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Marketing committee appointed

By Jan Gottesman MANAGING EDITOR

BOYLSTON — Officials believe in the potential of Boylston to attract businesses, especially along the Route 140 corridor.

Looking to improve the town's image as "business friendly," selectmen Monday night appointed Herbert Cronin, Edson DeCastro and Ron Wagner to the newly-formed Business Marketing Committee. The committee will work with Town Administrator Nancy Colbert-Puff.

Colbert-Puff noted that when she attended a Wachusett Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Committee meeting recently, she was pleased to discover Boylston had a reputation for being friendly to businesses.

"I am so glad you are willing to volunteer on behalf of the town," she told the new committee members, noting that several pieces of the development puzzle, including the ability to offer tax increment financing and expedited permits, are in place. The town has a grant from the expedited permit process, known as 43D, to see how to entice more business to Route 140 area and add jobs to the community. The Hillside property could also be included in planning.

According to the draft mission statement, the committee is charged with "promoting business expansion in town and attracting new businesses to locate in Boylston ... In working to develop and sustain a vibrant business community, the committee recognizes its work is essential to: providing services to Boylston, locating jobs here, and maintaining a balanced mix of tax revenues to the town."

Selectmen Chairman James Stanton said chairmen of other boards – such as Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Board of Health and the building inspector – are on board with the process of bringing business to town.

Stanton said the consultants working on the development study need the committee to keep them on track, to ensure that the study produces concrete suggestions, not just vague generalizations.

Colbert-Puff agreed.

"Any good consulting process is not one where they come in and tell you what you want to hear, but there is a lot of back and forth," she said. "If there is communication between parties during the process, they come out with a recommendation that people will respond to."

"This should be the study to end all studies," Stanton said. "Be very vigilant that's what they are going to do."

Selectman Kenneth Sydow said he was "tremendously excited" about the direction of the committee.

"I am excited about the potential to grow beyond 140," Sydow said. He pointed out that Wagner is a "walking encyclopedia" of the Hillside property. "Remember that when we bought the property, some town residents thought Hillside would be the white elephant of the town. It won't be and it shouldn't be."

Sydow pointed out that much of the land along Route 140 is not controlled by the land and landowners do not have to respond.

"If we do put (a development) on the corner (of routes 140 and 70), we need to rebuild the football field," Sydow added. "There was a lot of time developing the site, but it may not be the best use of the property."

The committee will meet the town administrator next Wednesday to start the process and will eventually meet with Claire O'Neill, a representative of MassDevelopment, to find out what services the state offers.

"The state is in the best position to sit with towns that know what they need from the state," Colbert-Puff said.

DeCastro said the town needs to figure out what it has to offer to potential customers, then find the right market to sell that.

Colbert-Puff noted that, "in a large part, we are selling access, location and the community as a terrific place for employees to live."

Sydow added that, unlike many other towns in the region, "we don't have old, vacant factories."

"They do not have to put a square peg in a round hole and they do not have dirty ground," Sydow said. Saying that the economy is expected to start turning around in the third quarter of 2010 or early 2011, Sydow said, "This is the perfect time for Boylston (to start the process)."

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