

Woodstock Economic Development Commission

Draft Minutes

March 7, 2019

Commissioners present: Julia Cooke, Charlie Kimbell, Joe DiNatale, Jon Spector, Mica Seely, Michael Malik (phone)

Commissioners absent: Courtney Lowe, Barry Milstone, one vacancy

Others Present: Sally Miller, Macy Lawrence, Ray Bourgeois, Christian Avard, Beth Finlayson, Laura Spittle, Charlotte Hollingworth, Rich Kozlowki

I. Call to Order

Ms. Cooke called the meeting to order at 7:02.

II. Citizen Comments

None.

III. Approval of Minutes

On a motion of Ms. Kimbell, seconded by Mr. Spector, the minutes of February 7 and February 18 were approved with the following correction to the February 18 minutes.

“Of the three EDC members in attendance, a vote was taken, with commissioners Kimbell and Cooke in favor, and Milstone abstained. The aggregate for all commissioners consulted during the meeting was 4 in favor, 0 opposed and 1 abstention. A discussion ensued about the minimum number of votes required to indicate approval, as Vermont statutes have a different requirement than do Roberts Rules of Order. Kimbell offered to follow up with legislative counsel for a determination on that matter. Regardless, because of the disjointed flow of the meeting and the lack of a quorum present at any one time the vote will be presented to the Select Board as a sense of the board.”

Amended minutes were unanimously approved by voice vote.

IV. Grant Discussions

Lifescape – Mr. Spector presented for the Economic Resources Subcommittee (ERS). Linwood Thomson was sent a set of questions. His responses will be forwarded to the commission. The only debatable question was a request to provide the service for free. Mr. Thompson wanted to charge a minimal fee to see how it works. The startup will be rolling out a prototype in May and Mr. Thompson welcomed the idea of forming an advisory committee to review the product and determine the relationship with the town. The ERS recommends that a formal approval take place after more information is gathered. EDC should take the lead to create it. Mr. Spector and Mr. Malik offered to be part of the advisory committee.

Parkrun – Ms. Cooke presented for the ERS. The subcommittee thought that this project would be beneficial for our community. They encouraged the group to look for alternative sites in case the River Loop Trail is not ready this spring. The subcommittee recommends that the EDC approve the grant with the condition that the group has a viable trail in place before requesting funds. (The trail doesn't need to be the River Loop Trail, but that the ultimate goal be the River Loop Trail. In discussion two other conditions were added. 2.) That there is a viable structure with identifiable volunteers for the first six months, and 3.) That they be responsible for clean up.

Mr. Bourgeois asked why they are getting it all up front. Ms. Spittle asked if there was a demand. The funds are for initial infrastructure set up; there will be minimal costs to run the program. The program is well-established internationally and the idea is to build on that locally.

Mr. Spector motioned to approved with the three conditions, Mr. Kimbell seconded. Voted was taken by voice. All approved.

SW Green Bags – The Subcommittee is in support of the program, but had doubts about some of the vendor’s involvements. The ERS felt that Mac’s Market needs to be part of the program and had asked that Sustainable Woodstock work with them. Sustainable Woodstock has not sent any follow up about Mac’s involvement yet. The Subcommittee recommends taking no action on the grant application until this information is available. There was some discussion about the value of the product.

V. Financial Report

Mr. Spector reported that the growth rate of the options tax fund slowed in the first quarter. It is difficult to get up to date numbers, but he anticipates that EDC will end up with \$400K in the bank unencumbered at the end of 2019. He hopes that the visioning process will identify the ideas that will facilitate capital programs.

VI. Coordinator Report

Ms. Miller reported on the "Gateway Communities: Balancing Nature and Commerce in Rural Communities" workshop from February 25-28 in West Virginia which she attended as part of a seven-member team from Woodstock. As part of the workshop teams are asked to develop a community project to work on in their towns; the Woodstock team decided that rather than add a new project, they would support the Community Visioning process. The National Park sponsored and funded the team.

VII. General EDC updates

a. Economic Resources

Storefront Incentive Changes – The ERS proposed some changes to the program to allow for some flexibility for tenants who have different types of leases, such a payment when an operation has been in business for 6 months and then additional payment after second six months. The proposed change was triggered by one situation, but the ERS thought that it would achieve the same benefits and still show success without the 12-month lease.

Mr. Kimbell thought that the original document was good. A 12-month lease is a commitment by both. Mr. DiNatale thought that landlords who set an impossible price they aren’t motivated and felt that the program enables landlords. When program is over, the rent will still be too high.

Ms. Cooke would like to see something to be done on a legal level. It’s a real problem and threatens the vibrancy of the town. We can’t change the law easily, but this is something that can be done. Mr. Kimbell had talked with Chair of Trustees about a penalty for leaving spaces vacant, but they found that the legal costs to defend an ordinance are very high.

