

Bi-Town Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes
via Zoom
Thursday, June, 4, 2020

Members present: Heidi Taylor, Vicki Capitani, Eric Durocher, Adam Grinold (for BDCC), Gretchen Havreduk, Tracy Bartels, Ryan Holton

Also present: Christine Howe, Shannon Wheeler, Scott Tucker, Chris Company, Jesse Kreitzer, Cheryl LaFlamme, Tom Fitzgerald

Meeting called to order at 8:04 am

I. Introduction of Tracy Bartels, General Manager of Mount Snow

II. Chris Company – Windham Regional Commission

a. Shared experiences of post 9/11 and other disaster area relocations. Changes in housing market, job activity and second to primary homeowners which led to changes in local policies and new challenges to local services. Saw planning tools not followed – allowing development where you know it shouldn't be and what those effects were.

i. Vicki: Property tax concerns come Fall; what is a good strategy to protect our locals and those large tracts of land that people have been trying to hold on to for a long time?

1. Chris: I think States are hoping the Federal government steps in and helps with this. It's going to be a challenge to see how we navigate these next few years. I think there will be pressure that didn't exist previously to sell. It's not just the data or the numbers; it's your neighbors and are they able to stay. I think this is one of the things to be mindful of; this is how a lot of the shifting occurs.

ii. Gretchen: we have been seeing 2nd homeowners that have been staying here, some since March and they haven't left yet – I feel like I need to be monitoring the real estate market and what's happening there. I'm wondering if you're looking at metric data? Are you compiling this and will this be available to everyone? And maybe a question for Adam as well. On the other side – businesses closing in Windham County - are you monitoring this? Can you give me some idea?

1. Chris: some of the data is really hard to collect. You can't keep an eye on permits like other things. The transfer tax will give me some indicator of how many properties are changing hands. Trying to think of what other metrics we might have. I have not reached out to clerks to see what they're seeing. As far as business closing and opening. Adam: do you have a clear inside on how to track that?

2. Adam: Business openings we do track currently county wide and update on a quarterly basis. That includes LLCs with sole proprietors, so it's hard to see what the job creation is so it's a lagging indicator. In regards to real estate, MLS is the best source. You can track percentages of properties under contract, so it's a little forward looking. BDCC submitted an application on behalf of the RDCs of the State of Vermont to the Northern Board of Regional Commission for a 2 year subscription to a national data tool that would provide very granular information in ease of use and presentation –so it translates the data for a use to be able to understand the data and make informed decisions. If we receive that, one of the RDCs will have embedded a person who can respond for each region on data requests. So hopefully that will get funded; it was a small ask of \$50,000 and we're hoping that will be funded by August.

Bi-Town Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes
via Zoom
Thursday, June, 4, 2020

- iii. Christine: Chris, you mentioned large tracts of land/farms selling – there’s good and bad things about Vermont and development. We have some serious permitting in place to almost mitigate the overbuilding quickly. Have you seen in other places where there have been disasters and the economy has taken a downfall where the permit process has been eased or things have gone quicker where they’re feeling the pressure to make the boom happen?
 - 1. Chris: Land use policies and permitting process are two separate things. I personally find Vermont’s permitting process – the actual mechanics of it to be very confounding. In Calvert County, Maryland, we overhauled the entire system. In part because the rate of growth was so fast it was overwhelming the public infrastructure. A lot of people blamed the policies for the problems but it was the permitting; things took so long. We revamped it so the permit process was much more transparent and I would love to work on that in Vermont so we had a more up to date tracking system. In other places I have seen lack of enforcement in existing flood hazard policies and that kind of thing. And then the heartbreak that would follow by allowing development where you knew bad things were going to happen. And also development in places that created new problems where they didn’t exist before. In the rush to accommodate development, what they wound up doing was hurting everyone else in the process. That’s what you need to be careful about.
 - 2. Adam: to jump in; in Phase 2 of Governor Scott’s proposal he is going to be advocating for what they’re calling the easy pass to expedite some permitting. So there is some potential there. During Irene, Governor Shumlin waived some of the application criteria which did expedite some of the restoration. So we have seen that here in Vermont. Governor Scott’s team is first addressing the economic pieces and then hope to advance some permit reform as well.
 - 3. Chris: my counterpart in Chittenden County and I both offered to the Secretary of Natural Resources and anybody who would listen that we’re happy to participate in discussions on how to help modernize Vermont’s permitting process systems.

III. Any additions or changes to agenda? - None

IV. Motion by Gretchen to accept March minutes. Vicki seconded; all in favor.

V. Election of officers:

- a. Motion by Vicki to elect Heidi Taylor as the Chair. Gretchen seconded. Heidi accepts.
- b. Motion by Gretchen to nominate Eric Durocher as Vice Chair. Vicki seconds. Eric accepts.
- c. Motion by Vicki to approve officers as nominated. Tracy seconds. All in favor.

