

Pennington Borough
Economic Development Commission
MINUTES of April 25, 2022

***Submitted by: Larissa Kelsey, Member, and Jason Meyer, Chair
As Adopted: June 27, 2022***

Members Present: Jason Meyer, Chair; Andy Hamblin; Reba Holley; Larissa Kelsey; Chris Murphy; Michelle Needham; Nazli Rex

Borough Representatives Present: Kit Chandler, Borough Council Liaison

No members of the public were present. A quorum of the full membership being present, Chair Meyer called the meeting to order via Zoom at 6:34 pm.

By unanimous consent, the February minutes were approved without revision.

The scheduling of future meetings in 2022 was discussed. By consensus, the EDC confirmed its plan to meet from 6:15 pm to 7:30 pm, generally on the fourth Monday of every month.

[NOTE: Subsequent to the meeting, the meeting schedule was clarified to be as follows:

JULY: July 25, via Zoom. Michelle Needham, secretary

AUG: No meeting

SEP: Because of Rosh Hashanah, rescheduled to Sep. 19 (from Sep. 26). Assume the meeting will be live at Boro Hall. Nazli Rex, secretary.

OCT: Oct. 24, via Zoom. Chris Murphy, secretary)

NOV: Reschedule to Nov. 21 (from Nov. 28). Assume the meeting will be live at Boro Hall. Erin Armendinger, secretary]

Re: Membership – Meyer noted there is a vacant seat on the EDC, and that several people have applied through the Borough to be appointed. After discussion and without objection, the EDC appointed a subcommittee of Meyer, Murphy and Chandler to review those applications, interview finalists, and make a recommendation as to which applicant should be appointed. It was also the consensus of the EDC that the Mayor and Council should be asked to authorize Alternative Members to the Commission, to increase participation and take advantage of the increased interest in the Commission.

In Regular Business, the EDC discussed the inventory and status of vacant commercial properties in the Central Business District (CBD), devoting most of its attention to the now-vacant former bank building at 1 North Main Street. In a discussion of possible interest in the property by a medical office, the Commission directed Chair Meyer to prepare a “sense of the Commission” communication to the Pennington Planning Board, explaining the EDC’s preference that a retail establishment occupy the space, consistent with current zoning, which would increase retail traffic throughout the CBD without unduly burdening parking.

[NOTE: Subsequent to the meeting, Meyer sent the attached communication to the Chair of the Planning Board and received the attached reply from its Chair.]

Next, members of the EDC who (formally or informally) serve as liaisons to other Borough committees reported on the relevant activities of those committees:

Parks and Rec (Needham):

1. Memorial Day Parade will proceed this year
2. Renovation in progress at Kunkle Park
3. The Boro is looking for input from residents regarding the Sked St. Park renovations.

Open Space Committee (Meyer):

1. The Committee has discussed the importance of the “green belt” around the Borough and how acquiring property outside the Borough helps to preserve the nature of our town, which in turn encourages commercial activity.
2. The arboretum was purchased with state funds.

Streetscape (Murphy):

1. At a meet and greet event, it was learned that renovations that will take place on both sides of Delaware Avenue, along with South Main Street, similar to work that previously took place on North Main, but that no street closures are expected.
2. The money for the upgrades (lighting, flowers, etc.) is from a federal grant.
3. There will be future meetings via Zoom for the public to attend.

PB&PA (Murphy):

1. The Pennington Business & Professionals Association is newly energized and had a kick-off at the end of March.
2. There was some discussion of the website that the PB&PA will be using and the importance of the EDC and PBPA connection.

The EDC briefly discussed the upcoming planned Borough-wide Yard Sale, scheduled for May 14. Borough Council Liaison Chandler reported that the Borough purchased promotional flyers and yard signs, and in so doing fully expended the EDC’s 2022 annual budget of \$500.

In conclusion, Jason added that he would like to implement a “learning and sharing” conversation with EDC members on a regular basis during our meetings. This would be a great way for members of the committee to share opinions and ideas regarding perceptions of the Borough and its business environment.

Without objection, Meyer adjourned the meeting at 7:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Larissa Kelsey
EDC Member

Pennington Borough
Economic Development Commission
Exhibit to Minutes: April 25, 2022

From: James Reilly

Date: Thursday, May 5, 2022 at 9:43 PM

To: "Jason B Meyer, Esq.

Subject: Re: Pennington Planning Board - Sense of the EDC re CBD business uses

Dear Jason,

Thank you for sharing your thoughts about possible uses of the former Ocean First Bank building with me and with our Master Plan Committee. In my experience, the Board has always been concerned about the health of the business climate in the Borough.

While it is not certain, there may be an application for variance relief involving the bank building before the Board in the near future. The Board would welcome testimony from the EDC or its individual members at the public hearing that would be held to address any such application.

Please continue to share your concerns and suggestions relative to maintaining a supportive environment for Borough businesses.

Jim Reilly

Chair, Joint Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment

On Sun, May 1, 2022 at 12:04 PM Jason B Meyer, Esq. wrote:

Dear Jim,

Greetings! I write to you in my capacity as chair of Pennington's Economic Development Commission.

The EDC members has become aware that some of the parties who have expressed interest in the former Ocean First Bank building at the corner of Main and Delaware are medical/dental offices, which would require use variances. The EDC discussed this possibility at our meeting last Monday, April 25, and the Commission asked me to convey to you its informal reaction to this possibility.

It is the sense of the Commission, as to the bank building and any other vacant spaces in the central business district, that the EDC would generally prefer uses consistent with the current retail/restaurant zoning.

Among the factors that led us to prefer uses within the current zoning were: that the use be likely to generate business traffic for the other businesses in town, and that the use not make intensive demands on on-street or municipal parking. In other words, we disfavor uses that would be inward-facing (for example, people going into an office or production facility and spending the day there) in a way that makes demands on Borough infrastructure without generating a return in the form of neighborhood foot traffic and increased traffic to the other CBD businesses.

That said, I would underline that this is a general reaction and not the result of a formal vote. We understand that in the Planning Board's discretion a variance may be necessary at some point, perhaps in the future when all other options have been exhausted. Most importantly, the EDC is eager for these vacant spaces to be occupied with a business use as soon as possible, and we stand ready to consult with the Board, provide additional reactions, and generally facilitate that outcome in any way we can.

Looking forward,

Jason

JASON B. MEYER, JD, CCEP
CHAIR, PENNINGTON BOROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION