

Town of Mount Desert
Economic Development Committee Meeting
January 13, 2021
Minutes

Attending: Megan Bailey, Jamie Blaine, Martha Dudman, Matt Hart, Nancy Ho, Durlin Lunt, Dan McKay, Kathy Miller, Stephanie Reece, Tony Smith, Micki Sumpter, Rick Wheeler, Averel Wilson, Wendy Wood

Absent: Don Graves, Heather Jones, Seth Singleton

Others in Attendance: Kerri Sands, Sydney Rockefeller

All attendees attended via Zoom.

Dan McKay convened the meeting at 4 p.m.

Membership Changes

- Minot Weld has resigned from the committee.
- The Board of Selectmen appointed Megan Bailey at its last meeting. Megan lives in Northeast Harbor with her husband and works for the Margaret Chase Smith Center at University of Maine Orono. She is a PhD candidate in community development, focused on local community development.
- Minot's resignation also necessitated a new secretary. The undersigned was elected by acclamation.

Minutes: The minutes of the July 8, 2020 meeting (which were not approved on October 14 due to the absence of a quorum) and the minutes October 14, 2020 meeting were both approved, as amended to show that (1) Wendy Wood was present at the October meeting and (2) the correct box to check for the ubiquitous Mr. Weld is absent. Moved by Kathy. Seconded by Nancy.

Main Street Project

Because Tony Smith had to leave for another meeting, Dan asked him to give his update on the Main Street project early.

- Completion of the project is now scheduled for the fall of 2021. Work will again take place in the spring, stop for the summer months, and resume in the fall. The two major items remaining are the paving overlay of Main Street and landscaping. There are three easements outstanding, and Versant will not begin its work on the power lines until those are cleared up, hopefully in the spring. He noted that the delay has added to the time and cost of the project.
- Asked about the next phase for Main Street, he said that was at least two to three years out.
- Kathy asked about the community's response to the new grey fiberglass poles on Main Street, which were selected by the Design Committee. "Some like them. Some don't. Some are getting used to them."

- Rick asked whether there was sufficient underground infrastructure for the future of broadband. There is a moratorium on digging for five years, but there are possible conduits that could be used.

Broadband Committee Report

- Scott McFarland has been elected the new chair of the committee, and Pete Cuffari, a software developer in town, has also joined the committee, which now meets monthly. The committee agreed to share the minutes of our broadband discussions with the Broadband Committee.
- Matt reported that in February the Broadband Committee will begin participating in “VETRO Cares for ME”, a program run by Portland-based [Vetro Fibermap](#), which should yield a good deal of data to help with specific planning. Mount Desert is one of the pilot towns taking part, and the Island Institute is involved as well.
- In response to funding questions, Durlin said \$12,000 would be allocated to this committee as a contingency in 2021. He subsequently said that, because the Broadband Committee is not considered a department for the allocation of town funds, its requests need to come through the EDC. Such funds could include the \$12,000 we had only minutes before learned we had. As they say, easy come, easy go.
- With the Broadband Committee reenergized and now meeting monthly, and with the importance of this project to the economic development of the town, this committee determined that its job going forward is to provide oversight and encouragement to the Broadband Committee. Because of the importance of community engagement, Kathy said, the Broadband Committee wants the EDC involved, and she will report to us regularly. We will keep the matter on the agenda, for as Dan noted, “this is a long-term project that is ultimately going to involve a lot of money.”

Parking Limitations

- Kathy raised the issue of parking, noting that the new 365 building on Firehouse Lane had to be downscaled due to parking concerns. She has also heard the issue discussed around the proposed COA building and by village residents who have trouble finding overnight parking.
- There was discussion about whether the parking issue was more perception than reality, but all agreed that, whichever it was, it needed to be addressed, particularly if we hoped to attract new businesses to Main Street. Do we need an ordinance change with regard to overnight parking? Should we involve the codes enforcement officer?
- Dan raised a separate issue: the use of the marina parking lot by tourists who leave their cars for the day, take the bus, return in the evening, and drive away.
- Sydney said that there is a Traffic Committee, she is a member it, and she will get the committee together to talk over these issues.

Economic Impact of the Corona Pandemic

- Stephanie said, “The SRA definitely helped!” The outside tables worked great and definitely dressed up Main Street. She is hoping for a better summer, but as yet, she doesn’t know what to expect.
- Micki also praised the SRA, including for the additional advertising their funds provided. She said the merchants generally are “holding their own.”

- The holiday season went pretty well in all the island towns. The chamber is working with the state to get funding for businesses to market with the chamber.
- Dan said he felt there were many more people here in the off season than in the past. Micki agreed but said she does not yet have much data.
- Nancy thanked Micki and the chamber for their wonderful work during these times.
- Rick asked about vaccines, saying that he knew summer people who would come back early if the vaccine was available here. He also noted that others will come up early to get away from Covid elsewhere. He asked Micki to get the word out and suggested using the SRA and [*The Quietside Journal*](#) as venues. Micki said they don't have good information yet on the vaccine, but when they do, she will publicize it.

Other Business

- Maine Craft Guild:
 - Dan noted that the Guild, which has had held its show in the high school, was looking for a new location for July.
 - There was discussion of the possibility of the marina (with a tent).
 - Martha said they need to apply to the Board of Selectmen for a permit.
- Strategizing:
 - Rick asked that, if our role is to come up with ideas, what kind of new ideas should we be collecting/thinking about, etc.?
 - Kathy suggested: How are we making our community attractive for new businesses? What barriers are they encountering here? Are we being as helpful as we can be in welcoming them?
 - In particular, she questioned some of the barriers raised by local ordinances.
 - Kerri asked about the existence of an economic strategy, both for the town as a whole and for this committee?
 - The most recent comprehensive study for the town was done in 2009, and its recommendations were boiled down to five points. There was consensus that we needed an updated long-term strategy, particularly as the chamber was now so much stronger than in the past.
 - We decided to keep brainstorming and asked Micki to feed the committee ideas from her vantage point.

The meeting adjourned at 5:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Jamie Blaine
Secretary`