



December 20, 2023

Dear Members of the Richmond Town Council,

I am writing to inform you that I have chosen to resign from the Economic Development Commission. For those who know me personally, know that I did not make this decision lightly. When I made this commitment, I genuinely offered my time and energy to serve the Town of Richmond, confident in the results of the 2022 local election, results that gave me hope for a better Richmond.

During the 2022 campaign, at least three of you touted your genuine interest in attracting commercial business, in an effort to lower the burden for overwhelmed local taxpayers. It was Mike Colasante, Helen Sheehan and Mark Trimmer who as Town Council candidates together penned a letter to taxpayers with the headline "We Mean Business, Not Business as Usual." In the letter, you promised to use your collective business experience to be the future drivers of economic development and usher in a new direction for Richmond – a direction where the hardworking individuals had a real opportunity to receive desperate tax relief. How refreshing that was to hear! Those three individuals were indeed elected to the Town Council and I sought an appointment to the Economic Development Commission because I was truly encouraged and excited by your commitment to attracting business to Richmond. I wanted to do my part to support you.

I also sought an appointment knowing that there were distinguished veteran members of this body in Bryan Lebeau, Joe Reddish and David Woodmansee, and in becoming a member, I could hit the ground running under their guidance and expertise.

Over the last year, our members put our political and philosophical differences aside. In addition to those persons mentioned above, as well as Joan Kent and Peter Burton, our **Commission were completely united and focused on supporting the Town Council with your economic development vision for Richmond.**

Unfortunately, the Council's vision for economic development was never articulated to the EDC.

Allow me to take you back to early April 2023. All of the members of the EDC (with the exception of Joan Kent and Peter Burton who were not yet EDC Members) thoughtfully and thoroughly discussed, contributed to, and prepared a comprehensive report for the Town Council, and Vice Chair Reddish presented our report to your body. Our report included specific ACTION ITEMS for the Council's consideration and discussion.

In the spirit of transparency and to refresh your memories, the items presented to the Town Council in the April 5th, 2023, EDC report were:

1. **Identify if Richmond is "Open for Business" – The EDC requested funding of \$150,000 to conduct an audit of all ordinances; we recommended overhauling the town's website to become more user friendly, and hire an Economic Development consultant or Director to guide economic development initiatives for the future**
2. **Develop a "How To" Guide for future businesses and developers to use to help streamline the business approval process through the Town Hall**
3. **Develop an "Open for Business" guide to include addresses and contact lists for all businesses in town**
4. **A Formal endorsement by the Town Council stating that attracting, securing and maintaining commercial businesses is THE TOP priority to move Richmond forward. More specifically,**

within this recommendation, we asked that the Town Council approve performance-based objectives and accountability in the job descriptions of the Town Administrator and Town Planner related to Economic Development and partner with the EDC to identify those specific performance-based objectives.

5. **Identify 1 Town Councilor to be the “point person” to partner with the EDC** ensuring that all parties were completing their follow-up tasks and that lines of communication remained open

At the end of our April 5th presentation, we encouraged the Town Council to:

1. Digest our proposal and budget request
2. Place the EDC proposal on the next agenda for discussion, review our action items and budget request for the approval and formal adoption of some or all of our action items and budget request
3. Give us feedback and guidance for our future work

Here is what the EDC received in return:

- At the conclusion of our April 5th presentation, **The Town Council President said “I really see an opportunity for us to perhaps hire a person (i.e. an Economic Development Director) in Town Hall, that’s what their focus would be.** It would certainly be an investment. We hired a Human Services Director to take care of people to help in Town. We need someone to bring businesses in, that’s their full-time job and not a secondary job.”
- Months after our presentation, the **Town Council President called our report “vague” and “lacking substance.”**
- **The EDC was not given the courtesy of a point-person from the Town Council,** that request was voted down on April 18th, 2023 by a 3-2 vote with Councilors Trimmer, Samantha Wilcox and Richard Nassaney voting against it and Councilors Colasante and Sheehan voting for it.
- The Council approved a \$150,000 ARPA appropriation to conduct an audit evaluation to identify ordinances that could act as a barrier to economic development. That funding would also pay for a new position of an Economic Development Consultant. However, at the July 18th Town Council meeting, **the Council rescinded that funding noting that 1.** With new state laws coming from the State Legislature, the ordinance audit wasn’t necessary at this time and **2.** The Council changed their mind about moving forward with an Economic Development Consultant. I would remind you that it was Councilor Wilcox who made that motion to remove the funding with Councilors Trimmer, Nassaney and Wilcox voting to rescind that funding, Councilors Colasante and Sheehan voting to keep that funding for EDC. Our body also sent a formal letter to the Council dated Sept. 27, 2023 asking that the Council reconsider funding for the Economic Development position. We did so because we felt very strongly that the Town of Richmond had made no proactive or substantive progress enticing new business to locate to Richmond and felt that an Economic Development Director/Consultant could work in tandem with the Town Administrator and Town Planner to carry out an economic development vision of the Council. Such a Consultant/Director would be the primary person “in charge” of economic development working together as a team with the Town Administrator and Town Planner to facilitate and guide the Council with this critical priority.

