

1 Town of Middlebury
2 Economic Health Committee
3 Minutes of Meeting
4 November 8, 2018
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6 Present: Fred Kenney, Mary Cullinane, Steve Boyce, Ben Calvi, Becky Dayton, Mike Capra, John Freidin,
7 Scott Gemignani and Karen Duguay. Absent: Ben Calvi and Farhad Khan.
8

9 Also Present: Ex Officio Member Jennifer Murray and Planning Commission members Barbara Saunders,
10 Steve Terry, Lucy Schumer, Chris Robbins and Todd Desabrais, and Assistant Zoning Administrator Dave
11 Wetmore.
12

13 Guests: State of Vermont Downtown Program Coordinator Gary Holloway and Waterbury Economic
14 Development Director Alyssa Johnson.
15

16 Call to Order: Fred Kenney called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. in the Town Offices Large
17 Conference Room.
18

19 Minutes: The minutes of the October 25, 2018 meetings were deferred until the next meeting.
20

21 Public Comments: None
22

23 Gary Holloway and Alyssa Johnson
24

25 Kenney introduced Holloway and Johnson, and said the Committee had been charged to provide the
26 Selectboard with suggested policy changes, tools and other ideas to help maintain the economic
27 vibrancy in Middlebury, and help the Town build up a tool box of economic and community
28 development tools to encourage business and economic growth in Middlebury.
29

30 Holloway began by saying he was the Downtown Program Manager for Community Planning and
31 Revitalization for the Agency of Commerce. He said he worked with 23 of the mostly larger
32 communities in the State, while his associate handles the smaller communities. He said they work
33 directly with downtown organizations, municipalities, and chambers of commerce on a variety of
34 different topics including revitalizing the core of communities and downtowns. He said he was here to
35 shed some light on what was happening statewide and on the models of how some communities
36 structured their economic development activities and what things they're doing well.
37

38 He said to begin he'd touch on the challenges of economic development:

- 39 • The rules keep changing and what was true 5 years ago might not be true now, such as on-line
40 shopping and how that changes the landscape of how we think about retail.
- 41 • Try to identify what the Town is trying to accomplish in terms of its economic development
42 goals.

- 43 • Learn as much as you can and identify what you already know and what you know about
44 Middlebury.
- 45 • Identify the players on your team, such as:
 - 46 ○ The Town
 - 47 ○ Planning Commission
 - 48 ○ Selectboard
 - 49 ○ Chamber of Commerce
 - 50 ○ Downtown Businesses
- 51 • Good Communication is probably the hardest to accomplish. Figuring out a good way to
52 communicate and collaborate towards shared goals is really important.
- 53 • Every community is unique, and what works in one community might not work in another;
54 however what others did might be adaptable to work for us.
- 55 • Know you aren't alone and this is happening throughout the State.
- 56 • Know your assets. Do a SWOT analysis to identify what makes Middlebury unique and what are
57 the strengths, weaknesses, threats.
- 58 • Look at what point you need to add staff, so understand the capacity of volunteers and existing
59 staff.
- 60 • Developing an Economic Development Plan is very important and a plan is only as good as you
61 use it. He said this could be done by compiling all the information and then look at where the
62 town is today.
 - 63 ○ Identify priorities
 - 64 ○ What space is available
 - 65 ○ What does the Planning Department have for future streetscape projects
 - 66 ○ It's important to put all the pieces together.
- 67 • Economic development isn't only about jobs and businesses, it's all interrelated existing
68 business, job creation and housing, quality of life and why people want to live here, schools,
69 services. All are related.
- 70 • Identify short and long-term goals. Work on something that is a shorter project that can be
71 completed and celebrate those successes as you move forward, and then plan your next steps.

72

73 Next Holloway described what some communities had done and how they structured themselves to get
74 it done.

75

76 Montpelier

- 77 • Allocated funds for a comprehensive Economic Development Plan.
- 78 • Hired a consultant who did 50-60 individual interviews as opposed to just taking public input,
79 since a lot of people don't want to speak at a public meeting. Focused on the younger
80 population.
- 81 • Created a non-profit organization that would use funding from the town for a full-time staff
82 position to do economic development. This eliminated the politics and process involved with
83 being a town position.

