

Essex Economic Development Commission (EDC)
Business Outreach Meeting Minutes

February 19th, 2026, 8:00AM

Meeting held at LaFountain Family Maple 125 Bixby Hill Road, Essex, VT 05452

Minutes Submitted by Clerk Keith Dunbar, February 21, 2026

Attendees

Commission Members:

Present: Irene Wrenner, Chair; Ken Signorello, Vice Chair; Keith Dunbar, Clerk; Anne Miller, Igor Polenov

Remote:

Absent:

Staff:

Public: Brad LaFountain

Partners:

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 8:03 AM by Chair Irene Wrenner

2. Agenda Additions/Changes

- No changes made to the agenda

3. Public to be Heard

- No members of the public were present in person or online.

4. Minutes to approve

- Minutes will be approved during next business meeting

5. Partner Updates – N/A

6. Business Items

a. LaFountain Family Maple – 125 Bixby Hill Road – Brad LaFountain

The Commission conducted an on-site business outreach visit and heard a presentation from the owners regarding operations, challenges, and opportunities.

Business overview

- Family-run maple sugaring operation established in 2020
- Approximately 3,400 taps
- Wood-fired evaporator system
- Emphasis on recycled materials and self-built infrastructure

- Expansion into value-added products including baked goods, flavored syrups, and agritourism open house events (approximately 600 visitors during 2025 open sugarhouse weekend)

Operational challenges discussed

- Labor availability and training
- Equipment efficiency and electrical costs
- Wildlife damage to sap lines
- Seasonal weather variability affecting production
- Succession planning and generational transition in agricultural businesses

Economic and regulatory topics discussed

- Parking and permitted uses in industrial zoning districts
- Difficulties accommodating certain business activities due to zoning restrictions
- Agricultural land use and conservation considerations
- Housing availability, including workforce and migrant housing
- Enforcement and inspection considerations for housing and labor standards
- Opportunities for educational partnerships (schools, workforce training, field trips)
- Agritourism and community engagement opportunities

No formal action was taken.

b. Personnel Matter

- Discussion of a personnel matter was listed on the agenda but was deferred pending executive session.

7. Reading File

No Items discussed during business outreach meeting

8. Next Meeting

- Thursday, March 5th, 2026, 8:00 am at the Essex Town Offices

9. 7. Proposed Executive Session

- Commission went into Executive Session at 9:15am to discuss the appointment, employment, or evaluation of a public officer or employee pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §313.

10. Adjournment

- **Motion** to adjourn at 9:26 am, (Signorello / Miller) passed 5-0

Meeting recording available here: No video available as this was a business outreach meeting