

Town of Mount Desert
Economic Development Committee Meeting
October 11, 2023
Minutes

Attending:

In person: Megan Bailey, Jamie Blaine, Martha Dudman, Nancy Ho, Dan McKay (chair), Kathy Miller, Stephanie Reece, Averel Wilson

By zoom: Don Graves, Matt Hart, Jen Judd-McGee, Durlin Lunt, Kerri Sands, Wendy Todd, Rick Wheeler

Absent: Tony Smith

Guests: Several attended on Zoom and one in person.

Dan convened the meeting at 4 p.m.

1. Minutes. The committee unanimously approved the minutes of the July 12th meeting.
2. Updates
 - a. Broadband. Kathy reported that the one remaining part of the town to be upgraded to provide Spectrum high speed service is an area in and around the Park, which includes Jordan Pond House. It will be expensive, but the Park will pay the major share, although the exact split has not yet been determined. When everyone in town is connected to the Spectrum system, the committee will pursue its ultimate goal of providing fiber optic to the entire island. Of the other towns, Southwest Harbor has to date expressed no interest.
 - b. Heel Way Project. There are still a number of steps to go through. The Planning Board meets at 6 this evening. Dan noted that the committee had sent a letter of support in July, and the letter referenced in the latest *Quietside Journal* was from him personally and not in his capacity as chair of our committee. (note: another meeting has been scheduled for Oct. 18 at 6 p.m.)
 - c. Main Street Project. Durlin said there were just a couple of things left to take care of, the major one being the overhead wires waiting to be buried. Everything is ready to go except for Spectrum and Consolidated, who no longer have a monetary incentive to hustle. So, they aren't. The lines come down, said Durlin, "when Consolidated and Spectrum get around to it." Fire engines can get through he said, although the expanding size of vehicles parking diagonally may present an issue for future review.
 - d. Housing Summit. Dan said the group's report has been published and a \$75,000 grant from the state's Department of Economic and Community Development has been received. The money will go to three initiatives:
 - (i) Funding structures and mechanisms.
 - (ii) Building island-wide cooperation: inventory of buildable land, needs assessment, etc., (all part of an alarming statewide shortage of housing).
 - (iii) Education/Communication, with the goal of an Island Housing website.Dan noted that this process began right here, with us.

3. Skating Rink Project

- a. Planning and Fundraising. The group is about to begin its major fundraising effort. The original goal of \$500,000 may have to be increased, as the cost of installing the electricity appears to be a bit greater (c. \$120,000) than anticipated. We are checking on ways to deal with that. To date we have raised \$110,000 in cash and pledges.
- b. Dan reported on CDC money on hand: a total of about \$43,000 remains in the general operating account of the Town of Mount Desert Community Development Corporation, including \$18,225 which, with the consent of donors, will be redirected to the skating rink project fund. The Town intends to recommend that its original contribution of \$30,000 to the Promenade Park Project also be redirected to the skating rink project, but that redirection will require approval at the 2024 Town Meeting. Jamie suggested that funds redirected from the Promenade Park Project go to the capital campaign, as they were originally raised for a capital project. The Stroud Fund of St. Mary's church has pledged \$10,000 to the campaign.
- c. Future role of CDC in fundraising projects. Currently the administrator and bookkeeper is Dan. While the price is right, this won't be sustainable if we support more projects. Already a request to accept gifts of securities has revealed our limits. Can we get help from the town? Durlin said the money was not in the budget and not an appropriate use of town staff. The town has appropriated \$10,000 in support of economic development. Most of this goes to Broadband efforts. Kathy suggested that MD365 could possibly contract with the Town to provide administrative services. She will bring it to her board next week. She acknowledged that the current controversies surrounding 365 may complicate a role for the organization and said, "If there is anything we can do to help, we will do so."

4. Code of Ethics. Dan handed out copies to each of us of the town's new code of ethics and succinctly summarized the long document: "Be sensitive to conflicts of interest and be respectful of others." All members must sign and return it to the town office.

5. Short Term Rentals. Martha said that, because the LUZO Committee is swamped, the Select Board has put together an ad hoc committee (Geoff Wood, Martha, Durlin, and Noel Musson). The proposal that was withdrawn as a warrant article last spring provided only for registration of short term rental units and did not address placing a cap. But there are so many questions, Martha said. Right now, the matter is completely unregulated, and Martha said she would like to come to an agreement on some kind of cap. "I think the issue is a plague. People are running hotels in residential areas." In her view the ultimate issue is whether housing in this town will be a commodity or the foundation of a community. There will be a meeting on Thursday, Nov. 2, at 6 p.m. to discuss updating (not rewriting) the comprehensive plan. Everyone is invited to share their thoughts about the future of our town.

6. Ideas for 2023-4 Initiatives.

- a. Brief discussion of a Great Cranberry Island style golf cart/train for Northeast Harbor. One sticking point is insurance. Wendy reported that only one insurance company in Maine will insure. There is interest in pursuing the idea in some form. Wendy volunteered to seek out additional information.

- b. Kathy mentioned two ideas we might want to look into possible areas of future economic development:
 - (i) [The Center on Rural Innovation](#) in St. Johnsbury, VT.
 - (ii) [Ilana Preuss](#) for encouraging both small manufacturing and tech-based businesses.

The meeting adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jamie Blaine, Secretary