

Chatham Economic Development Committee
2017 Annual Report

The EDC is primarily concerned with the the need to balance responsible economic development and sustainability with the need to preserve and improve the quality of life in the Town of Chatham. The EDC is a group of civic-minded residents, business owners, family leaders, and members of the local community with a vested interest in the future of the Town.

The EDC met fourteen (14) times during 2017. The EDC's efforts during 2017 were widespread, with focus on 2 major topics, 1. continuing analysis of the 12/29/15 request from the Board of Selectmen to identify ways the Town can encourage greater age diversity and maintain the youth of the Town; and 2. global analysis of the economic implications of the state of affairs of the Town Municipal Water Supply and associated infrastructure. The EDC also discussed and analyzed various other topics having Town economic implications including Accessory Dwelling Units, Single Family Rental Bylaw, Branding Chatham, creation of a Town Ombudsman, and the Eldredge Garage property.

1. In 2016 the EDC identified the main diversity issue to be the exodus of and inability to retain or attract 18-44 year old adults to the Town of Chatham and further identified a primary driver to be the high cost of living in Chatham. In 2017 the EDC has been working to address ways the Town can mitigate this burden both in the present and into the future. The EDC reiterates the belief that ***Town Staff, all Town Committees, as well as the Board of Selectmen should consistently work to reject cost increases that affect this demographic.*** EDC economic analysis of every discussion topic specifically reviews potential impacts to this vulnerable group and EDC has and will continue to provide recommendations to the BOS on those relevant topics the group believes to be specifically important.

2. In early 2017, the EDC reviewed proposed irrigation and water regulations and after some preliminary eye-opening analysis, quickly identified the global topic of “The Town of Chatham Water” as one having the most critical economic implications for the future of the Town. EDC invested time in becoming educated on “Water” by meeting with the Chair of the Water & Sewer Committee; reviewing present and historical precipitation and groundwater level data; USGS reports and aquifer information; and data on Town infrastructure including wells, storage tanks, and treatment plants. EDC concludes that the Town is simultaneously facing 3 major problems – aging/insufficient existing infrastructure; the significant expense, construction time, and geographical difficulties of new infrastructure; and rapidly increasing water demand. EDC believes these factors have the potential to together create a perfect storm that manifests in a major water problem, the consequences of which would have disastrous implications to the public and across all economic sectors of the Town economy. At the same time, EDC recognizes that *funding the necessary solutions will exacerbate the previously articulated cost of living problem* facing the entire town and particularly the younger residents . The EDC formalized these views in an 11/22/17 memorandum that opposed the structure of proposed new water rate increases and further recommended that the Town shift focus to consider a new global water strategy:

“... it will be in the best interest of the Town to develop an education campaign as well as an incentive program to encourage private well installation for larger users. The objective would be to shift the burden of supplying residential irrigation water off of the Town infrastructure and on to private infrastructure.”

The EDC will continue to discuss and monitor the topics of “Demographics” and “Town Water” and provide recommendations when appropriate.

In early 2017, the EDC reviewed the proposed Single Family Rental Bylaw and was successful in advancing the discussions on the economic implications of such a bylaw. EDC also reviewed the topic of “Branding Chatham”, is working with the Chatham Chamber of Commerce, and has continued to further advance the benefits of boosting shoulder-season tourism to enhance multiple sectors of the Town economy. EDC has discussed the creation of the position of Town Ombudsman, and noted that the Town of Orleans has moved forward with this concept. With a possible future Chatham position in mind, EDC is following along the progress of Orleans (currently populating a task force to articulate the role of Ombudsman) as they pursue this objective. The EDC is currently following along the progress of the Eldredge Garage Planning Committee. The EDC is also currently analyzing the economic implications of the proposed Accessory Dwelling Unit bylaw and is scheduled to meet with the Chair of the Planning Board in January to discuss the preliminary draft.

These are example of the types of issues the EDC is tackling to strengthen and grow Chatham’s economy. The EDC welcomes broad participation in their efforts and looks forward to continuing to work closely with the Board of Selectmen and other Town boards, commissions, and committees to ensure the long term sustainability and growth of Chatham’s economy.

The EDC continues to maintain the fiscal position to not support taxation or fees as a source of revenue generation in the absence of the demonstration of specifically enumerated financial need.

Economic Development Committee

Luther Bates, Chairman
Darren Saletta, Vice Chairman
Andrew Wade, Clerk
George Khalil
Mike Gorman
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