Ms. Spittle said that she has been in space since Sept 1. They extended her 3+ month lease until end of 2019, but the lease has an escape clause in case they do work. Planned to be a pop-up store for 3 months and be done, but work needs to be done if she stays – planning space and inventory. She has only spoken with property manager who has been good about working with her and feels supported. Overall plan is to stay through 2019 and would like to make a commitment to stay in the village, but needs to make it through the winter. By next winter she will have had time to build the business, hopefully attracting some local business. She now has a 12-month lease. Her new 12-month lease makes her eligible for the program as written, so discussion was tabled.

Move to Woodstock - Ms. Cooke outlined the incentive program, but explained that the ERS is having second thoughts about the public perception – that it might be too bureaucratic and not friendly enough. They are also exploring possibility of Stay to Stay. Mr. Spector expressed other concerns such as how effective will it be and how to address people already here.

Mr. DiNatale wanted to know how moving a family and incurring expenses is different from enticing a business to move to town. Funds should be used to mitigate the overhead of moving.

Mr. Kimbell was concerned that it doesn’t address some of the important issues like housing. We should be looking at what are compelling reasons to move here, and how to convert visitors to residents. He likes a version of Stay to Stay. (The Vermont \$10k went viral, had a billion(?) imprints)

Ms. Cooke sees the value of a program is that it sparks an interest. Other opportunities for engagement were discussed. Mr. DiNatale wondered if there should be a paid welcoming person who introduces people to the town.

Ms. Spittle thinks that the market is the owner of second homes.

Mr. Spector wants to explore some other programs. Ms. Cooke is concerned that some programs don't attract people who aren't joiners. \$10K program allows people to approach on their own term and is a shield. Mr. Malik doesn't think that \$2,500 is enough to sway people.

Ms. Finlayson said that the Chamber is a welcome wagon and does introduce people to the town. Mr. Kozlowski suggested that the CBHM pasta supper might be a good opportunity to engage with people. The Welcome Center could be a place to engage with people.

Further discussion about how to engage people.

Ms. Miller and Ms. Finlayson will meet with Wendy Knight about Stay to Stay.

Telling the EDC Story – The ERS is working on an EDC webpage. The Coordinator will update it as opposed to having the town do it. It will be a place to store and view documents and will be accessed through town website and look just like it. Mr. Bourgeois asked why not do the entire town site? Mr. Spector said that right now it's a short term solution but might be a demonstration project for the town.

b. Civic Revitalization

Mr. DiNatale reported that a presentation to the Select Board has been scheduled for Thursday, March 21 at 6:00. It will be a joint public hearing with Trustees. Ms. Finlayson will notify business owners, and the public will be invited. It will be a presentation about the conceptual plan.

c. Recreation Assets

Ms. Miller reported that the first meeting with consultants Peter Jensen and Bob White is coming up on Wednesday, March 13 at 8:00am in the Town Hall meeting room. The group is hoping to have the trail active for Memorial Day weekend even if it is only some flagging.

d. Website/Promotion

Mr. Kimbell said that an agreement with Chamber has been signed by the Town and the Chamber. They were delivered to the commission at the meeting. Still to be done:

1. Work with the Chamber to move site to a cheaper site hosting location.
2. Find a firm to do maintenance. The Digital Media Coordinator did some research and found that it is not easy to find someone who works with Drupal and is the "right fit." A temporary agreement for one month was signed with Origin.
3. Setting up the new editorial board. Members to include 2 from the EDC, 2 from the Chamber, 2 Public, and the Directors of the EDC and Chamber. Mr. Kimbell nominated Mr. Lowe for the board.

The commission reviewed the new single page monthly report prepared by Katie Berdan. The site is still performing very well and is up 88% over the previous period.

Ms. Cooke highlighted that top referrals – Facebook, NE.com, Timeout.com and the Chamber Instagram acct. The top Go to pages are the home page, events calendar, things to do, lodging, dining and shopping. Some discussion about the function of the calendar.

VIII. Other Business

Ms. Finlayson spoke about great Food Truck Race. They took footage here but did not stop and went to Killington and Rutland instead.

Mr. Kimbell heard that there might be an application for light/flowers and suggested that it may be worth having conversation about funding those items again. The Chamber does not see the flower baskets in their mission, so they asked the village merchants to pick it up; they all thought that it should be an EDC item.

Ms. Miller reported that the first visioning meeting will be Monday March 11 at 9:00am in the Town Hall meeting room. The purpose of the meeting is to start understanding our community and set the agenda for

the process. The public is welcome to attend. A poster and postcards for comments were available at Town Meeting. Several dozen residents submitted postcards.

IX. New Business

Accountability – Mr. DiNatale asked about developing process for what happened with the money. Ms. Miller is working on a final report form for grant recipients.

X. Adjournment

On a motion from Ms. Seely, seconded by Mr. Spector, the meeting was adjourned at 8:50.

Respectfully submitted,
Sally Miller
EDC Coordinator
March 12, 2019