- 84 • Created a local option tax and the funds were directed towards the new economic development
85 position.

86

87 Springfield

- 88 • No staff person, work is being done by Selectboard, “Springfield on the Move” group, chamber
89 of commerce and regional development commission.
- 90 • Did a Downtown Master Plan with economic development components. Created a working
91 document that is their “bible” and is a good example of working together towards a common
92 goal.
- 93 • The Town has purchased vacant property to make sure it gets developed properly and the
94 downtown group and community development organization have worked with Housing
95 Vermont on a project.

96

97 Bellows Falls

- 98 • Has a Town Development Corporation with part-time staff (20 hours) that they’ve had for quite
99 awhile.
- 100 • Brought together individual property owners and businesses with available space, potential
101 investors and developers, State and regional officials and toured the spaces that were available
102 and what the available asserts were. Do your homework and know what’s available.

103

104 Wilmington

- 105 • Contracted with a person to do economic development work 2 days a week
- 106 • Wilmington Works, a group of volunteers created to support a vital downtown, works with
107 contracted economic staff person and put together a Business Plan Competition and the two
108 winning plans would each get \$10,000 to open or expand a business. The prize money was
109 donated by an individual and not tax dollars.

110

111 Bennington

- 112 • Went through planning process and have an Economic Development Plan in place.
- 113 • Hired Community Development Director and contracted with Bennington County Industrial
114 Corporation to help with economic development projects.

115

116 Cabot

- 117 • Hired a consultant to help with a Revitalization Plan.
- 118 • Has non-profit group with part-time staff.
- 119 • Bought two properties and fixed them up and are trying to find the right users.

120

121 Albany

- 122 • A community organization bought property after the General Store burned. They started a non-
123 profit to purchase the property and then created a community supported enterprise, so they
124 own the assets and find a business operator to run the business at a reasonable rate. The Town

125 offered a tax abatement for up to three-year if the business met certain criteria. The advantage
126 to this is if the business operator fails, you don't lose the assets and another business can be
127 found.

128

129 Holloway concluded with some other suggestions:

- 130 • Support existing business that need support when looking at an economic development
131 program.
- 132 • Identify start-up businesses and self-employed businesses looking for space to lease or who
133 need support.
- 134 • Pop-up stores in vacant spaces.
- 135 • Create business welcome packets for people coming into town that list all the business
136 resources.
- 137 • Inventory available spaces and have this available on a website.
- 138 • Have things such as Revolving Loan Funds, Façade Grants and other funding tools.
- 139 • Tour other communities, set up some meetings and talk to folks.

140

141 Alyssa Johnson

142

143 Johnson said she is the Economic Development Director for the Town of Waterbury, but is an employee
144 of "Revitalizing Waterbury", a non-profit community development organization for the Town. She said
145 their mission is to "promote, preserve and enhance the social, historic and economic vitality of
146 Waterbury for residents, visitors and businesses." She said it is a full-time position funded by a Town
147 appropriation for revitalizing Waterbury, and she reports to a Waterbury Area Development Committee
148 who sets her work plan. She said it's a volunteer committee with the Municipal Manager serving on the
149 Committee as an ex-officio member. She gave a brief history of her position and how it began after
150 Hurricane Irene and was originally funded with FEMA funds.

151

152 She said she is the first call for everyone. She said if something is happening in town; she tries to be the
153 link between the Town and the businesses. She said she is an advocate for the businesses, and attends
154 Planning Commission and Zoning Board to be their voice at the table. She said knowing what spaces in
155 town are available, the square footage and the zoning is helpful when talking to someone wanting to
156 start a business, but referring them to the Town for the final ruling. Johnson said they also have a
157 Business Directory and a Revolving Loan Fund. She feels it is important to have a person to go to.

158

159 Duguay asked Johnson if they actively recruit businesses. Johnson said she follows up on businesses that
160 have contacted her and her committee does review what possible businesses would be a good fit when
161 there are vacancies.

162

163 Freidin asked how municipalities fund creating Economic Development Plans. Holloway said some are
164 through a Municipal Planning Grants, but it depends on how in-depth of a plan you want to do. He said a
165 Better Connections Grant might be possible. He said Planning Grants are given out once a year and

166 they're regional, so municipalities within that region are competing for these funds. Johnson said Plans
167 can also be done in-house, such as the one in Waterbury. Kenney asked if multiple municipalities could
168 apply, and Holloway said they could if they wanted a grant for a Regional Economic Development Plan.

