review & revise ordinances and building codes and, where needed, support enforcement of violations.

- **Narragansett Electric**

The historic Narragansett Electric turbine building will be the focus of a charette by the EDB in the fall to study potential uses and improvements to this critical north gateway to Warren.

Warren's Farms, Agriculture, & Aquaculture

- **Local Farmers Markets**

The Hope & Main kitchen incubator project promises to offer opportunities for local farmers & fishermen to sell their products at a year-round farmers market.

- **Aquaculture**

The EDB will add aquaculture to this objective to expand opportunities for Warren's fishermen. The EDB is supporting and encouraging the Narragansett Bay Seafood Co-op to develop a facility on Warren's working waterfront.

Warren's Identity and Marketing

- **Marketing Plan**

It is premature to create a marketing plan for Warren since certain infrastructure issues need to be addressed before a clear marketing message can be developed. It's essential that parking, signage, beautification be in place before a marketing plan is implemented.

We look forward to continued work on these initiatives for the remainder of 2010, creating opportunities for new and existing businesses, and making Warren more attractive for investment.

Respectfully submitted,

Warren Economic Development Board



Town of Warren

Economic Development Advisory Board

Sara Volino, Chair

Friday July 28, 2009

Town Council Warren

Dear President Frerichs,

After reviewing the existing parking situation in the downtown area, The Economic Development Board has concluded that the current parking situation negatively impacts our business environment. Although there are many areas where solutions can be sought, we recognize that budget constraints are an issue. With that in mind we have chosen to start with the easiest and most cost effective solutions.

Our first recommendation is to delineate parking spaces on Main St., adjacent side streets and eventually Water Street (after repaving). Clearly marked spaces will increase the amount of available parking by lessening wasteful parking practices. This of course will only be an initial step and we intend to present you other proposals as we develop them.

We thank the council for taking this matter into consideration. We recognize that this is an ongoing problem and are committed to working with the council toward a practical and equitable solution.

Sincerely-

Sara Volino - Chair

Davison Bolster – Vice Chair

Nancy Blount - member

Karen Dionne- member

Brandt Heckert – member

Diane Horton- member

Paula Silva- member



Town of Warren

Economic Development Advisory Board

Sara Volino, Chair

MEMORANDUM

TO: Warren Town Council
C. Richard Paduch, Town Manager

FROM: Economic Development Advisory Board

SUBJECT: "Business-Friendly" Town Hall

DATE: December 1, 2009

The EDB is working diligently within the existing zoning and planning guidelines to help make Warren "business friendly." We have set out in our 2009-2010 Work Plan an objective "to improve information about locating and operating a business in Warren, to clarify the permitting process, taxes, and licenses." In order to address any "speed bumps" for businesses that approach Town Hall, members of the EDB Board and the Town Planner performed an "audit" of Town Hall as a physical building and as a resource for businesses. As a result of this audit, the EDB offers the following preliminary recommendations:

- 1. Invest in good directional signage for Town Hall and the Government Center.** The first step of the audit examined Town Hall for its approachability (that is, how easy is it to find one's way from every entrance). This review revealed that Town Hall has no directional signage at the rear (where the parking lot is) and unclear signage at the front (see pictures, attached). The EDB recommends that a sign be placed to the left side of Town Hall's front entrance that indicates office hours (legible from the street), and the location of key offices. A similar sign should be located to the rear of Town Hall. Small directional signs throughout Town Hall can direct people to the appropriate door. Furthermore, once inside, a staff directory should be immediately visible, indicating office locations and perhaps, office hours. Internal wayfinding signage should be considered an investment, and is the visitor's first impression of Town Hall and its organization. Making Town Hall a welcoming place, through the use of tasteful welcome signs as well as displays of updated, local art or photos emphasizes Warren's vitality and beauty to visitors who may still be weighing *where* they want to start their business. The Economic Development Board's new arts-based work group (WarrenArts) can assist with the "warming up" of Town Hall.
- 2. Establish an internal protocol for dealing with people in business or interested in business and get all Departments on the same page.** As part of the business audit, the EDB Work Group and the Town Planner interviewed staff at the Town Manager's office, the Town Clerk's Office, and the Building and Zoning Office. Each office was asked the following questions:

- When someone comes in who is interested in starting a business in Warren, what do you say?
- What do you ask them?
- Where are they directed?

The Work Group determined that these offices see a range of clients from those who are well-versed in business and know exactly what they need to those who are inexperienced and intimidated by Town Hall or only have a general idea of what they want to do. Town Hall should be prepared to deal with this full range of clients; however, the audit suggests some disconnect or lack of clarity in where people are directed. Clerks, most often the first receivers of business people, tend not to ask questions and instead direct business people to Alan Crisman. This is not defined as part of Mr. Crisman's duties by contract and has led to some back and forth as people are given incorrect information. A few key questions about where clients are in the process may clarify what sort of assistance they need and which department is the most appropriate to assist.

The EDB audit suggests that all of Town Hall staff be given basic instruction on the development process and the resources available to those who are interested in pursuing a business in town. Knowing which questions to ask people and the correct place to direct them means less time wasted in starting a business. Periodic retreats with staff and relevant boards to discuss issues and problems in the business development process may also be useful. The Economic Development Board is happy to assist or host such an event.

3. **Consider a Point Person for directing people to the appropriate Office.** Although the EDB certainly understands the budget constraints of Town Hall, ideally a "Point Person" should be identified to explain the process of business development in town, including:
 - a. Getting a business license
 - b. Clarifying different types of business
 - c. Understanding zoning rules and regulations for various businesses and locations, including signage, parking, etc.

If such a position were developed, this person could assist people through the development process and act as a liaison between staff and the businessperson. Moreover, the Point Person can maintain a record of business prospects and help inform the Economic Development Board of the types of businesses that are considering Warren.

4. **Develop and maintain print media (posters and brochures) for Town Hall that "maps" the government approval process for starting a business.** The EDB Work Group determined that print media that is easily updateable and outlines the business process is essential to cultivating local business (new, relocating and expanding). The EDB and the Town Planner have researched several models for business assistance guides and have created a draft brochure for business assistance and a poster for the Clerk's Office. This media will also be available on the Town's website.
5. **Establish a system for tracking business inquiries and operations and offer a mechanism for constructive feedback.** The Town Clerk currently maintains a brief database of business licenses. With some tweaking, business license data could potentially be useful as a gauge for the types of businesses that are locating in Warren. Feedback mechanisms could also offer the Town means for improvement on how it communicates with local businesses.

The Economic Development Advisory Board is appreciative of Town Council's support and particularly of Council members Dave Frerichs and Cathie Tattrie's consistent participation. We believe that an open, responsive Town Hall is essential to cultivating new business in Warren.

Town Hall



A crafted sign placed to the left of the front doors to Town Hall can clarify which offices are upstairs (and that the stairs are to the right) and which are on the first floor as well as hours of operation.



The glass doors are not legible (and you would have to know to look to the right side)—and some of the offices are not indicated correctly. The Planning Office is not indicated at all.



Where? The existing signs on the first and second floor are not up to date. Planning and Zoning are not indicated at all.



Rear Entrance, view up the stairs. Visitors from the rear entry have no idea where to go. Blank walls such as these (and in the elevator) can help out visitors to Town Hall.