VI. Deerfield Valley resiliency team COVID-19 work - [Apologies as I lost connection throughout this section A & B – please let me know anything of note I may have missed]

- a. Gretchen: when the Governor made the state of emergency Eric and I plus Meg from Wilmington Works and Shannon intermittently have been having weekly calls. We’ve merged listings of our businesses and have just been dialing them and checking in. People are grateful we’re reaching out and calling them. We’ve been giving them resources and updating them as things change. We’re talking about not just resiliency now but more about recovery. Dover and Wilmington both had programs for businesses. We had a really good response in that. People received funding and it was helpful to them as the SBA programs came much later.

Bi-Town Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes
via Zoom
Thursday, June, 4, 2020

- b. Vicki: updated on Dover's CEAP program: \$190,180.00 to 108 businesses.
- c. Eric: if you hear businesses throughout anywhere in the valley that are looking for help or guidance on these types of things please send them in our direction. Let us be that sounding board. Keep an eye out for the webinars we've been running. Soon there will be some broader sector for things like dealing with an online presence coming down the pipeline. I think those will be beneficial. Next week our team in conjunction with others will get together and start to have a conversation about possible marketing dollars coming from the State package if and when that is approved.
 - i. Chris: speaking with Londonderry & surrounding uncovered areas; what are the Southern Vermont Chamber of Commerce member towns?
 - ii. Eric: Mass line to Wardsboro in the center of the state. I have been reaching out to businesses outside of those areas in my own time to have a conversation with them to help them get what they need for information. I don't know what the answer is to reaching all of those businesses in uncovered areas other than taking the time to reach out and share the resources you have. Unofficially hoping that people like myself running my type of organization are taking the time to think about those people who may not have the help they need and reach out to them.
- d. Vicki: In our position we're also talking to a lot of business community and there's a real concern because PPP money is starting to run out. So within the next two weeks a lot of companies are going to be out of money again.
 - i. Gretchen: hopefully the state funds will come through and then those will be a different set of money.
 - ii. Eric: yes I think that's the biggest frustration at this point is because those PPP and EIDL funds are coming to a head it's really frustrating to see that our state legislature has not put the pedal to the floor and making sure that those other funds from the package become available as soon as possible. You know, there's no real answers. It's been asked many different ways and there's not answer about when it may happen.
 - iii. Adam: I think yesterday there was good movement. The goal is to have this out of the House Commerce this week. They are trying to guide some of the economic relief sooner than other parts of this. Hopefully that means dollars early July.

VII. Housing Committee:

- a. Gretchen: We haven't met. There are some funds coming down from state I think we'll be reorganizing and regrouping soon.

VIII. Marketing Committee:

- a. Eric: Met yesterday, meeting again next week. Trying to present to both Selectboards still to show what came out of last year and what we're trying to do with this year. In conjunction with what we're planning for marketing dollars from the state. We need to do something and whatever we can be doing for marketing we should be doing. Next Wednesday morning bi town marketing and afternoon is region meeting for conversation about state marketing dollars.
- b. Gretchen: we will be asking in that budget for a consultant to do a five to ten year strategic marketing plan for the Deerfield Valley.

IX. VTrans Signs:

- a. Gretchen sent out resolution. This was a recommendation that came from Steve talking to Joe. Kelly to have all towns have a resolution about it. Working with Vtrans for 3 years now they keep pushing back and we've been trying to create a solution. So we're going to jump through this

Bi-Town Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes
via Zoom
Thursday, June, 4, 2020

hoop and if that doesn't work really work hard with our legislators and our state tourism department.

- b. Jesse: Marlboro Selectboard have already adopted the resolution and have sent it to the Agency of Transportation. We sent a letter to the Wilmington Selectboard about installing signs directly on Augur Hole and Hughes Roads. It's another mitigation effort where traffic ignores signage and listens to their GPS. Just trying to deter traffic from those roads. We have another effort underway with Wilmington Selectboard for similar signage on Higley Hill Road.
- c. Shannon has already updated the same resolution with language for Dover and will get it on the next Selectboard meeting and will send to Gretchen for a single submission to the state.