If you recall, I personally spoke at Town Council meetings urging this funding be reinstated asking the Council – “What is your vision for economic development?” and “What does success in economic development look like for Richmond?” Moreover, I stressed that the reason why there is no movement

toward economic development success was because no one was “in charge” of economic development, and with no one being in charge, that means there is no movement, and no one is held accountable.

Fast forward to recent weeks. The EDC has been derided on social media by the Richmond “Community” Alliance (a group that espouses bringing ‘civility’ and a ‘neighborly spirit’ back to Town Council meetings) with this post: “**EDC REFUSAL** to assist Planning Board by contacting property owners on Route 3 to get feedback on potential rezoning of properties to allow mixed and commercial uses.” (The tone of that post doesn’t appear to be a great representation of the “Community” Alliance’s values).

There were also other social media posts by members of the community saying that EDC meetings were inaccessible because of the times of our meetings (I will note that at least one other Board/Commission meets during the day and this Council and the last Council held special meetings during the day) and also because our meetings did not have a virtual component. The dates and times of our meetings were mutually agreed upon by the members of our Body as times that were convenient for our schedules. The Town Planner suggested we include a virtual component to our meetings in her memo to the EDC dated August 22nd. Council recently considered adding virtual components to Board and Commission meetings and they decided not to move forward citing cost and staffing constraints for this decision. It was obvious to me that the EDC was suddenly being singled out by some who seek to use it as a political, campaign issue. It was Vice-Chair Reddish who said during one of our recent meetings that for years, he could count on one hand the numbers of community members who attended these meetings.

In the letter the EDC submitted to the Council which appeared on your December 5th, 2023 agenda, in a response to “what we’ve been up to”, I remind this body that Councilor Wilcox, who has attended at least 5 of our recent meetings, made a motion to “file” our letter, thereby offering no discussion by the Council in giving the EDC any direction to guide our work. President Trimmer called our letter “disappointing”. Despite their being a total of 3 members of the EDC present at said meeting, including myself, not one of us were called upon to offer any substantive dialogue with the Council. You can imagine my surprise with this motion to file, especially in light of Councilor Wilcox knowing quite well what the EDC “has been up to” due to her frequent attendance at our meetings.

In addition, at the December 5th Town Council Meeting, Councilor Wilcox added this agenda item:

“Request of Councilor Wilcox for Discussion and Consideration of Council Support of the July 11, 2023, Memo from the Planning Board to the Economic Development Commission Regarding Rezoning for Non-Residential Use. Request the Economic Development Commission to Work on the Same.”

Councilor Wilcox knew quite well that the EDC engaged in a robust discussion on this item and our body felt that this outreach was more appropriate coming from the Town of Richmond via correspondence to Route 3 property owners. However, it didn’t matter to Councilor Wilcox or for that matter, to Mr. Dan Madnick, Vice Chair of the Planning Board and Founding member of the Richmond “Community” Alliance, that the EDC thoughtfully discussed this suggestion and made a decision on the item. By placing this topic on the Dec. 5th agenda, Councilor Wilcox clearly demonstrated her refusal to accept the EDC’s decision on this topic.

With all of this being said, I’m truly personally disappointed and shocked that the EDC is being singled out, chastised, and frankly disrespected by some members of the Town Council, especially by President Trimmer as recently at the December 19th Council meeting, and now, the Richmond “Community” Alliance. We are volunteers who have given up our time and offered our collective talents to serve the Town of Richmond. The members of the EDC worked very hard on our presentation to the Council back in the spring and received absolutely no direction from this Council on our next steps. And more recently, a group that is

comprised of founding members of said "Community" Alliance, a political action committee who tout themselves also as "non-partisan", (how can you be a political action committee and then claim to be non-partisan?) appear now to be using the EDC as a campaign issue, as a number of their Board members, including Dan Madnick, presumably seek to run for Town Council in 2024.