169
170 Cullinane asked what were some road blocks that communities have run into. Johnson said be sure you
171 have a community buy-in so you aren't fighting an uphill battle. Holloway said if you want to purchase
172 property and apply for State or Federal funding, don't purchase the property until you know the
173 environmental conditions are on the property that might make it ineligible for State or Federal funding.

174
175 Cullinane asked for advice for a committee like this one. Holloway said sometimes groups try to take on
176 something that's way too big for them to take on. He said success or failure can be as simple as the
177 collaboration between all of the different entities involved with economic development. He said you
178 don't have to do everything, and let the experts do what they do well and just communicate well with
179 them, and it's important to understand the role of everyone involve. He said don't try to do too much,
180 stay focused on what your charge is and do that really well.

181
182 Gemignani asked about the availability of other Economic Development Plans, and Kenney said he'd see
183 if he could find links to the plans for the municipalities mentioned and send them to Committee
184 members.

185
186 Gemignani left the meeting at 1:00.

187
188 Murray said that, provided Middlebury receives grant funding for their Downtown Master Plan, there
189 would be an economic development component in the Plan, and this Committee could help with that
190 section.

191
192 There was continued discussion on various funding sources and how funds have been used in different
193 communities to purchase property to attract businesses, such as in Springfield and St. Albans. Holloway
194 said some municipalities have gone in and done the Brownstone remediation work to attract businesses
195 to the property. He said there are times when the town really has to step in to make the deal happen.
196 He also mentioned instances, like Vergennes streetscape project, where it was a private-public
197 collaboration to get a project done.

198
199 Freidin asked where towns get the money to purchase properties. Holloway said in Springfield the
200 voters approved the funds to do economic development and they used those funds to purchase several
201 properties, or they work through a regional development corporation. Kenney said regional
202 development corporations can get money through a Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA)
203 loan, but there has to be evidence the property will produce income to pay a loan back.

204
205 Murray stressed that all these projects and deals described are very complex. She said Middlebury used
206 to have an economic development staff person, but he's gone now, so without having another staff
207 person it's difficult to get ideas off the ground. Duguay asked what the difference was between what

208 Johnson does in Waterbury, and the economic development staff person Middlebury used to have. She
209 said it would be good to know since that might be one of the recommendations this Committee makes
210 to the Selectboard, and they're going to want to know the differences and why this might work when
211 another one didn't. Holloway said it depends on what you want to accomplish and do you want
212 accountability. He said a staff person doesn't always equal new jobs or less vacant spaces, and
213 sometimes it takes two or three years of planting seeds before anything happens, so it's hard to speak
214 on the differences.

215
216 Kenney said he appreciated hearing about the different models being used in other Vermont
217 communities, and while he particularly likes the Bennington model, he said he feels there will be some
218 good debate on the Committee on what to recommend to the Selectboard. Holloway said the Town
219 really needs to have some skin-in-the-game and they can only depend on volunteers to a certain point,
220 you really need a point-person people can go to.

221
222 Kenney asked Johnson if Waterbury had a loan fund. She said they do have a Revolving Loan Fund of a
223 million dollars, which was established as part of a funding plan when Ben & Jerry's came to the area, but
224 she said it sits in the bank and they haven't made a loan in three years.

225

226 Next Meeting – November 29th

227

228 Kenney said there will be some Middlebury businesses coming to the meeting on November 29th
229 meeting to provide their input. Duguay said the Committee had received a lot of information over the
230 last few meetings and hadn't really had a time to process and discuss the information they've heard, so
231 she'd like to set aside some time to process all this information and set some long and short-term goals.
232 Kenney said he was fine with doing that on the 29th, and put the businesses off until the December
233 meeting. He also said he's delaying the public input meeting until they actually have something to
234 discuss.

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236 The Committee members are to send Kenney what they'd like to talk about on the 29th, and the business
237 community input will be put off until December or January.

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239 The meeting adjourned at 1:33 p.m.

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241 Respectfully submitted,

242 Beth Dow

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