

Scituate Economic Development Commission

October 30, 2012

Summary – Scituate Resident Survey and Business Survey

The EDC's mission is to improve the Town's overall economic health by enhancing the existing business community and encouraging new ventures to grow and diversify the tax base. In June 2012, the EDC asked Scituate residents and businesses to participate in two surveys, one residential survey and one business survey, to help it understand what the town thinks is working well and what is not, to establish a baseline of thoughts and opinions with respect to Scituate's business community and quality of life and, perhaps more importantly, provide an opportunity to be heard and participate in the continuing economic development of the town.

The Commission developed the surveys with input from the Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator and used a web-based application to reach the largest number of residents and businesses in the most efficient manner. The surveys were advertised locally in newspapers, on the radio, and through various town and school email distribution lists. EDC members also reached out to liaisons to other community groups and business organizations to make them aware of the surveys. Both surveys were available from May 21, 2012 through June 22, 2012. The resident survey received a total of 684 responses and the business survey received a total of 54 responses. Due to the small number of responses to the business survey, and particularly because of the number of questions that were skipped by many business respondents, the EDC determined that the responses to the business survey were not adequate to provide a meaningful analysis and is exploring alternative way to reach out to the existing business community. This summary focuses on the results of the residential survey. The summary responses to individual questions of the residential survey are included in the attached slides and copies of the total responses for both surveys are posted on the EDC website – <http://town.scituate.ma.us/economicdevelopment>.

The residential survey provides a snap shot of the current state of the community; 73% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that they are happy living or working in Scituate and 71% rated Scituate "good" or "excellent" overall. Many of the respondents have chosen to live in Scituate because it is a safe community with a strong educational reputation. However, maintaining such attributes can be expensive. Many respondents rated the town's school buildings at its biggest weakness and indicated a need to improve such things as pedestrian friendliness; but addressing such capital projects is

a significant challenge. Focusing on economic development will generate the resources necessary to sustain the success of the community and maintaining or improving the quality of life here, but economic development itself also requires an investment in things ranging from staff support, strategic planning, and targeted infrastructure that might catalyze growth.

There was significant support for increased economic development among the respondents. There was a strong indication of a need to expand the existing business community with 80.1% of the respondents agreeing that Scituate needs to expand its business base. In addition, although, a majority of respondents rated the *quality* of existing businesses as “good”, many also rated the *number* of existing businesses and *variety* of existing businesses as either “poor” or “fair” at 59.8% and 64.9%, respectively. The variety of businesses and number of businesses along Rt. 3A were also identified among the Town’s top five weaknesses.

As much as economic growth is necessary to the community’s development, not just any growth will do. Not surprisingly, the Town’s top strengths were identified with its location near the ocean, its beaches, and the harbor selected by 84.1%, 55.5%, and 61.4% of the respondents. Scituate’s identity as a “small-town community” also ranked high among the respondents with 58.7% choosing it as one of the top strengths with its historic character (32.8%) being a significant attribute as well. The harbor business district (23.6%) along with the train stations at Greenbush (24.1%) and North Scituate (14.3%) and the Town’s location overall (28.7%), with respect to Boston and Rt 3A, were also identified as key strengths. Although the upside of its coastal location far outweighs the negatives, it does limit the geographic market area and available development opportunities. Land itself is a limited resource and when the various regulations, such as zoning, wetland bylaws, and flood zones, are layered on top of market conditions and development requirements, finding and capturing the right opportunities becomes critical. For that reason, among others, economic development cannot take a ‘wait-and-see’ approach but must-be a pro-active endeavor requiring careful planning to leverage the Town’s key strengths and at the same time make sure any growth fits with the community’s values.

Finding the right fit is essential. The biggest reason respondents cited for shopping outside of Scituate is because the specific type of business they are looking for is not offered here (76%). Not all those businesses would be suited to Scituate but with only 21% of the respondents indicating that they do shop in Scituate, there is a significant opportunity to capture a local market through expansion of existing businesses or encouraging new ventures. Survey respondents offered a number of suggestions for

business types they would prefer to see in Scituate. The most frequently selected options were:

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| 1. Recreation facilities (pools, fields) | 43.2% |
| 2. Health food stores and healthy take-out | 41.0% |
| 3. Specialty shops
(similar to Derby Street in Hingham) | 39.7% |
| 4. Hotels, including resort style hotels and inns | 29.0% |
| 5. Grocery store | 28.3% |

It is important to note that several other categories had a strong interest among respondents, including maritime/technology/services (28.1%), restaurants (27.5%), and green technology (21.0%), many of which also appeared in the comments submitted in response to the questions.

Just as important as identifying the right type of development, is identifying the right place for it. The survey asked respondents for their input on where redevelopment or new development should occur and the following locations, based on a weighted average rating, were the most frequently cited:

1. In the Harbor (2.33)
2. Along Route 3A
 - i. between Booth Hill Rd and the Cohasset Line (2.13)
 - ii. between First Parish Rd. and Booth Hill Road (2.12)
 - iii. between the rotary and First Parish Road (2.06)
3. Along the Driftway (2.04)
4. In North Scituate Village (1.99)
5. Near Greenbush (1.76)

In addition to land development and business recruitment opportunities, other avenues available to generate revenue include things like a local option meals tax. The residential survey indicated that two-thirds (66.3%) of the respondents were in favor of establishing a 0.75% local option meals excise tax as has been done in neighboring Norwell and Hingham. A number of comments offered by respondents to other questions also supported possible revenue generation through fees for things such as boat ramps and non-resident beach access.

In addition to their survey answers, the respondents submitted a large number of comments. In addition to helping explain and clarify some of the responses, many of the comments contained a number of recurring themes. Some of those themes included the following, in no particular order:

- Development of RT 3A
- Opportunities the harbor area
- Developing tourism
- Targeting maritime and marine technology sectors

In the end there are no easy answers and this summary is not a blueprint for going forward. There is support for increased economic development, suggestions on what might fit and generalizations about where that development might occur, but each will require further investigation and analysis. It is important to note that ideas that may be attractive from a quality of life perspective may not yield the economic value necessary to sustain that quality of life and that development yielding high tax revenues may not be the right fit; the EDC will be looking at that balance as it takes its next steps. The survey was intended to be one input into Scituate's economic development strategy and the EDC will continue the dialogue with the residential community, the Board of Selectmen, and the business community.

A few of the EDC's next steps are outlined below.

- Because the responses to the business survey were insufficient, the EDC will
 - plan a local business forum and schedule meetings with local business organizations.
- Because economic development requires investment and with the support indicated by the residential survey, the EDC is
 - recommending the Town implement the local option meals-tax and designate the funds for economic development investment that might include marketing and outreach, infrastructure development, and research/planning.
- Because the residential survey identified certain sections of the RT 3A corridor as an area where redevelopment or new development could occur, the EDC will
 - focus on mapping the developable land along RT 3A, and
 - research most efficient development types (e.g. balancing yield and attractiveness)

- Because finding development opportunities is so critical, the EDC will
 - participate in the Public Facilities Master Plan and the reuse of existing public sites, and
 - request funds from the Town to match grant opportunities for economic development.