

Bi-Town Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes
via Zoom
Thursday, March 4, 2021

Members present: Gretchen Havreduk, Vicki Capitani, Eric Durocher, Heidi Taylor, Tom Fitzgerald, Ethan Schoonmaker, Tracy Bartels, Bill Benneyan, Adam Grinold, Christine Howe

Also present: Shannon Wheeler, Meg Staloff, Scott Tucker

Meeting called to order at 8:00 am

- I. Additions or changes to the agenda: *None*
- II. Approve minutes from the February 4th meeting
 - a. Motion to approve by Eric, seconded by Gretchen. All approve.
- III. Deerfield Valley resiliency team
 - a. Gretchen: we've been making phone calls to all the businesses to see what their current challenges are. Deciding how to use our funding surplus. Meeting tomorrow at 11:30.
 - b. Meg: I think especially our restaurants are looking towards how to set up this summer and foresee those expenses, anticipating outdoor dining and they learned a lot from mistakes made last year. With decreased revenue from this winter I think this is a specific area where any assistance that can be provided it would be very beneficial. There are some specific needs around technology that businesses have realized they need to address and haven't yet so that may be another thing where we can be of help and guide them to providers.
 - c. Eric: I didn't talk to a lot of people who are middle of the road on things at this point. Some are crushing it. Some didn't apply for assistance the first time around and by the 2nd round, they needed it but couldn't apply because they hadn't the first round. So we do have a handful of businesses who may be looking for assistance that weren't eligible previously. The more information like that our group can share with legislators and the ACCD will be helpful.
 - d. Gretchen: I think retail is really struggling right now. Hotels are challenged and for restaurants it's difficult because their costs have increased with all the to go containers. They are all suffering but I think retail and hotels are really struggling.
- IV. Our Growing Communities – Zoning
 - a. Gretchen: The planning commission is working on the housing piece and updating zoning.
 - b. Meg: yes, working on senior housing as a starting point to create some conditional use around developing that and then move on to how we can address workforce housing. Open some cracks in the door for permitting to make it a little easier and making guidelines clearer for developers to understand what is possible. Looking at applying for a municipal planning grant to do a fuller reworking of zoning - more in line with current best practices. Instead of using density, using dimensional requirements. It's a big switch, but it makes things easier for people to understand and change uses within a building without changing the look of the village.
 - c. Eric: Our planning commission is just getting back into it after appointed new members. There's going to be some work to do on the zoning piece. Focusing on workforce housing and trying to find the initiatives that are going to lead property owners to help.
- V. Housing Committee:
 - a. Eric: Meeting again next Wednesday. We found some topics we were discussing prior to Covid we can't continue right now. Covid continues to be a major challenge with housing. The influx of new homeowners purchasing at rates that make it impossible for someone in the Valley to get a home. We would like to sit down with Tracy and Mount Snow and see what your challenges are and initiatives that may be able to assist in that for next year. One big thing we'll be talking about Wednesday are two separate bills – one House and one Senate - focusing on

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hard regulations on Air Bnbs throughout the state. Reading through it I don't know that what they're trying to do is the answer to solve the problem. It may be a little too far, if you think about the economic impact that would have in a community like ours. We don't want to take all the business away from our Inns and Hotels, but those Air Bnbs provide money to other businesses when guests are here and to our 1% fund. We talked to a lot of people around the state and no one seems to have the answer. It's going to be a long conversation and we hope it comes to a middle ground in the legislature. We did have a meeting with the head of Mad River Valley housing coalition. It was a great meeting, we talked about things we have that she doesn't, she filled us in on programs they're running we could use here.

- b. Gretchen: did get some reaction from sending things out to potential small developers. Construction materials are so high right now so they are looking for incentives. Going to put together a Zoom panel with resources from the state to discuss what they have available.

VI. Marketing Committee:

- a. Gretchen: we met yesterday, putting together our final budget to go to the Selectboards. It is significantly less than what was in the strategic marketing plan. We do have some funding balance that helps a little but also removed some items.
- b. Eric: the budget is still adequate to achieve so many of the goals they covered. We didn't cut anything that was vital the first year, took a deep dive into what to set up first.
- c. Gretchen: we're not doing a campaign this summer; we feel we need to update the branding and the new website and focusing on these key things will make next year's campaign really strong.

VII. Other Business:

- a. Walgreens:
 - i. Gretchen: I have nothing. Has anyone heard any recent complaints?
 - ii. Eric: there's a lot of confusion there right now with the Covid vaccine rollout, this on top of their existing problems. There hasn't been a major problem yet but I can see it potentially being an issue.
 - iii. Vicki: I know someone that got a Covid test there on a Saturday and didn't get their results until the following Thursday night. They are sending to TN for processing. Another person went to Bennington this week and had results later that same day.

