

Bi-Town Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes
via Zoom
Thursday, September 3, 2020

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

Also present: Shannon Wheeler, Scott Tucker, Gig Zboray, Bill Benneyan

Meeting called to order at 8:06 am

- I. Additions or changes to the agenda *None*
- II. Approve minutes from the August 6th meeting
 - a. Motion to approve by Eric, seconded by Gretchen. All approve.
- III. Deerfield Valley resiliency team
 - a. Gretchen: We've been focusing on a grant opportunity from the state with a super short turn around. The grant is basically how to help your local community with a marketing plan. We've been struggling with a piece of it centering around lodging.
 - b. Eric: They're providing up to \$10,000 per applicant to stimulate the local economy. ESSL just wrapped up and preliminary numbers from Meg show we generated over \$85,000 in business for participants. Per coupon it was over \$50 spent in a local business. This program we wanted to focus more on lodging because ESSL doesn't directly benefit them like retail and restaurants. I asked for \$10,000 and so did Meg to provide our lodging establishments with gift certificate packages so that they can book future stays with those included. Anyone booking an equivalent of a two night stay will get \$100 in gift certificates for local businesses. There is a potential of 65 businesses that this could help and each lodge will get about 10 of these packages to market however they wanted. Each lodging business would be paired up with a specific group of businesses, so we make sure everyone is getting movement. It will provide cash up front as well as on the back end. I think we hear around September 15 if we are awarded funding.
 - c. Gretchen: and we've been working on Welcome Wagon still – we have a training this evening as hosts with BDCC for the Southern Vermont region. Collaboratively but as individual towns we're also working on a postcard for new residents.
- IV. Our Growing Communities – Zoning
 - a. Gretchen: we've had Chris Company on our agenda but I was thinking how do we move this to a new title and I think it was really about growing our communities but how do we keep our landscapes and our culture. I know Dover was working on getting their planning commission back involved. As far as Wilmington goes, we have not really done much but we are going through our Zoning bylaws and making some changes. I have not been to the planning commission regarding anything in our landscape so I don't have any updates on that.
 - b. Eric: no updates on that. I did speak with Tabi, our Zoning Administrator, and she did express interest in revitalizing our planning commission but no updates.
 - c. Vicki: yes we have maybe one of three members who want to be involved but it's getting the others to actually resign before we can appoint someone else. I'm not sure where that's going right now. We've been consumed with other things.
- V. Housing Committee:
 - a. Gretchen: working on Agenda for this month for Eric to move it forward.
 - b. Eric: yes, working on this and you'll see a note soon once I have the contact information for those involved.

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- c. Gretchen: there's been a lot of action in the Valley about taking older hotels and changing them into different types of housing so I think it's important we have a robust committee to help guide them.
- d. Heidi: that can continue those meetings in person at Deerfield Valley Rescue as long as it's a maximum of 10 people.

VI. Marketing Committee:

- a. Gretchen: we had 11 responses to our RFQ on a scale of really bad to really good. We all individually scored them (Tim Dolan, Eric, Shannon and myself) and last week decided to enter into a contract with an agency out of Virginia called Charette. This is the one that came back with strategic planning in their proposal. Everyone else really only spoke about a campaign. We need something deeper – are we in the right markets? A five year plan and not just a campaign. They were who really excelled in their proposal.
- b. Eric: by the end of the week we'll have an RFQ out for a videographer/photographer to build assets on a shot list for future campaigns. Trampoline will be moving forward with our Fall campaign – started back up September 1st

VII. VTrans Signs:

- a. Signs have not yet been placed. Adam will update when he sees them.
- b. Gretchen: Meeting yesterday on Route 9 corridor from VT DOT. Attended by Gretchen and Scott; lengthy PowerPoint. Asked about things on Route 9 such as the deteriorating bridge in the center of Wilmington and that the town had paid for renovations and there was no comment. There was talk about state right of ways because roads have moved over the years, but the right of ways remained the same.
- c. Scott: Primary focus seemed to be on repaving and reclamation. A lot of talk about Brattleboro through Marlboro.
- d. Gretchen: also Searsburg and over that way as well.

VIII. Other Business:

- a. Adam: There's a conversation that's been happening with the Chambers that we've been convening with the BDCC in partnership with the BCRC have been convening the chambers from Bellows Falls, Brattleboro, the Valley and Southwestern VT. They're in a hard place right now and we're really just trying to figure out how we can support them to get through this to the other side so we still have Chambers operating a year from now. If something's not done we're going to lose these Chambers. We signed onto a letter of VACCE (the executive group of the Chambers). They issued a letter to House Commerce requesting funding distributed amongst the state chambers. That ultimately was not picked up by Commerce in their current version of the legislation making its way through the legislature. They are opening the funding opportunity up a little more. Chambers that had interpreted the requirements that said you can't have charitable giving included in your revenues when determining your grant size under the RESTART program. So some chambers chose not to interpret festivals as fundraising as charitable, while some did. There is a way to reduce that chamber revenue to a point where the grant from the state was somewhat more meaningful than those who only included dues. I think that's really the only avenue that's going to be available state wide at this point. We really are encouraging all business to find a way in which to come together to talk about this process. We've got bricks and mortar in Brattleboro, the Valley, Bennington. Bellows Falls has a free space in the Waypoint center, but they have a volunteer operation at this point. I think in both chambers in Brattleboro and in the Valley we're on a hybrid with various salaries and wages

