

1 Town of Middlebury
2 Economic Health Committee
3 Minutes of Meeting – Business Round Table Discussion
4 January 10, 2019
5

6 Present: Fred Kenney, Mike Capra, Steve Boyce, Scott Gemignani, Ben Calvi, Becky Dayton, Farhad
7 Khan, John Freidin and Karen Duguay. Absent: Mary Cullinane and Ex Officio Member Jennifer Murray.
8

9 Others Present: Members of the Middlebury business community (See attached for attendees).

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11 Approval of November 29, 2018 and December 14, 2018 Minutes – Deferred
12

13 Business Round Table Discussion

14 Fred Kenney welcomed everyone and said this was going to be an informal discussion, and asked
15 comments be brief and to focus them on the charge of the Committee, which is to make
16 recommendations to the Selectboard on economic development tools, strategies and actions the Town
17 can take to improve the economic health of the community.
18

19 Following everyone introducing themselves, Kenney asked them to respond to the current challenges
20 facing their businesses that the Town could help them with.
21

22 Amey Ryan (IPJ Real Estate) said real estate is facing the challenge of opportunities lost for “talented
23 partners.” She said when one partner comes here for interviews at the College, Hospital or other
24 business in town, the other partner may have a set of skills that don’t match job opportunities in the
25 area, so they end up not moving here because the cost to live here is too high for only one salary. Ryan
26 said if towns in the region could make it easier for start-up businesses to grow, then there would be
27 more job opportunities. She said whether that’s the selectboards or the Economic Development
28 Corporation, she said it needs to be someone’s job and focus to make this happen.
29

30 Mike Capra (Denecker Chevrolet) said the Town needs to make it easier for businesses to grow and to
31 make them feel welcomed.
32

33 Barbara Harding (Otter Creek Used Books) said she’d never looked at how the Town might be able to
34 help her. She said the Town had told her she couldn’t put a sign at the head of Printer’s Alley during the
35 Chili Fest one time and she now feels she should had just done it and no one would have said anything.
36 She said Neighbors Together have been very helpful to businesses in the Marble Works.
37

38 Susan Shashok (Caroline’s Dream) said what she wants from the Town is basic infrastructure; water,
39 sewer, sidewalks, safety and all the things she pays taxes for, so she doesn’t have to worry about it while
40 she runs her businesses. She said it was important for the Town to focus on the infrastructure and

41 that's all she ever expected from the Town. She said the various events Better Middlebury Partnership
42 has had provided her with the opportunity to open a pop-up store downtown, and those have been very
43 helpful.

44
45 Andrea Murray (VIA Architects) said that her business and the construction businesses are having
46 trouble finding entry level, younger workers. She said construction workers are aging and that's one of
47 the reasons construction is so expensive due to the higher priced skilled workers. She said young people
48 coming out of college aren't interested in the construction trades, and then there is the lack of
49 affordable housing or night life for people in their 20s and early 30s. Kenney said he felt a lot of
50 businesses were having a hard time finding workers.

51
52 Bill Sinks (Multy Builders) said he used to get workers from the Career Center building trades program
53 that was cancelled a few years ago, but he wasn't sure what the Town could do about that. Kenney said
54 the Career Center is starting the building trades program back up this coming fall, so urged everyone to
55 encourage people they knew who might be interested to get into this program.

56
57 Claire Tebbs (Planning Consultant and Middlebury Studio School Board member) said affordable space
58 for creative businesses is unobtainable and the culture of downtown planning and access to out-of-the-
59 box community space thinking on how key that is to a vibrant downtown center aren't matching. She
60 said this is from the landlord angle, but the conversation between the landlord and Town has gaps.
61 Freidin asked what she meant by community space, and why couldn't they use the Library community
62 room, or other public space. She said they do seek out public spaces for satellite classes other than their
63 main residence on Route 7 South, but the problem is finding more permanent sites for these community
64 services that are affordable. Kenney said the Maker Space at the Hannaford Career Center does partner
65 on things like workshops and classes, and they are currently looking for mentors.

66
67 Kelly Hickey (Edie and Glo) said her son was a landscape student at Hannaford Career Center, and the
68 reason he got a job as a landscaper is because his boss showed up at the school looking for workers, so
69 she feels if the building trades need workers, she feels they need to go to the school and say they have
70 jobs available. She also addressed the space issue, and said she's tried for 5 years to find a space to
71 open with like-minded businesses. She said due to the online nature of her business, she only needs this
72 space for a few months out of the year. She said she spoke to BMP and they helped with the space over
73 the holidays and she was highly successful getting other artists to join her as well, so encourages the
74 Town to find more space downtown for these types of businesses.

