

Woodstock Economic Development Commission

Draft Minutes

August 2, 2018

Commissioners present: Barry Millstone, Tom Weschler, Courtney Lowe, Michael Malik, Julia Cooke, Joe DiNatale, Mica Seely (by phone)

Commissioners absent: Jason Merrill, Charlie Kimbell

Others Present: Sally Miller, Beth Finlayson, Ray Bourgeois, Butch Sutherland, Jill Davies, Virginia Dean, Mary Riley

I. Call to Order

Mr. Weschler called the meeting to order at 7:02.

II. Citizen Comments

None.

III. Approval of Minutes

On a motion of Mr. Milstone, seconded by Mr. Lowe the minutes of July 11 were approved as submitted. All approved.

IV. Financial Report

a. Unexpended funds

There was discussion about the best way to ensure that grants are completed in a timely manner.

Commissioners felt that there should be a policy to get it done rather than mandate a year. Each proposal should have a timeline on the application.

There is currently a requirement to report out, but the Commission suggested having an exit interview, too.

The list of projects with unexpended funds was reviewed. The EDC Coordinator will contact grantees that have been inactive for over a year and ask for closure.

Mr. DiNatale made a motion to award an additional \$10.35 to the Public Relations account to cover the overage. Mr. Milstone seconded the motion.

Unanimous approval.

Mr. DiNatale asked to clarify the Pentangle grant. The \$25,000 fee was for a fundraising consultant, but the consultant recommended that they not proceed. A report was received.

V. Chairman Report

Mr. Weschler reported that it is his last official meeting which is bittersweet, but the handoff is already happening. He reflected on his time on the board and said he felt good about what has been accomplished; there is a lot to do but felt the EDC is going in the right direction.

He also put in a plug and asked the EDC to keep in mind the importance of Town Plan and stay actively involved in the process.

VI. Coordinator Report

Ms. Miller reviewed the coordinator's report. It was suggested that the report get attached to the agenda.

VII. General EDC updates

a. Promotion / Website

Mr. Lowe reported that the website is doing fine. SEO is strengthening, and the content is getting updated regularly. The Digital Media Coordinator, Katie Berdan, is putting regular content on social media, too. They are currently trying to get more diversity in the content. The functionality is good, and the stats look good.

Mr. Lowe also mentioned that it has been difficult to find someone to sell ads. They are doing okay on feature ads but are trying to get more listings.

Mr. Milstone asked about making calendar more robust. The website committee is looking at options.

b. Economic Resources

Mr. Milstone reported.

Rainbow Playschool – The committee is still waiting for them to let the EDC know what they need. They have been providing business advocacy by finding other grants and opportunities. They have option on building and are moving forward.

Empty Storefronts - The Committee has been discussing carrot and stick options; Trustees are investigating stick, and the EDC is looking at carrot options including offering free rent for businesses that move into vacant storefronts.

Ms. Cooke listed the criteria which might include:

- Reimbursed after 6 months

- Located in meter zone

- Storefront spaces — second floor too, but must be visible from the street

- Filling a storefront that has been empty for more than 6 months

- Up to 3 grantees a year

- Up to \$20,000 a year total of EDC funds

- 2 month's rent — based on an average per square foot, to be revisited once the “stick” is in place

Mr. DiNatale thinks that the carrot concept seems to be a short term solution and needs to have the stick.

Ms. Cooke agreed that it will provide a short term fix and needs to be in concert with stick, but it has the added benefit of putting EDC money into use and will show what the Town is doing.

The sense of the board was that it should be pursued.

Next grant cycle - Two grant workshops are scheduled – August 21 and September 25, at 6:00p.m. at the Optimist Center. The first session is abstract and the second is more proposal oriented. Ms. Cooke asked for EDC participation.

Housing – It was reported that the survey should be out soon.

Leveraging \$10,000 State offer – Mr. Milstone presented an option to offer substantial welcome packages such as multiple \$250 gifts to local businesses. Ms. Cooke stated that it would not be tied to the State grant or working remotely but tied to bringing new families.

Mr. DiNatale suggested that the group talk with relators and consider having someone from the EDC act as welcome person.

Mr. Malik thought that it should be promoted as something special as opposed to getting it automatically.

Mr. Weschler thought that it had been a good real estate year but too many gray hairs and wondered how to target other people. Ms. Cooke thought it could cover rentals, too.

Ms. Davies questioned whether \$1,000 would make a difference. She would rather see fewer and more substantial grants.

The sense of the board was interest in pursuing the possibilities.

c. Civic Revitalization

Ms. Seely reported that the sub-committee has a report of existing conditions from Dubois and King. There is a task force meeting scheduled on August 8 to flush out ideas from the meeting. Future timeline will be discussed at the meeting, but the goal is to have a final report with concrete ideas to Select Board in time for budget meetings in November.

d. Recreation Assets

Mr. Weschler reported that there has not been a recent meeting, but conversations with property owners have started. He will stay on the River Loop committee.

VIII. Other Business

a. Review Board Terms

Ms. Davies commented that the Select Board has re-appointed commissioners in the past without an additional review process. They currently have applicants for the EDC, so they want to check to see if everyone is still interested.

Mr. Weschler stated that EDC has no policies specifically for the commission, but suggested that the Select Board might write a policy for all boards.

IX. New Business

None.

IX. Executive Session

Mr. Lowe made a move to move to executive session to discuss contract negotiations. Mr. DiNatale seconded the motion. Ms. Miller will be included in the discussion.

All voted Aye.

Executive session concluded at 8:25.

X. Adjournment

On a motion from Mr. Milstone the meeting was adjourned at 8:28.

Respectfully submitted,
Sally Miller
EDC Coordinator
August 7, 2018