

Woodstock Economic Development Commission

Draft Minutes

November 1, 2018

Commissioners present: Charlie Kimbell, Julia Cooke, Jon Spector, Barry Milstone, Mica Seely, Michel Malik

Commissioners absent: Courtney Lowe, Jason Merrill, Joe DiNatale

Others Present: Sally Miller, Rachel Gardner, Ray Bourgeois, Alita Wilson, Geraldine Fowler, Madeline Carlock

I. Call to Order

Mr. Kimbell called the meeting to order at 7:00.

II. Citizen Comments

None

III. Approval of Minutes

On a motion of Mr. Spector, seconded by Mr. Cooke, the minutes of October 4 and 11 to approve. All approved.

IV. Grant Discussions

EC Fiber, Outreach – Ms. Miller presented her discussion with David Brown. The purpose of the campaign is to sign up people as they are building the route. If people sign up while the main lines are being constructed they can get connected on the fly and have fiber within a few months. For that first route listed in his ad, those people could have fiber sometime this winter. If they don't get connected while the trucks are there, they will need to wait until they come back which could be several years.

The Resources committee recommended funding two months of advertising (\$1,000) with a report back on progress to receive additional funding.

Some discussion about whether it would be an automatic renewal? The intent is that it needs to be requested. We will ask EC Fiber to show a demonstrable percentage of people signing up. They are not tied to any particular time frame, so it could start at any time.

A motion was made to allocate \$1,000 to EC Fiber by Mr. Spector. Ms. Seely seconded.

Further comment by Mr. Spector – He doesn't see this as a great use of money, but fiber is important, so this is a small request to say that the EDC supports fiber.

All in favor.

Sustainable Woodstock, Green Bags/ Outreach – Ms. Cooke presented that the committee felt that very supportive in general but there was not enough information about how the bags would be distributed and the staffing. The committee requested that they submit a more detailed application explaining how the finances would work and which retailers they had on board (need Mac's). Also let them know that the EDC does not fund provide general organizational support.

They were asked to re-submit. No action was taken.

Jane Lackley, WUHS Apparel – Mr. Milstone presented the revised application. They will be looking for a loan as opposed to a grant. They are being advised by Travis Hellstrom on a business plan. This grant will be used to purchase "Woodstock" gear, not WASP. They have put together a website and are asking local shops to distribute, too.

The first loan will be \$1,776. They intend to pay it back within 6 months and return with metrics to get additional funds, if needed.

Mr. Millstone has been talking with Mascoma about loans and re-payment. It will be a 0% loan. The gear will be the collateral. The goal is for students to learn how to run the business.

Details will still need to be worked out, but the committee recommends fully funding it as a loan. (If it doesn't work, it could be a grant.) The intent is to work with Mascoma Bank, and the EDC might just guarantee the loan.

Ms. Wilson asked what is the economic development component? She is afraid that we are setting a precedent for other student groups.

The committee sees it as a way to build entrepreneurship among high school students. The gear may also may encourage more people to come to Woodstock.

A motion to loan \$1,776 to Woodstock Wasp was made by Mr. Milstone, seconded by Mr. Malik.

All approved.

Ms. Wilson said that EDC should be careful about setting a precedent; she asked that the EDC track and measure their success.

Woodstock Christian Child Care, Expand Infant Care.

Mr. Milstone presented information gathered by the Resources committee. Childcare is a critical need in the community, but the EDC needs to consider the application guidelines which state that projects cannot promote a single doctrine. The Vermont League of Cities and Towns sent a response which gave some examples of challenges in the state on similar issues and said it wasn't a clear decision. They said that it is up to EDC to determine if it promotes their religion.

Ms. Cooke presented the information that was gathered about the legality of a municipality supporting a religious organization. The legal experts agreed that it was a grey area and restrictions could be put on the grant. She referenced two similar 2017 lawsuits. One clearly did not only benefit the church, and another received funds to renovate a playground. These are parallel because they were just for purchase of infrastructure, nothing was used for direct religious purposes.

The legal line is blurry. The facility is open to the public but not only Christian families send their children to this daycare. The \$5,000 gets us care for four infants. WCCC has a Vermont 4 STARS just like Rainbow Playschool.

The Resources committee was not unanimous in recommending the grant

During discussion, Mr. Spector wondered if the only thing that matters if money is going to something to that is inherently religious?

