

Bi-Town Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes
via Zoom
Thursday, August 6, 2020

Members present: Heidi Taylor, Vicki Capitani, Eric Durocher, Gretchen Havreluk, Tracy Bartels, Tom Fitzgerald

Also present: Shannon Wheeler Lauren Harkawik, Jesse Kreitzer, Scott Tucker, Bill Benneyan

Meeting called to order at 8:02 am

- I. Additions or changes to the agenda
 - a. Introduction of Bill Benneyan, Executive Director and General Manager of Hermitage Club
- II. Approve minutes from the July 2nd meeting
 - a. Motion to approve by Vicki, seconded by Gretchen. All approve.
- III. Deerfield Valley resiliency team COVID-19 work
 - a. Gretchen: we're meeting later today to talk about a welcome wagon. We've seen a huge uptick in real estate market of homes being purchased. There is a statewide welcome wagon program where people can sign up to be hosts or if they're new to the area and they match hosts with new residents. <https://www.vtwelcomewagon.org/> There's a SoVT division and I would encourage anyone that would like to be a host to sign up. As a team, we're trying to drill it down even more into our individual towns. First maybe a postcard to new residents linking to a website. We're working on that right now.
 - b. Eric: in addition, Shannon and I were discussing getting something out to the entire Grand List to collect that contact information. New residents and existing second homeowners that are here and contemplating staying. Having all that contact info moving forward would be invaluable. Other initiatives: working on the Everybody Eats program with Meg at Wilmington Works and lining that up with our local restaurants and what group could facilitate that.
- IV. Housing Committee:
 - a. Gretchen: we have not met, but there is some housing activity. There are some developers interested in Dover and Wilmington which is exciting. Hopefully that moves forward and into development.
 - b. Eric: if you haven't looked at the Out of Reach study (https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR_BOOK_2020.pdf) - it supplies information on where we stand as a state compared to the rest of the country and comparing that to what we got from our Housing Analysis (https://www.doververmont.com/sites/default/files/housing_analysis_master_plan_report_-_towns_of_dover_wilmington_vt_11-13-19.pdf) – there's some interesting information in there.
- V. Marketing Committee:
 - a. Gretchen: we've been meeting and moving forward, our RFQ is due Monday at 4 and I've had a lot of questions on it from marketing consultants. We have a scoring mechanism for those and I think we're going to have a lot of responses. Working on a video RFQ and starting the digital ad campaign.
 - b. Eric: those RFQ responses are coming in; Gretchen's handling questions and I get the finalized responses. I expect will see a lot more before Monday.
- VI. VTrans Signs:
 - a. Gretchen: the resolutions worked. We had a meeting with VTrans: Joe Kelly (SW Regional Traffic Safety Investigator, Operations & Safety Bureau – Highway Division), Matt Bogaczyk, Project Manager; Katharine Otto, Planning Coordinator; and Amy Bell; Facilitator. It went really

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well, there was a PowerPoint and they admitted that something needed to be done. We did get at the approach to Augur Hole Rd on Route 9 they will installing a new 'Ski Areas' pointing straight ahead between the existing South Newfane & Wilmington signs. We did not win Hughes Road piece. They felt no one should be traveling that road unless they live on that road. It's interesting how they process the signage needs. The other piece that they were more than willing to jump in on was town highway signage. They are proposing that there's better signage at these intersections. It was great to have Dave Elliott, Marlboro Road commissioner along with Jesse on the call. They also suggested that Mount Snow and the Hermitage Club note to stay on State Highways to reach these on their websites. Maybe the Chamber providing that info; that's a piece we'd have to work on.