Just last week, President Trimmer, in being interviewed by the Beaver River Valley Community Association, an organization that is hardly supportive of anything related to economic development, offered his public rebuke of the EDC members who chose to resign saying that we had "broken our oaths to the Town." President Trimmer went on to say that "We look to fill the Economic Development Commission with people that will keep their oath and work for the benefit of the town." With all due respect to President Trimmer, I would ask him to reflect on his comments from the May 16th Town Council when evaluating how he was going to vote on Board/Commission appointments moving forward, posing this question to potential applicants:

"How do you feel about negative public discourse and public criticism?" And "Do you feel people on Boards and Commissions should be openly and repeatedly critical of other people who sit on other Boards and Commissions?"

I submit to you that President Trimmer has in fact, spoken disparagingly about 4 EDC members not only in this article, but also during the December 20th Town Council meeting. As Town Council President, this is not the way to treat volunteers. Please hold yourself to the standard you set forth and refrain from engaging in repeated critical statements about other people who sit on Boards and Commissions. President Trimmer, there's a word for that – HYPOCRISY ("a feigning to be what one is not or to believe what one does not: behavior that contradicts what one claims to believe or feel").

The EDC did receive questions, directives and feedback from one Town Councilor, Samantha Wilcox, on several occasions, despite the Council giving her no majority permission to do so. Cases in point; Councilor Wilcox emailed all of the members of the EDC on Oct. 19th and Oct. 21st asking if we reached out to businesses promoting the Small Business Grant opportunity. I volunteered for that outreach at a recent EDC meeting and anyone who knows me knows that when I say I'm going to do something, I follow through. That task was completed.

And, at the EDC meeting of November 14th, Councilor Wilcox presented our Body with a spreadsheet of "to do" items from the Town's Comprehensive Plan. I have to say that while Councilor Wilcox may have thought this was helpful, I was extremely uncomfortable with this. Councilor Wilcox was not asked by the Town Council to do that, and this type of direction and leadership should be coming from our Chair, Mr. Lebeau or Vice Chair, Mr. Reddish. I took this action by Councilor Wilcox as unilaterally influencing our public body and I'm just not comfortable with that. If Councilor Wilcox wanted to be the EDC's "point person" she should have voted in the affirmative on that topic at the April 18th Town Council meeting. And in our December 11th EDC meeting, Councilor Wilcox made a derogatory statement about me during the "public comment" section of our meeting. I often hear Councilor Wilcox talk about treating people with respect, however, she failed to offer me that respect as a hardworking, EDC team player. Councilor Wilcox, I'm not the one filing Open Meetings Violations against my fellow Councilors or calling a fellow Councilor a misogynist on social media. You're doing that. Your actions have been, and continue to be, very divisive and I strongly encourage you to take the time to reflect on how your actions and words as a member of the Town Council have contributed to its complete disfunction.

Another point of fact for you to digest. During the EDC's December 11th meeting, four members of our body expressed their frustration with the way we, as volunteers, have been treated by the Town Council. These

four (4) of 6 members decided to resign from the EDC citing a whole host of reasons for doing so including, but not limited to, feeling disrespected as volunteers. Following our April 5th presentation, the Council failed to produce any direction for the EDC to work as partners with your Body, with mostly all of our suggestions being dismissed. We had been waiting for months to receive any kind of direction from the Town Council. Seeing that 66% of the members of the EDC resigned, this Town Council should use this as a reflection point to examine your part in this mass exodus.

And in examining your part in these mass resignations, may I remind the Town Council about former EDC Chair, William McIntosh's words in his Dec. 13th, 2022 letter of resignation, where he states the following;

"Vice President of the Town Council Richard Nassaney has proven that he can not play well with others on a team and has consistently voted against proper growth while creating a tremendous amount of drama in the town for the last 4 years. I am just not sure if Mr. Nassaney is actually capable of acting properly, effectively, or ethically as a leader, so I step down to avoid any additional dealings with him. Rich recently has threatened that he was going to attempt to disband the EDC...." And Mr. McIntosh went on to say, "This is not a personal attack on Mr. Nassaney but rather a call to action for him and his counterparts to make the necessary improvements in their leadership and teamwork for the good of the Town of Richmond and its Taxpayers."