X. Wilmington updates:

- a. Tom: Board vacancy we are dealing with. We've been meeting through Zoom. All of our summer events are canceled. Green Mountain Beach is closed right now because we can't enforce social distancing. Limitations on the lake as it is privately owned. Hoping these ease as the summer progresses. Hoping we offer safe haven for people.
- b. Gretchen: East Main St sidewalk moving forward/sewer project moving forward. Things were delayed but we're hopeful. Grant for North Main St received replacement of sidewalks, granite curbs, and lighting. Most likely that won't happen until next year or year after. Very greatly that in March the Hermitage was sold and I have been meeting with them on a weekly basis. These members are humble and really want to work with the community. Did hire a GM and plan on opening for mostly weekends maybe holidays or events. Pending sale for Haystack Golf Course. That is already opened for this summer and is being managed by Johnny Cleanthes. The members have created a 501c7 for associations/membership nonprofits. Not intended for any one person to make money on this. Lots of other properties were sold/bid on. We've been told there's a pending sale on one of those inns. Not sure what they're doing with the Hermitage Inn. They have contracted with Berkshire East for a working relationship to help manage the mountain, mostly equipment usage. Not sure if we want to invite them back into BiTown; let's discuss next month.

XI. Dover updates:

- a. Shannon: CEAP program has been suspended by the Selectboard after helping 108 businesses. This week they approved emergency appropriations for non profits and helped 4 of those in town. Really hoping to pull off the Summer concert series starting July 5th. Board is still in the their search for the Director position and hopefully will have that buttoned up this month.

XII. Mount Snow updates:

- a. Tracy: We're going to be making announcements next week on opening the golf course, lodging and summit service for the summer. It will all start happening pretty quickly. Stuff will start opening up and in the future some of our dining options. We have really great social distancing plans that will be implementing. Vail is taking a very slow and thoughtful approach to reopening things as safety is one of our core values.

XIII. SeVeds updates:

- a. Adam: Seds priority projects that came out this week. Thank you for the participation in that. As that continues we'll see some more federal dollars dropping into the region. The business resiliency program that we've been running since the Ides of March we've now had over 450 participants in that. Partners in the Valley are really the standouts. We see is some strong participation in both the local programs and the regional program. People are coming in better educated and really ready for that. CDBGCV from \$2 million to have for whole state. BDCC will

Bi-Town Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes
via Zoom
Thursday, June 4, 2020

be administering half the state's applications. From Windham and Bennington Counties to Franklin County. Two Rivers out of Quechee is doing the other half. There's so little money it's going to be a lottery. Simple application certifying your needs for grants of 5, 10, 15, 30 thousand in buckets as a lottery. That's on track to launch in next 10 days. Drawing right after Independence Holiday with exact date TBA. Look for more info soon. The marketing piece has been discussed, hopefully the region can join together to draw those dollars down for the entire Southern Vermont zone. Marlboro college: we have been working with them on transitioning some of the folks in employment. That's been frozen now as there's indications some of them may be able to work for the new owners of the campus. We've helped facilitate four connections from employee to employers. We were about to roll out a real connection where we advertised the fact that we had this pool of qualified talent here locally and despite the economy people are still hiring, so talent will always win out. Folks who already live here are a real asset. We're confident they'll successfully transition one way or another. We submitted an EDA application for the zone for Windham/Bennington county for each county to hire an additional small business technical assistance provider and one additional position overseeing that effort. We should know about that in the next 6-8 weeks. We are anticipating changes tomorrow for indoor dining from the state.

XIV. Chamber updates:

- a. Eric: Already talked about what we've been trying to do. Working with locals but also other Chambers lobbying for our businesses. Cosigning letters that each other have written based on restaurants and lodging and trying to get those to the right people. We sent a letter to the Governor and Secretary Curley regarding the loosening of some of the restrictions on out of state visitors to lodging. Unlike restaurants or retail there's no options for them right now. Have a call with our board today about events. Kind of looking at Wine/Harvest and moving the July golf happening into September. Chamber is trying to figure out where the money is coming from. Events and guide ads have been put on hold and that's what carries us through right now for funding. No fireworks or Blueberry festival so we need to figure out what we do to help keep the Chamber afloat. Because we're a 501c6 organization we are not eligible for PPP funding and by the time it was determined we may be eligible for an EIDL grant that had been closed. Having conversations with our bank and fellow chambers about what they're doing to stay afloat. That's the big piece right now is making sure we can keep that place open. Hoping to open the physical building soon.

XV. Other comments:

- a. Christine: we were lucky to keep things going during this time. Larger buses are helping with social distancing. Press release: we added an additional run to Brattleboro earlier in the day. (Stopped Marlboro run for now but can add back in as needed).
- b. Adam: Friday's business resiliency call will have Darcy Carter from the SBA to go over the changes that the Senate passed last night.

XVI. Next meeting July 2 – hopefully in person

XVII. Motion to adjourn by Eric at 9:24 am, seconded by Gretchen. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Wheeler
Economist Development, Town of Dover