

Bi-Town Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes
via Zoom & Deerfield Valley Rescue
Thursday, July 11, 2024

Members present: Bill Benneyan, Gretchen Havreluk, Heidi Taylor

Members present via Zoom: Bethaney LaClair, Eric Durocher, Vicki Capitani, Adam Grinold, Christine Howe

Also present via Zoom: Shannon Wheeler, Will Galway, Dani Delaini, Sam Kondracki, John Redd

A recording of this meeting can be found here: <https://youtu.be/HJXHS3Fx70Y>

Meeting called to order at 8:04 am by Chair Eric

I. Public Comments:

- a. Adam: Introduction of Dani Delaini - new head of business acceleration and assistant director at BDCC.

II. Additions or changes to the agenda: [Added a Wilmington Works update]

III. Approve minutes of May 2nd meeting:

- a. Motion to approve by Heidi, seconded by Bill. Motion approved.

IV. Housing Committee Update:

- a. Eric: Haven't met in a bit but working through items we've discussed. Meeting this afternoon. New website is up and running [<https://www.deerfieldvalleyhousing.com/home>]. Will be very centered on resources for landlords. Gretchen put together a letter out to businesses seeking funding to help with some of our initiatives. Gretchen and I will be discussing an accessory dwelling unit program at next Selectboard meetings.

V. Marketing Committee Update:

- a. Gretchen: Summer campaign going, will share numbers in August to Selectboards. Successful photoshoot at the end of June. T-Term grant application went in for our passport program. Unfortunately, did not get awarded. Over 6 million in applications and only 1.2 million in funding available. Fall Foliage webcam coming. Looking at possible new pole banners for next year. [Eric recapped Bandwango passport program]

VI. Economic Data Reporting

- a. Eric: May 1% payment down 0.75% over last year. [Gretchen will send Wilmington information out].

VII. Other Business: *None*

VIII. Wilmington Update:

- a. Gretchen: Wilmington Works and the Town received \$125k for façade program for all Wilmington businesses on main roads. \$15k for project with an August 1st deadline. Talking with state and their engineer on bridge replacement happening in 2029. Hoot Toot & Whistle trail improvement RFP is out and due next week. Hired consultant for the Windham County cultural plan the Town of Wilmington is spearheading with Rockingham and Brattleboro. Good news from USDA on Rt 9 infrastructure expansion project and have agreed we can apply. If we are awarded it will be a lower interest rate with potential forgiveness. Permitting process has begun and will be seeking easements. Reappraisals will have a huge impact on the Town Offices with grievances.
- b. Sam: Façade program: they have until next July 15th to complete projects because of the late start vs previous program 180-day deadline.

IX. Dover Update:

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- a. Vicki: Town plan was approved by Windham Regional last night, one more vote of Board of Directors, but looks like our town plan will be in place. Lots to do, top of the list is a municipal water system. Selectboard has agreed to appoint a committee. Excited to be moving forward.
- b. Eric: Horace Hill work is complete, waiting on maps and final signage to host ribbon cutting and market on social media. [Eric shared images of signs and maps]. Great video from designer we're waiting to share once they do. On track with legal for STR ordinance, looking forward to moving on that shortly. Finalizing plans for business plan competition and potential loan program. Wrapped up DO-IT applications, working on some new signage around town.

X. Hermitage Club Update:

- a. Bill: in maintenance, chipping away at projects. Great extended July 4th weekend, record number of members in town. Held our annual big summer event on the 6th that was well attended. Some construction on and around property. Membership is steady. A lot of raised eyebrows on reappraisal process.
- b. Adam: are you closing membership sales? Bill: we've hit our comfortable number where annual budgets are self-sustaining; we are carrying no debt. Over 400 members. High percentage of recent members are younger families which is ideal, starting to see some multigenerational members and more year round visits.

XI. Mount Snow Update: *None in attendance.*

XII. BDCC Update:

- a. Adam: SEDS: about to enter heavy public engagement portion. Continuing to host public meetings for input, be on the lookout for those. Important we get people from different perspectives. This is a five-year document, thinking back 10 years ago there were warnings of a significant age and population decline issue. Our region has outperformed the rest of rural Vermont because we had those early strategies in place. Refugee work was very intentional, seeing wages of \$2 more/hour for them compared to Chittenden region. Eight people in CDL process. BizConnect: July 31 kickoff of this new initiative. Result of meeting with communities across region last few months that do not have chambers or downtown orgs, businesses are asking for something we distilled down to community. First event is July 31 at new Flat St coworking space, Bizitown. Will host in other communities on the 2nd Wednesday of each month through Fall, looking at one in Valley in August or September. Act 250/housing legislative changes: so much rule making still to come, hard to say what impacts will be. One of the outcomes that changed is downtown designation process. No longer a board, it's now the community investment board. Echoing concern over Wilmington reappraisal and panic that is setting out and what does it mean for my actual tax bill.
- b. Dani: really excited to work with all of you. Looking forward to seeing what's next.

XIII. Moover Update:

- a. Christine: Finished up Winter season, an average ridership season. Thinking of different ways to get ridership up on Wilmington/Dover route. Thank BDCC in their support for microtransit in Brattleboro: 2nd and 3rd shift workers with no way to get there, all app based, is going fantastic. 50-60% rides each evening are for employment. VTrans is backfilling in since we had private money. Transportation in general across the state is under some serious challenges: budget constraints. State has been fantastic in supporting us, but to note Windham County has the highest aging population in the state, 2nd highest volume of assist rides in the state. Looking towards Winter – meeting with Mount Snow next week, drop zone change went really well this year.

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XIV. Chamber Update:

- a. Bethaney: Events: new resident social through GROW program grant held with about 30 attendees and some businesses. Will have another around November and two next year. Social media content creator Janice hit ground running, analytics on her posts are exciting. Fireworks: one of best attended, Moover ridership was high. Weather was a challenge. Blueberry Festival coming up starting July 26h. Lots of press coverage, Yankee Magazine sending tv crew for that week. Janet and I working hard to expand where we can on it. Member mixer on the 15th at Green Mountain Squeeze, our last in June was annual meeting with 60 people. Up to 175 members with lots of personal supporters and new businesses. Renewals start in September, Coffee chat at Kitzhof Inn to answer any questions on membership. Planning on sending a survey out to get member feedback. Expanded Visitors Center hours to 10-5 with consistent numbers 50-100 each day with trail maps flying off shelf.

XV. Wilmington Works:

- a. Looking forward to seeing what comes out of the façade improvement grant program. Launching business plan competition with applications opening at the end of September and going through Winter. In busy event season, next is a new resident meet up on July 20th then Block Party during Blueberry Festival.

XVI. Motion to adjourn by Heidi, seconded by Bill at 8:52 am.

Next meeting September 5th

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Wheeler
Economic Development, Town of Dover