

Town of Mount Desert
Economic Development Committee Meeting
April 12, 2023
Draft Minutes

Attending:

In person:, Megan Bailey, Jamie Blaine, Martha Dudman, Matt Hart, Nancy Ho, Jen Judd-McGee, Durlin Lunt, Dan McKay (chair), Kathy Miller, Wendy Todd

By zoom: Don Graves, Stephanie Reece, Kerri Sands, Tony Smith, Rick Wheeler, Averel Wilson

Guests: Erika Wibby Mitchell (Skating Rink Group)

Dan convened the meeting at 4 p.m.

1. Minutes. Kathy moved approval of the minutes of the October 12, 2022, meeting, Jen seconded, unanimously approved.
2. Updates
 - a. Broadband. Kathy reported that the town's consultant, Casco Bay Advisors, is also working with Tremont and Bar Harbor, and the three towns are discussing working together. She hopes that Southwest Harbor will also join, as the whole island would present a stronger entity for grant proposals. To date SWH has not responded. Kathy reiterated that the town currently has 96-97% cable coverage. She is also hopeful that Spectrum will "up their game" in the face of potential competition. The committee's next meeting is tomorrow, April 13.
 - b. Island Housing Summit. Several meetings of the stakeholders group last fall produced an island-wide, full-day summit on March 24. Dan reported that it was a good meeting, with all the major stakeholders present, including banks, Realtors, contractors, and government agencies, as well as State Representative Nicole Grohoski. Smaller working groups discussed (1) barriers to affordable housing and (2) solution ideas, including a property transfer tax and applying the conservation easement concept to preserve existing housing. Nancy asked if the group was collaborating with the University of Maine, and Megan affirmed that they were. A report synthesizing and highlighting the meeting will be distributed to this committee when it is available.
 - c. Short Term Rentals. In the wake of heavily negative reaction, an ordinance that was deemed not yet ready for prime time, and the belief that a negative vote at the annual meeting would doom such efforts for years, the select board has withdrawn the warrant. Tony suggested the town put together a small committee to improve the ordinance. Jamie made a motion that the EDC endorse that idea, which Megan seconded. Passed with Nancy abstaining because of a possible conflict of interest.
 - d. Skating Rink. Dan explained that funds raised for the rink were funneled through the CDC, which subsequently donated the rink itself and operating monies to the town. The rink group consisted of Erika Wibby Mitchell, Kathy Miller, and Jamie Blaine, with important technical input from Dean DiMauro and Peter Bronson. Peter became

the rink's paid manager, skating instructor, ice maker and scraper, and public face, both at the rink and on its website and Facebook page.

The first season vastly exceeded expectations: (1) in usage (over 1,000 skaters in 170 hours of ice time); (2) fundraising (original goal: \$15,000; final total: \$35,800, with substantial support from the town's merchants); (3) the community's enthusiasm; and (4) the breadth of our reach (home schoolers used the rink almost daily, and skaters came from as far away as Ellsworth, Blue Hill, and Sullivan).

The rink evolved from a winter recreation site to an economic driver; and with the proposed rehabilitation of the tennis (and pickleball) courts, the marina can become a major year-round asset for the town, which will lead to a more vibrant Main Street and more stores and restaurants staying open year round. Subject to approval at town meeting in May, the town has budgeted \$10,000 for annual operating expenses as well as voting to invest \$210,000 in the tennis court project, which is essential for the next phase of the rink. The rink group has kept in contact with the Harbor Committee, the town, the public works director, and the SRA to ensure the rink becomes an ever-more important asset to the entire community. We hope the EDC will enthusiastically support the project.

The first year made clear that we need a more permanent structure that will allow for both a longer season and extended skating hours (as the sun begins to melt the ice in the afternoon). Along with the benefits listed above, Erika said that she believed a successful rink would help her and other Main Street merchants to stay open all year, which would be a huge step in building a year-round commercial base.

Since the Promenade Park has yet to be created, and with changes to the landscape wrought by the new fire station and the possibility that the Main Street plan's Phase 2 may never be completed, the rink group asked the committee to think about asking the park donors to consider re-allocating the unspent funds (which Nancy said was c. \$51,000) to the rink. Committee members responded positively albeit cautiously, noting the importance of maintaining fiduciary responsibility to the donors and taking great care to communicate the value of the rink to the entire community, including testimonials from merchants. Other issues discussed were the size, noise, and placement of the compressors and the condition of the stairs to the village. Dan agreed to get the list of donors, with the help of Nancy and Averill, and to draft a letter. Jamie, Erika, and Kathy will draft a case statement.

The meeting adjourned at 5:16 p.m.

The next meeting will be Wednesday, July 12, at 4 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jamie Blaine, Secretary