75
76 Kenney said the Addison County Economic Development Corporation (ACEDC) has started the Addison
77 County Workforce Development Task Force to address some of the workforce issues by getting into the
78 schools to talk to kids early and often. Hickey warned the kids would feel that the words "Task Force"
79 were negative, and probably wouldn't want to hear them.

80

81 Ben Calvi (Committee member, Woodchuck Cider) said he had attended a job fair and there wasn't a
82 single lead for a job, so businesses owners are going to job fairs, so that isn't where people are looking
83 for jobs.

84

85 Amey Ryan said some of the smaller businesses are working with smaller resources and it's hard to put
86 down the money for a rent, so sometimes the town or non-profits have to sign off on grants for these
87 spaces. Kenney said that was a good idea and this Committee had been charged to look at how to use
88 some Town funds.

89

90 Peggy Burns (Middlebury College) said that Middlebury College students' perception is there are no jobs
91 here. She said the College funds between 10 and 20 internships in downtown Middlebury every
92 summer with businesses and non-profits, and after a summer here those students get a whole different
93 experience without the burden of academics, they have fun and get outdoors, and say that every
94 student should be required to spend a summer here. She said it may need re-branding to get this
95 message out on why you'd want to live and work in Middlebury and Addison County.

96

97 The use of the former Clay's space for Very Merry Middlebury was discussed and how the landowner
98 and realtor worked with them to provide the space for free, once they saw the benefits to them for the
99 space being used during the holidays. Hickey spoke on the efficiency of the setup and how parking and
100 traffic had not been a problem. She said people spoke of how they'd would park at the remote locations
101 then ran into their neighbors while shopping, so she feels the parking on the outskirts of town is good.

102

103 Kenney asked if there were specific suggestions for the Town to consider, such as specific policy
104 changes, or things they could do to help a business grow or things that aren't so helpful.

105

106 Sivan Cotel (Stonecutter Spirits) said one thing he likes about the design of the town is that there are
107 many ways to go through the town, but there is no way to go around the town. He said while it can be
108 annoying at times, it makes people going through town to see what there is here. He said out on
109 Exchange Street there are two things that have been talked about forever, the sidewalk which should be
110 done sooner rather than later before something tragic happens, and a traffic circle where Exchange
111 Street meets Route 7. He said if there is anything the Town can do to speed them up to happen sooner,
112 it should be done. He said anything to make Exchange Street more hospitable and safer.

113

114 Ben Wells (Marquis Theater and former Rough Cut) said the sidewalks are a big deal and he regularly
115 shoveled the sidewalks repeatedly between the two businesses and he hears complaints about how
116 treacherous they were, so he'd like to see the Town take a bigger role in snow and ice removal. There's
117 a point been made that parking is on the outskirts of the Downtown, so better maintained sidewalk help
118 all businesses.

119

120 Ross Conrad (Dancing Bee Gardens) said sidewalk maintenance in general is needed, since the
121 downtown sidewalks have huge holes in them that are dangerous.

122 Claire Tebbs said there is a new Transportation Planner at ACRPC, so talk to him about the Exchange
123 Street sidewalks and the roundabout. She said there seems to be a disconnect with what grants and
124 programs are available to the downtown businesses. She said since Middlebury is a Designated
125 Downtown, they are part of the State program that comes with benefits for these businesses and she
126 thinks this is not known by many downtown businesses. She said businesses need to be aware of these
127 grants so they can actively advocate for themselves with the Town and committees such as this one.
128 Kenney asked if a workshop on the benefits of the Downtown District be helpful to businesses, and the
129 response was it would be very useful.

130
131 Amey Ryan said the signage in town is “horrendous” and there are so many of them they look awful.
132 She said she loves the concept about the walking through town for parking, and she believes there is
133 enough parking in town, but because there isn’t proper signage in town, there are parking spaces in
134 town that no one knows where they are. She’d like the Town to put a concerted effort into improving
135 the signage to direct people to parking, including signage directing people to Marble Works even though
136 it’s private property.

137
138 Bruce Baker (Sweet Cecily’s) said he agreed with Ryan and the perception that there isn’t enough
139 parking in town. He thinks with the right campaign we could break that down. He said there is a lot of
140 talk about how horrible it looks with all the lost stores and restaurants, and we need to change that
141 message. He said we have free parking in downtown, and how many towns can say that, so he believes
142 the proper messaging would help.

143
144 Andrea Murray also mentioned the lack of moderately-sized land available downtown, so she’d like the
145 Town to reconsider the redevelopment of the EDI site behind the Town Offices. She’d like them to
146 reconsider the site be developed as smaller, separate sites as opposed to one large building.