Ms. Seely said the EDC should go on the record to support early child care.

Ms. Fowler asked if they had other sources. WCCC had indicated that they had not found other sources.

The commission attempted to make a motion that it approve the grant with some following restrictions such as asking the church if they can commit that none of the funds they receive will be used to purchase religious materials and that there won't be any any religious content for the infants, that funds will only be used for labor and material purchases only for support of infant care and not promote religion, and that none of the funds are to be used for worship, instruction or proselytization.

The commission determined that they wanted to get the wording of the motion correct, so it will be worked on by the Resources committee and presented at the next meeting.

Ms. Seely asked to move the issue to the next meeting, but the sense of the board to was to support it.

The commission agreed to continue discussion.

Community Visioning

Ms. Miller explained that she has been involved in the project for over a year, before she started as the EDC coordinator and sees the benefits to the EDC of the process. The goal is to engage the community and get people involved by opening it up to more people in the community. The EDC could do outreach as part of the visioning. People are invited and asked to participate. Ms. Wilson read a letter supporting the proposal.

The commission asked who will continue the project and make sure it gets done. The visioning committee has been moving it forward and will continue to work with the facilitator to get it done.

Mr. Kimbell spoke on Burke process which brought two very different towns together, and the fact that it sometime leads to hard costs.

There was some concern that it did not talk about current EDC projects. It was explained that the goal of the visioning is to give an opportunity for the community gather and discuss the direction and concerns in the community and energize new (hopefully) people to get involved and working on important issues.

Mr. Spector said that he would be supportive if it is done in a way to recognize and continue existing initiatives. We need to keep them going and be careful to have them fit together.

The value of visioning is that things happen. If we do not engage community now, will we be able to get people on board? There was support if there is action.

Mr. Kimbell sees the opportunity to engage a broader section of our community and re-engage them to get projects done.

Ms. Fowler mentioned that there are 30 names of people who support the project who are committed to making sure their constituents are engaged. Ms. Cooke wants to make sure that there are new names.

The proposal came without a recommendation from the Resources committee.

The commission would like the visioning committee to solicit proposals and make a selection to present to the them.

Ms. Cooke wanted a motion that the visioning process has merit. The sentiment is that the board supports a visioning process that focuses on engaging the community and allows the existing initiatives to continue operating effectively.

A motion made by Mr. Milstone, seconded by Mr. Spector to support the above statement.

All approved.

V. Financial Report

Mr. Spector helped format the new financial reports. Any comments are welcome.

One obvious point is that the revenue is increasing annually.

VI. Coordinator Report

No questions.

VII. General EDC updates

a. Promotion / Website

Mr. Lowe was not present but sent a report that content loading continues incrementally. The community website committee is adding Ms. Cooke to represent the EDC and another Chamber member will be added. They are working on an arrangement for the Chamber to sell ads. They will to review website budget which includes maintenance and enhancement fees. He recommends that we stick with Origin for six more months as we still need enhancements and they know the site well and have heard our needs.

Website committee has been talking about it and moving in a good direction.

Hiring Katie to do some storefront promo.

b. Economic Resources

Mr. Milstone presented. The committee will be updating the grant application and posting the deadlines for 2019. The committee is also discussing ways to work with new businesses.

c. Civic Revitalization

Mr. Bourgeois presented that a group went to D+K to discuss the process. They have a detailed sidewalk estimate (which was a priority from the August stakeholder meeting) - \$417K for concrete sidewalks throughout the study area. D+K will provide additional information for other elements including trees, parks, signage, etc.

D+K is at 75% of original budget, but they should be done by the end of December.

A Village business and owners meeting has been scheduled for November 19 to review the proposals and get their feedback.

The committee will report to Select board on November 20th and should have additional ballpark numbers by then.

They intend to do another public outreach meeting for the whole project at the December Select Board meeting.

d. Recreation Assets

Nothing new to report. (See coordinator's report.)

VIII. Other Business

Mr. Kimbell said that Mr. Merrill has submitted his resignation. Mr. Milstone will follow up with the Select Board on EDC involvement in appointment of a new commission member.

IX. New Business

None

X. Adjournment

On a motion from Ms. Cooke, seconded by Mr. Spector, the meeting was adjourned at 9:05.

Respectfully submitted,
Sally Miller
EDC Coordinator
November 7, 2018