- b. Jesse: I did speak to David about installing dirt road signage on the town roads at Higley Hill/100 and right when you turn on Augur Hole. That's the only other mitigation effort we could pursue at this point.
- c. Eric: I think the entire exercise was very educational on our part. After two and a half years, we finally get a meeting together and they admit that there's a problem, and they were 'well we aren't going to be able to change google maps but we will put a sign up'. Glad to see that something's happening. The Hughes Rd thing I guess we can't win them all, at least the Augur Hole Road piece has been addressed. If we can do a little more education wise with our visitors. The issue with having that info at the Chamber is it is well after the fact that they would have turned onto one of those roads to get to the ski areas. We'll just keep moving forward with everything we can to try to mitigate the amount of traffic going over those roads trying to access the ski areas
- d. Gretchen: They said they'd be able to put the sign up rather quickly depending on the height of it so we'll see how quickly that does go up.
- e. Vicki: way to stay with it guys, I really appreciate it. I think the towns appreciate it, and our visitors will appreciate it, and the locals will appreciate it. This was not an easy task, it seemed ridiculous but thank you.

VII. Chris Campany – Windham Regional Commission: are there any action items from June meeting?

- a. Gretchen: in our minutes it indicated we'd be reviewing our zoning bylaws and Dover would be working on activating their planning commission. Reviewing zoning bylaws is really difficult. They are difficult to decipher and they're pretty lengthy. I haven't had a chance to review ours with a fine tooth comb. I think we're looking here to save our agricultural lands and that that is our primary focus right now.
- b. Eric: We started the discussion at a SB meeting about reviewing the planning commission. It's not an easy process as anyone anticipated. We need to find some new members and would like to see that move forward as quickly as possible. Jeannette was reaching out to current members to get a final word on their involvement and from there we will work on replacing any members that don't wish to be involved anymore. It's interesting that we started having this zoning talk because shortly after the State in conjunction with other groups released the Enabling Better Places: A Zoning Guide for Vermont Neighborhoods so that's going to come into the conversation as well. <https://accd.vermont.gov/content/zoning-for-great-neighborhoods>
- c. Gretchen: Wilmington planning commission also going to take a look at that document as well, our ZA sent that out to everyone as well.

VIII. Other Business:

- a. Heidi: do we have any update as to somebody who could join our meetings from the Chamber?

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- b. Eric: I haven't spoken to anybody directly about that piece of it but I will put it on my list of things to get done.

IX. BDCC updates: *Adam unable to attend*

X. Mount Snow updates:

- a. Tracy: Working on our winter plans and looking forward to getting colder. Jobs are posted for the Winter season. We have a lot of jobs posted online and we're getting a slow stream of applicants. That's our focus right now. Winter will be here in 100 days or so. The Grand Summit will be taking transient guests on August 14th. Scenic rides and the golf course are going well, golf course has been sold out.

XI. Dover updates:

- a. Vicki: We are struggling with our hybrid meetings; we're trying to get the Audio/Video working. It's about 6 weeks now we've been meeting in person. It's challenging, I think it's a better experience for those in the room than those on Zoom. We tried projecting and getting some extra audio/video in. It's still challenging. We're plugging along.
- b. Eric: Gretchen/Shannon and I participated in a call Tuesday with our local delegates. Had a really great conversation with them about the health of businesses in the Valley. It included representatives from Londonderry, Brattleboro, Bellows Falls as well so it was interesting to see where we are as it pertains to the Southern Vermont economy. *Heidi: so where are we?* I think visitation wise we're doing ok. Resiliency wise, because of the work of the DVRT, we're leaps and bounds ahead in terms of some of the programs we've been running. With our resiliency calls, with Meg getting the Eat Sleep Shop Local plan and moving forward into our involvement with the Everybody Eats program we can really push some dollars around in the Valley to help our local businesses.

