

Town of Mount Desert
Economic Development Committee Meeting
April 14, 2021
Minutes

Attending: Megan Bailey, Jamie Blaine, Martha Dudman, Don Graves, Matt Hart, Nancy Ho, Dan McKay, Kathy Miller, Seth Singleton, Tony Smith, Micki Sumpter, Rick Wheeler, Averel Wilson.

Absent: Heather Jones, Durlin Lunt, Stephanie Reece, Wendy Wood

Others in Attendance: Sydney Rockefeller, Kerri Sands*

All attendees attended via Zoom.

*(April 21st: Kerri Sands was appointed by the Board of Selectmen at its April 19th meeting. She graduated from the College of the Atlantic in 2002 and moved to the town of Mount Desert in November 2018. She is the Sustainable Business Program Manager at COA, and previously directed Maine Farms for the Future program at CEI and served as vice president of Good Group Decisions, a Maine-based meeting facilitation and strategic planning firm. She fondly recalls living and working out of a tiny apartment in Northeast Harbor in the mid-2000s.)

Dan McKay convened the meeting at 4:01 p.m.

Minutes: The minutes of the January 13, 2021 meeting were approved unanimously, as amended to show that the correct name of *Quiet Times* is [*The Quietside Journal*](#). Moved by Kathy, seconded by Jamie.

Broadband Committee update: Kathy reported that the committee now meets monthly, and they have invited the Island Institute to attend. There have been discussions of connecting the police department, town hall, and the high school through fiber, and the committee has begun work on GIS mapping of the town. With the probability of significant government infrastructure money for broadband, Kathy emphasized the need for community engagement, and in particular, a plan ready to go when the funding becomes available. A subcommittee will work with the Island Institute on that. She also noted that the town has joined the Maine Broadband Coalition and encouraged everyone to test their own internet speeds. The committee has three long-term goals: (1) “future proofing” (building in the ability to adapt to changing technology; (2) accessibility –throughout the town; and (3) affordability. A fourth important consideration is reliability. Nancy noted that Spectrum has recently “stepped up its game,” particularly in the winter when usage is lower; and Rick asked about the sense of urgency to be ready to apply for federal funding. Urgency is high, replied Kathy, noting that the town must fall into either underserved or unserved categories to qualify. Dan said the role of this committee is to urge the Broadband Committee to get the plan to the selectmen as soon as possible. Kathy said this committee could really help by laying out the roles broadband can play in economic development, including encouraging entrepreneurs and extended stays by summer residents.

Parking Update: There is no Parking Committee. Sydney reported that it is actually the Traffic Committee, which Tony noted was in reality the “Somesville” Traffic Committee and had not met in “more than 10 years.” There was discussion about the College of the Atlantic’s need to secure seven additional parking spaces, as well as other potential and actual parking issues – particularly during July and August. The committee determined that the best path forward, at least for now, is for Tony Smith and Chief Willis to manage the matter.

Pandemic Update: The merchants have endured, although the future remains uncertain. Micki said most are “holding their own,” and some are currently seeking additional PPP funds. Matt said he thought it wouldn’t be until 2022 that Main Street was back to normal; Nancy spoke of the desperate need for restaurants in the off-season; and Dan applauded the completion of the Seacoast Mission building.

Kimball Road Medical Building: Nancy said the doctors’ business has struggled during Covid but is starting to pick up, and everyone is hopeful. Discussions with MDI hospital, which is interested in coming back in the summer of 2022, are going well. Rick raised the idea of putting an entire specialty unit in the building, instead of just a part time doctor/nurse practitioner, and the idea will be raised with the hospital.

Main Street Project: Tony reported that Versant continues to refuse to work until the last two outstanding easements are in hand. He said they are talking about a “work around” but does not believe there will be any work done this spring or summer, which means that the end date will now be the spring of 2022, delays that continue to add to the costs. The final 800-foot stretch of Route 198, however, should be finished this spring. Matt praised Tony for the frustrating and expensive hoops he has been jumping through for over a year, saying that he “deserves a medal.”

Role of the Committee in Town Life: Dan opened the general discussion by observing that our role was as much about “economic sustainability” as “economic development,” adding that, while we often focused on the viability of businesses in Northeast Harbor, we are also concerned with the other villages that have fewer and smaller businesses. Sydney noted that Seal Harbor has three or four new businesses, which is a good sign for the village. Nancy said we need a list of all businesses, large and small, in the entire town, which Micki said the chamber is currently working on. The SRA grant really helped identify businesses. She said, “We need to know who is there and what they are doing.” Rick suggested the committee be a “sounding board” for the people and businesses of the town, a place where we can learn the issues they are facing and help find solutions. Dan asked what kinds of businesses and other activities constitute – and do not constitute – a community. After discussing the need (1) to ensure what we have now remains sustainable and (2) to broaden the year-round population base, two potential, and interrelated, committee roles emerged: “think tank” and “sounding board.” Nancy, Kathy, Megan, Micki, Kerri, and Jamie agreed to form a think tank subcommittee, and Kathy will supply information on ideas for the town that 365 has developed to date.

Other Business: Dan asked that we discuss the stalled promenade park at our next meeting. While it has been put on hold until the completion of Main Street, part 2, we have raised and invested private money in the planning. Martha noted the board’s current lack of appetite for the project and said it will fall on this committee to convince the selectmen of its merits. Matt added that he thought the private funding aspect “could be turned into a positive.”

The meeting adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

James G. Blaine
Secretary