Mr. McIntosh's words are as true today as they were one year ago. But the majority of this Council's members would rather play politics whenever Councilor Colasante attempts to offer any suggestions regarding meaningful economic development or ideas to lower the tax burden for the hardworking people of Richmond (one only needs to watch the tape from the Dec. 19th Town Council meeting regarding the discussion about lowering a bond from \$2.5 million to \$2.1 million as a result of a state appropriation of \$400,000). Some of you have displayed time and again your attempts to one-up each other while the taxpayers continue to suffer. Enough is enough. Stop these petty arguments, and interruptions. Stop filing Ethics complaints and Open Meetings Violations against each other and get back to business. I would point out that it has been Councilors Trimmer, Nassaney and Wilcox who have filed these complaints, at a cost to the taxpayers.

In the last few days, it was reported by the Richmond "Community" Alliance and the Beaver River Valley Community Association that Councilor Nassaney filed an Ethics complaint against Councilor Colasante, most likely to deflect the attention away from himself relative to the numerous Ethics complaints filed against him. Both outlets report that "Nassaney's complaint alleges that Colasante had a business relationship with D'Ambra Construction and Richmond Sand & Stone, but did not recuse himself from votes to award contracts for paving on local roads. In both cases, Colasante made motions to award the contracts to D'Ambra and then voted." I've heard Councilors Trimmer and Nassaney pontificating about how businesses see the dysfunction in Richmond and as such, are hesitant to move forward with commercial development plans. Aren't these latest Ethics complaints, one filed by President Trimmer and one filed by Councilor Nassaney, perfect examples of Council dysfunction? Councilor Nassaney is putting two businesses (one being a local business) in a negative spotlight. That's not a good look for economic development now, is it? And what's even more disturbing about this Ethics complaint filed by Councilor Nassaney is that someone connected to him is actually stalking Councilor Colasante's business location as evidenced by pictures of D'Ambra equipment at the sawmill property on two different days. Good grief – this is a new low.

Getting back to the EDC, let me say that our committee members came from varying backgrounds and professional experiences. We represented very different ideological viewpoints, especially with respect to local issues. Despite those varying viewpoints, as evidenced by Mr. Reddish serving as the local Democrat Town Committee Chair and my serving in the past as the local Republican Town Committee Chair, **we as a**

group of 6, respected one another, worked extremely well together, were completely cohesive and united in moving the town forward from an economic development perspective. Instead of Mr. Trimmer speaking disparagingly about the outgoing members, I encourage him to become the leader that he espouses to be as Town Council President and get to work in driving the economic development agenda for Richmond, as you promised to do during the campaign.

I volunteered my time because I felt I could offer my skills to make a real difference on the Economic Development Commission. During my tenure, I had near perfect attendance at meetings, I contributed to the group discussions, I volunteered to write a letter to businesses to let them know how they could stay connected to current events that may impact their businesses. That letter was reviewed by the EDC, and with their input, the correspondence was distributed via email. In addition, I proactively visited over 9 businesses to drop off grant applications for the Small Business grant opportunity, and also volunteered to be a member of the Small Business Grants group. I took that job very seriously in the effort to help small businesses flourish in our town.

I evaluate my time as a volunteer as an overall positive experience where I had the opportunity to cultivate strong relationships across the aisle with my fellow EDC members. We all had the best of intentions to work together to ease the tax burden.

At this time, I regretfully submit my resignation from the EDC. It has become crystal clear to me that only 2 of 3 Councilors who promised the voters that they would prioritize economic development, actually meant it. Town Council President Trimmer has not lived up to his "We Mean Business, Not Business as Usual" campaign promise.

At the end of the day, and for the entire town to witness, the 3 Council members of Councilor Trimmer, Nassaney and Wilcox would rather play politics, and refuse to prioritize economic development. These three Councilors, who currently vote as a majority on any issues of significance, would rather spend their time filing Ethics complaints and Open Meetings Violations against their fellow Councilors instead of using their time easing the tax burden of local residents. What a complete waste of time and money.

Councilors, after seeing my sibling suffer and pass from a debilitating disease last year, I've learned all too well that time is indeed, quite precious. My time is precious and valuable. It has become obvious that some of you fail to value my time and my commitment to serve the Town.

I know that I put my best efforts forward to positively serve the taxpayers of Richmond. I wish the future EDC members the best of luck, and ask the Town Council to put your differences aside, and seriously reflect on how you are going to move forward in the remaining year of your service to work not only as partners with future EDC members, but also to ease the tax burden for all Richmond residents.

Sincerely,



Louise Dinsmore