XII. Wilmington updates:

- a. Tom – no meeting this week due to no power. Working on a couple of things that VLCT has presented to us. We're trying to finalize our assuming ownership of the water department. We've got a long process in front of us. We've been working on this for at least 7 years, so hopefully we're going to see some end in sight fairly soon. The final piece of this is the state legislature has to approve it. So trying to take care of this. Beaches are open again – we had to shut down for COVID and finally got over that to open only to be hit with a high count of eColi. But it's back open again and people are enjoying it. We've only got a few more weeks to go of the season.
- b. Heidi: When will tax bills go out?
- c. Tom: We do not have the rate yet from the state. We don't know what the school rate is going to be so we've been playing a waiting game. Ours probably won't go out until September. Everything is delayed because of Covid. And we're getting ready for our tax sale.
- d. Vicki: Our tax bills went out last week and are due September 15th.
- e. Scott: I don't think the state has delivered the school rate yet.
- f. Vicki: I guess we're collecting what we think we're supposed to. How's the reappraisal going?
- g. Tom: it should be finished in a week or two. Scott: yes, we have an end date of the 14th so it will be done. We're hoping to get the bills out by the end of August or latest early September. We have only so much cash in the bank so we need to get our bills out as well.
- h. Gretchen: we are collaboratively working on the ESSL campaign. It's had a slow start in Wilmington, but we're hoping to see an uptick. I think people are confused because it always happens at Christmastime. To piggyback on Eric, the delegation update the other day. It

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sounds like we are doing so much better than Brattleboro is and I think that has to do with that we are lucky enough to be in a resort community. I presented a report to them on the Real Estate market for Wilmington. From January 1st to July 29th last year there was 41 total sales. This year the same date range there have been 46 sales but there are also 38 pending sales currently. The other huge factor is there were 46 sales so far this year but 3 of them were over a million dollars; last year there were none the entire year. And there are currently 3 pending sales over a million dollars.

- i. Eric: I think the number I saw the other day in the Deerfield Valley and just beyond there are 241 active contracts.
- j. Gretchen: I'm attributing this to two things. One, the rejuvenation of the Hermitage Club and I also think people are moving here from more populated areas due to Covid,

XIII. Hermitage updates:

- a. Bill: Like Mount Snow we are planning to open this year Thanksgiving weekend, weather conditions permitting. Like any seasonal work, getting everything that's been sleeping for a while ready. So far everything's good. The first thing we were concerned about is the on mountain ski experience from an operating standpoint and that's all thumbs up. We're looking at our lodging services. We've kept our buildings closed on purpose. There are a lot more members around this summer than I would have normally expected. There's been some pressure to use their Clubhouse but in the interest of everybody's safety. Our slowly growing employee base and all our visitors and members we've stayed tight shut. People are discovering fresh water boating. If there's silver linings around the crisis, our members are discovering southern Vermont on a year round basis. Thinking about the housing we do have a back log of interest in membership to join this year and the number one question they all have is where am I going to live, what can I buy, what can I rent, and what will you build. Most people have heard we're selling off all of our inn properties; our non core assets. Doveberry sold, Snow Goose is in closing. Hermitage Inn is in process. Horizon Inn has interest, my understanding is that interest is employee style housing which I know everybody can use. Golf course is under the new ownership of Johnny Cleanthes is going great guns. Like Mount Snow's course, really busy. I think he's going to hit his total budget for rounds at the end of this month. Our members still can use it but it was not something we were interested in operating. We're really focused on the ski experience and the club experience. These 100 days are going to go fast. We've got a lot of work to do. I'm starting to hire staff for outside/inside services. I think everybody's anxious to understand how we'll operate our services and amenities to our guests for the Winter. There's a lot of transparency in the industry and we're all sharing information and looking to put our skis in the snow.

XIV. Chamber updates: *No attendee*

XV. Other Updates:

- a. Eric: I talked to Andy, our Town Clerk the other day and we've had more requests for mail in ballots going out and coming back in than we normally have for foot traffic voting. So that's really interesting to hear.
- b. Scott: so our numbers have gone from normally there's about 89 people who participate. It's almost close to 400 right now.

XVI. Next meeting September 3rd.

XVII. Motion to adjourn by Eric at 8:44 am, seconded by Vicki.

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Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Wheeler
Economic Development, Town of Dover