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being paid but also a lot of volunteers. I see an opportunity for this group to be a real partner at least in the Valley conversation and see if there's a way in which to provide bridge financing to keep that organization going. I say all of this with the understanding that in a year Chambers across the state and country all have to re-envision their business model. It is one that is ripe for re-envisioning for their future. So that may involve a collaboration across the region. In Rutland the RDC and the Chamber just merged. It is not what we're interested in doing at BDCC whatsoever, I don't think my board would support it. But my board is encouraging us to find every way possible to support the Chambers, the downtown organizations, and economic development groups such as BiTown. I don't know if there's a future action item for BiTown or agenda item or if it's a committee but personally as a member of the Chamber and with my historic connections to the Chamber I'm willing to serve on that and with my BDCC had I'm available to help bring some resources to that fight.

- b. Gretchen: I have been encouraging people to pay their Chamber dues as soon as possible. It's a bad time for businesses, I understand that. But I'm going to write my Chamber dues check this week and I encourage other businesses to pay their dues as soon as possible.
- c. Adam: that landed pretty flat outside of Gretchen's comment. Is there no interest in BiTown picking this up?
- d. Heidi I will put it on the Agenda for next month. I think it is something that's important and we should pick it up.
- e. Gretchen: I would be willing to be on that committee as well.
- f. Eric: I'm more than happy to be a part of that conversation. You're completely correct the re-envisioning of the Chambers is actually a long time coming and I think this has just expedited the process obviously. I'm definitely happy to be a part of that conversation.
- g. Tracy: I'll nominate Tim Dolan as well; I think he's on the Chamber already and connect with him on that.

IX. Wilmington updates:

- a. Tom: We appointed Tony Tribuno to our open Selectboard slot until March. We have reappraisal appeals coming up; I believe 140 so far. Going to be a busy fall, at least we have that fifth person there at this point. We continue to work on water merger and hope that comes to fruition fairly soon. We dealt with some parking and speeding situations hopefully that's going to be resolved shortly. Tax bills should be out end of month and due end of October.
- b. Gretchen: Transfers in Wilmington - in July there were 17. 6 of those were zero dollars. 11 were actual transfers with 1.2 million being the highest amount. In August there were only 11 transfers, 1 name change and 560k highest dollar amount. It's pretty consistent of the growth that we're seeing. I'm thinking I should go back to June and May and see what those numbers look like as well. I have been working on our grant on East Main Street and I am extremely frustrated with our State. Because we have a VTrans grant and unfortunately, we have to redo all the easements for it and I was told that this week.

X. Dover updates:

- a. Vicki: Unfortunately, had our Chair resign rather abruptly. We are getting ready to appoint a new Selectboard member. We had some interest which was great and that person will be up for election again in March. It will be good to get a full board and to reorganize the board. We've had lots of dog and graffiti issues and they have consumed a lot of our time.
- b. Eric: I don't have the specific numbers Gretchen did but in talking with our local agents the market is just still on fire. It almost seems like they can't keep houses on the market. We'll see

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if the infrastructure can support that and convince them to stay. I think that's part of what Gretchen, Meg and the rest of us are looking at with this Welcome Wagon program is to provide those services to the people that are coming in to influence them to stay here in the Valley with us and hopefully that program helps. On the economic development side of things for the Town of Dover, the other night the Selectboard approved the funding for our new Economic Development specific website for Dover and I'll share that with you shortly. We have had four new businesses open in Dover and there's a potential for another two in the coming months as well.

- c. Vicki: On the real estate side I just have to say this was the most frustrating holiday week here at the Deerfield Valley News. Every time we'd get a real estate ad done another listing would go under contract. This went on for the last week, it has been insane. We can't get a real estate ad to stick. It's been a total moving target. Literally, every day, two more properties under contract.
- d. Eric: that just reminded me that we did run an ad this week to try catch second homeowners to say take the Census. Hopefully with the second homeowners and visitors up this weekend we can try and catch some of those people with that reminder and announcement.

