

Town of Woodstock
Economic Development Commission
Meeting
March 2, 2017
7:00pm – 8:30pm
Town Hall, Woodstock, Vermont

Draft Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order

Mr. Milstone called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm

Commissioners in Attendance: Tom Weschler, Barry Milstone, Joe DiNatale, Jason Merrill, Gail Childs, Keith Anderson, Matt Stover, Mica Seely, Charlie Kimball (by phone)

Commissioners Absent: Nick Ferro

Visitors in Attendance: Thirteen members of the public attended the meeting.

2. Citizen comments

No comments, aside from Rachael Shields being present to comment on her grant application.

3. Approval of 2/2/17 meeting minutes

Barry Milstone made a motion to approve the minutes from February 2 with a modification to Page 3 regarding the list of businesses to be provided by the Chamber. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Budget Update

- The 1% tax has raised \$384,415 to date
- 4Q2016--\$69,838 (up 10.5% YOY; 12.0% previous quarter)
- 2017 Revenue estimate ~~ \$250,000
- Expenditures paid = \$86,802
- Balance = \$297,613
- Allocated, but not spent ~~ \$25-\$30,000
- Balance free and clear ~~ \$270,000

2017 estimate is up to \$250,000, which is an increase over previous estimates.

Question from a member of the public- is the goal to utilize 100% of funds collected? The response was yes, but the timeline is still being determined as EDC considers Big Bets.

5. Communication Update

a. Warner Communications

Upcoming visit from Budget Travel, The Shire was featured in an article called “Green and Gorgeous”, recently. Two more resident profiles have been created and circulated. Social media followers are steadily growing, but the growth should be faster. Question was raised as to whether the followers are from our target market.

The focus now is to start turning to conversion of visitors to residents. There is a face-to-face meeting with Warner at the end of March, and this focus will be discussed.

b. EDC Communications Team

Articles have started to be featured in the VT Standard, with the first appearing on March 2. The articles have featured grants, EDC activities to date, and information on Warner PR's retention and role. The goal of these articles and other outreach is to engage the community. Kristi Audette has circulated a survey to local hospitality businesses to gather information that will help Warner to place visiting media and to engage these businesses in the promotion of Woodstock.

c. Website

The goal of the new website will be to combine all key information (Chamber and EDC) into one website. There is an RFP being created, which will be circulated very soon. All agree that this is a key item, and needs to be completed as quickly as possible. The website sub-committee is complete with four members as it was proving difficult to secure two more members of the community to participate. Once cost and timeline are developed (based on proposals received), the issue of website governance will be finalized. The new website URL will be woodstockvt.com (current Chamber site) and the focus won't be municipal, rather targeted to visitors, residents and potential residents with a focus on lifestyle in our area.

6. Submitted Grant Requests

- Woodstock Author Talks \$3,015.90
Grant not funded, vote was unanimous against. Does not meet key criteria for funding.
- WAMBA trail map, signage, improvements \$5,500
Grant funded. All except Joe DiNatale in favor.
- WCTV Local Streaming \$8,978
Grant not funded, one in favor, most conflicted or opposed.
- Pop-up Coworking \$300
Grant funded, all but one in favor.

7. Grant Guideline Modifications

Suggested modifications to the grant guidelines and procedures were presented to the commission for consideration and editing.

- 3 times per year
- 21% of 2017 funding ~ \$50,000
- Judged on merit of written application alone
 - Grants to be evaluated comparatively
 - Detailed budget
 - Follow up questions by e-mail
 - In-kind services do not count toward contribution
- Prioritize 1) loans > 2) matching > 3) full funding
- Generally not to supplement town budget grants
- Receipts required to support disbursements
- Grant completion report within one year
 - May be asked to present at public gathering
- Update Rubric

Grant Application Process (Revised)

- Submit application to Town office prior to deadline
- Respond to supplemental questions within two weeks
- Attend Town Select Board meeting when EDC presents recommendations
- Submit invoices with receipts to Town office
- Submit grant report within one

Grant Evaluation

- Favor
 - Serves EDC long-term goals
 - Measureable results
 - Long-term benefit to visitors, residents, and businesses
 - Startup expenses
 - Loans > Partial (matching) grants > Full funding
- Disfavor
 - 100% funding by EDC
 - Short-term paid advertising
 - Anticipated recurring expenses
 - In-house wages
 - Expenses that are, or could be, covered by volunteers/donations

Grand guidelines are to be reviewed by commissioners for discussion and voting at next meeting.

8. Big Bets updates / EDC Priorities

Joe indicated nine vacant storefronts in the Village that should be addressed as a high priority.

Status of sub-committees

- Nick and Gail are trying to reach the Bentley's block contact.
- Joe and Barry presented proposal for Optimist Center. Applicant responded to questions and discussion ensued. General agreement on concept. Kieth, Joe, and Barry will work with Travis to revise package.
- Joe and Barry presented outline for Woodstock inventory that can be used for welcome packages, marketing, etc. Commissioners will review and provide comments for discussion at next meeting.

Big Bets Vision

- Creative Economy - Leverage Who We Already Are
 - Arts
 - Crafts
 - Food
 - Remote workers (many and growing)
 - Retired (varied backgrounds, rich in capabilities)
 - Outdoors
 - Tourist economy (inns and retail)
- Add, if possible, "a taste of Brooklyn"
- Big Bets Buckets proposed by Tom
- Attraction/Conversion
 - Warner Communications
 - Website
 - Promotional materials
 - Ombudsmen
- Enable Commercial Development
 - East End
 - Stay involved and help to foster development to "vision"
 - Recreation
 - Connector/Circle Path
 - Woodstock

- Inventory of town and available properties
- Loans (?)
- Ombudsmen

Suggested that each Commissioner step up to spearhead one of the categories, and to see it through. Much discussion, not much action, time to make changes.

Matt Stover stepped up to lead a work session at the next meeting to address needs in the Village. He'll conduct a creative workshop, meant to engage the audience in generating solutions that address concerns around empty storefronts, beautification needs and overall vision.

9. Other business

Keith started discussion regarding appropriateness of promoting vendors outside of the Town. Does the outreach/promotion of Woodstock extend to the greater Woodstock area? Are we more than just Woodstock?

- “We want to provide our visitors with the best experience in the greater Woodstock area.....bar none”
- Warner Communications to preferentially feature Woodstock but sometimes will list businesses in neighboring communities

The group decided, as a whole, that we must leverage the extended area/community, in order to provide the depth that our visitors and residents require.

Meeting adjourned by Tom Weschler at 9:08 pm.