VIII. Wilmington updates:

- a. Tom: Bond issue passed this week for the public safety building. We did not have a physical town meeting, informational on Zoom and Australian ballot voting. Informational was not very well attended. Selected as a targeted community like Dover for EfficiencyVT. We are looking for a police officer. Reorganization meeting next week, all 3 Selectboard seats were reelected.
- b. Gretchen: We put out an RFP for engineering and design of North Main St on both sides which includes granite curbing, lighting, crosswalk, both sides. We only got 2 responses, so if you have projects like that going out be aware.
- c. Scott: and we have an RFP out for Clerk of the Works for the public safety facility project

IX. Dover updates:

- a. Vicki: Thanks to Mount Snow and Vail we will be hosting Town Meeting May 18 at Carinthia Base Lodge. We approved the budget to move forward so we're a couple of months behind Wilmington. You can still get on the ballot for any open positions.
- b. Eric: Working with RT Brown at BDCC for a revolving loan fund, excited to see that launch. We have an appointed and functioning formal Trails and Rec committee. In the middle of regaining

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our village center designations back for East and West Dover. New town website is in the works.

X. Mount Snow updates:

- a. Tracy: We will continue using Snow Lake Lodge this summer and next year for employee housing. We are working on bringing in internationals to aid in hospitality. Big capital plans for new ops building - same footprint and location of where it was previously. Planning stages for Epic Mix – app will tell you lift line wait times, has fun badges to achieve when on site, quick link for patrol and connect with friends to see where they are on Mountain as well to plan meet ups. Analyzing business operations for summer. Golf course and scenic chairlifts are a definite yes. Evaluating mountain biking, and we will have childcare. We expect to announce all the details in April at latest. We passed 100 day mark in the season last week and we are looking forward to finishing out the winter strong.

XI. Hermitage Club updates:

- a. Bill: We are also looking at bringing J1 Visa workers in for next season with housing being our biggest challenge. We had a DRB meeting about restarting the Grenoble Townhouse project Monday. We are hoping for approval and to have them done before next winter season we have an aggressive developer. This is really important to our membership. We've grown 35% in membership this season. We're a little ahead of pace but a couple of years away from our sustainability point. This summer we're working on deferred maintenance and we are scheduled to run through April 4 – maybe April 11 depending on snow. 234 members as of this morning and the majority of those new members are completely new to the Club and the Valley. We'll be connecting with the chamber on getting info together for them.

XII. BDCC Updates:

- a. Adam: Legislatively this week I wanted to share there are potential changes to unemployment insurance. There are proposals in the Senate Committee on Economic Development. In this region, Dover's Senator Balint is in that committee. I'll circulate an email which outlines the proposal and the net effect it would have on employers. The summary is businesses are currently spending \$58 per employee. If these changes go forward they will be spending \$189 per employee. In positive news, the BDCC board has decided to fund a position for the next 18 months which is the welcoming communities project. This position will only work on creating a network for new Americans, foreign born workers, J1 Visa help for small employers in the initial days, we're trying to assist in that process. Bigger picture working with all the different elements to ensure that the communities in Southeastern Vermont are welcoming place for new Vermonters. We know deaths outpace births so this is the only way to grow our working population. We are advertising for a couple of positions at BDCC – an accountant, an experienced technical assistance provider. Aggressively pursuing lending capacity in the organization. The Southern VT Economy Summit is moving forward virtually for May 12-14. It's intended to let people drop in and out over the 3 days so please check out the agenda and we hope to see you there.

XIII. Chamber Update:

- a. Ethan: Things are moving well, working on updating website. We purchased a drone to help members create video content in house. Spending a lot of time reaching out to members. Growth has slowed a little but continuing to reach out to all businesses. Board meets again on 18th. Committees are set up and ready to meet. 5 social platforms for our marketing committee to get ready. Membership committee has a lot to work on with member benefits, I've been

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searching for a web developer to help all of those members. I've spoken to almost every business in the Valley now. Events committee is meeting and we believe we're confident we'll be able to hold the Golf Tournament and fireworks, and will be preparing Wine and Harvest and hoping state guidelines will allow that to occur. Hope to have more information on that for next meeting.

XIV. Moover Update:

- a. Christine: we went live with our new website and branding. We are hoping it is more user friendly and easier to navigate. Tracy we have had a great year at the mountain, the ops team there has been fantastic.

XV. Next meeting April 1.

XVI. Motion to adjourn by Ethan at 8:53 am, seconded by Eric.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Wheeler
Economic Development, Town of Dover