XI. Mount Snow updates:

- a. Tracy: Hopefully most saw our operating plan that was released Thursday. We were excited to announce that Mount Snow is opening for the winter on November 14th. With the announcement there was a lot of careful thought went into this with safety being our core principle and guiding our decisions. Guests will need a reservation to ski at Mount Snow with priority to passholders. Ticket sales will open December 7 so through that first month the resort will be for passholders only. We believe in order to accommodate our guests, we're in it for the long haul and we need to be really rigorous with the safety to be open all season long and that's what our goal is. We're requiring face coverings and physical distancing and controlling our capacity through the reservation system. Hopefully that will be met really positively in the community and I'm happy to answer more questions. We'll set up a meeting in the future to address questions of us until we are open.
- b. Adam: Will the reservations require you to state where you're coming from? So in other words, will you be tracking people's residency and cross check that against allowable counties?
- c. Tracy: No, the people will have to know what they have to do so that's a little bit of responsibility on the guests that's coming, not on the mountain to control that. Just like currently in the time we're in right now, we don't know if their home address is in one of the red counties if they've been at their 2nd home all summer long and have been quarantining. So it's really hard for us to make that determination. And so it will be on the guest and we will have travel information through the Vermont site that's available for people to make sure and that's what we're doing now. We will know who's on the mountain any given day because of the information stored on their pass or their day ticket.

XII. Hermitage Club updates:

- a. Bill: We continue to work on the mountain and we're in great shape for opening when it comes to our mountain infrastructure. Most of planning has been around inside operations and effects of Covid. Kudos to Vail and Mount Snow by extension for putting out communications they did last week. I think they did the entire industry a favor and setting expectations for public skiers across the country and what the ski experience will be like this year and answering questions. No big surprises in there but I was really happy to see it. We've planning along the same lines

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and of course all of our member guests want to know what our plan is and it's nice to be able to point to and say look at Vail, it's not going to be too much different. Much of the industry is going to follow the same basic guidelines. Similar to Mount Snow and Vail's requirements, we have a known, fixed group; let's call them passholders to make it easy, so it's a very parallel situation with Mount Snow. We also require reservations but it's a different way we just need to know if the member is coming, who they're bringing and where they're coming from. We'll also be curious to know how many people are here in residence and not traveling back and forth because about 80% of our members have homes here. Our planned opening is November 27. We're just launching our own hiring and recruiting campaign for the season. We're a little bit behind Mount Snow in that but our needs aren't as great but I think we're expecting the same kind of challenges, particularly in our hourly seasonal food and beverage and service areas. You'll see us out there shortly looking for that winter seasonal staff for the mountain.

- b. Adam: How many staff are you looking to hire for the season?
- c. Bill: Around 100, we have a very small full time staff and we're pretty much fully staffed now. So it's really the seasonal that we're looking for and the big number's not surprising- mostly in food and beverage and ski school.

XIII. BDCC Updates:

- a. Adam: I had done a presentation for my board last week regarding Real Estate transactions. I pulled all the MLS data. I will email to everybody. It compares Jan-Aug this year to same time period last year. It's broken out by Brattleboro and adds Dover, Jamaica, Londonderry, Stratton, Wardsboro, Wilmington. Brattleboro is mostly steady but the tourism areas are huge. It shows all the data the realtors track. You really have to study it, it's a lot of numbers but it echoes what everyone is saying here. I think everyone's aware of the Restart VT program funding increase. Businesses that got capped out at \$50k can go back and apply for a second round. CDBGCV for sole proprietors first round was fully distributed and awarded. Our region, Southeastern VT did extremely well in comparison to other regions. BDCC is running that program in partnership with Two Rivers out of Quechee for the entire state. So we're fielding applicants from all over and there's a selection criteria that involves a lottery. Round 2 will be announced next week. So there will be another opportunity for sole proprietors to apply for up to \$10k funding. A new program will be announced next week, the state has chosen BDCC and the RDCs of Vermont to implement the technical assistance statewide program. This will be a 1.6 million dollar program that will award technical assistance funding to a business in the range of \$3,000. So if your business was negatively impacted by Covid you will make that statement, you will apply for funds and say "I need to pivot to online retail. I don't have a good website, I don't have a shopping cart process", you will be awarded on a first come, first serve basis this amount. Then your local RDC will hire a technical assistance provider to provide that service. The money doesn't go to the business, the business is bypassed and the money goes to the provider. This will be in \$4k increments so we're talking 250-300 business across the state that will be able to get this funding. It's going to be a dash to the finish line. Probably announced by Governor next Friday. And there will be two ways businesses can participate. They can be a technical assistance provider or apply to be a vendor. The census, to reiterate the importance of that. Hopefully at Wahoo's this weekend we will have a tent highlighting the need for second homeowners. We received an award from the USDA for our Regenerate program to help our succession planning and financing for businesses who want to sell and people who want to buy.
- b. Vicki: did you send a press release about that tent? I think we should share.

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- c. Adam: no I am waiting for details from the Census
- d. Vicki: whenever you get that information send it over and we can put out on our website and Facebook. I think it's really important and we need to get it out there.

XIV. Chamber updates:

- a. Eric: I did reach out to Rich Caplan on this and someone even from the Board will come to bridge the gap until my replacement is hired.

XV. Other Updates:

- a. Gretchen(Adam): I have a contract with SEVCA and we have micro grants up to \$5,000 available. The Embrace program. This is for micro businesses and there's pretty flexible usage. There is a duplication of benefits restriction. Contact Gretchen for more details.

XVI. Next meeting October 1st .

XVII. Motion to adjourn by Adam at 8:57 am, seconded by Eric.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Wheeler
Economic Development, Town of Dover