147
148 Barbara Harding thanked Jim Gish for keeping all the businesses informed during the construction
149 project and said communication is key between the Town and the e-mail blasts are very educational and
150 it helps her know what is going on.

151
152 Mike Rainville (Maple Landmark) said he hears about the concern of competition from online retailers to
153 downtown businesses, but it has been the bread-and-butter of his business for decades. He said 25% of
154 his staff is focused on their online business. He said he also knows his customer list of small main street
155 stores across the country is down by over 1/3 in the past 5 or 6 years, so they are trying to keep that
156 balance, but in the sense of economic development, online business is an important part of the
157 community.

158
159 Becky Dayton (Vermont Book Store) said they’ve expanded their online business greatly over the last
160 year, so people have learned they can shop online and still shop local too, so that is another message
161 that needs to get out as well. Kenny asked if there should be workshops on how to conduct online
162 business, but many said they already do it and felt it was more about communicating to local people
163 they can still support local businesses and shop online.

164 Jordan Benjamin (AquaVitea) he said businesses are not the only ones unaware of financial incentives,
165 that the Selectboard is not aware of them either. He said a year ago they had gone to the Board for one
166 of the Town incentives that was 12-15 years old, and the current Board had no knowledge of it, so we all
167 need to be on the same page as to what grants and incentives are out there. He also wondered if there
168 were any successful case studies of downtowns to show what we might be working towards.

169
170 Kenney asked what incentives could the Town provide, with limited resources, to make businesses want
171 to come here or grow here?

172
173 Scott Gemignani paraphrased much of what he'd heard in this session, and he said maybe what the
174 Town needs to do is create a decent-sized project, such as available space **(not sure what this means)**.
175 He said businesses also need grants for fixing things up and the Town needs to help businesses starting
176 out and get them the resources they need, and the Town shouldn't hinder businesses either.

177
178 Bill Brooks (Sheldon Museum) asked if the Ben Franklin space was a possibility for that. Gemignani said
179 that had been mentioned before that the Town should buy it and put in incubator spaces, and thinks it's
180 a great idea.

181
182 Kelly Hickey said that 5 years ago, her business, Stonecutter Spirits and Caroline's Dream sat down with
183 the Town and tried to create an incubator, but the Town wanted to stick them way out on Exchange
184 Street and only one of them was successful. She said they'd been told that there would be sidewalks
185 out there and it would be wonderful, but it has yet to happen, so she said timeliness is important.

186
187 Sivan Cortell said there is such a shortage of childcare and that impacts small and large businesses. He
188 said he doesn't usually like to ask municipalities to throw money at a problem, but this is one instance
189 that it does feel right for the Town to throw money at the problem. He said whether the Town
190 incentivizes childcare providers to exist, or subsidizes childcare for parents, it makes businesses more
191 competitive and would have a huge impact. Kenney said there is a movement now on the regional level
192 and Statewide organizations are looking at some kind of regional fund for subsidies or incentives, so it is
193 being looked at.

194
195 Ross Conrad said he thinks it would be helpful to bring the Farmer's Market downtown. He said when
196 the business community thinks of itself, it doesn't think of agriculture as a business, and he doesn't
197 know why that is. He said it works both ways, since the farmers don't think of themselves as belonging
198 to the business community, so he thinks bringing the Farmer's Market downtown would help to
199 integrate these businesses.

200
201 Amey Ryan said there's been a lot of misinformation with all the talks about planning the parks and
202 she'd like to hear the information on what the Farmer's Market wants and needs from the Farmer's
203 Market themselves. She said she's had a number of discussions on why the Farmer's Market shouldn't
204 be downtown from people who she's never seen at the Market. She thinks it would be fabulous to have
205 it downtown, so the Town should do whatever it can to make sure the Farmer's Market comes

206 downtown, because it will help everyone, and there's been negative conversations on the sideline on
207 why it can't be downtown.

208
209 Jim Gish (Town Community Liaison) said the Selectboard has approved a design for Triangle Park that
210 includes a great deal of hardscape to allow Farmer's Market, Foodaroo and other events right in the
211 center of town.

212
213 Claire Tebbs said we all need to hear a resounding "YES" attitude from the Town and that they want the
214 Farmer's Market downtown, and that voice isn't heard. She said they should be doing all they can to
215 make it happen. She said the Town should also be working on flexible spaces and the zoning, DRB and
216 DAC folks really need to come together with Gary Halloway at the State Downtown Program to get up to
217 speed on incentives and how that relates to policy and zoning, and have some flexible zoning where
218 appropriate, with the end-goal the economic vibrancy of the town. She said there is not being any
219 communication between the people who know about those programs and these committees.

220
221 Mike Corbett (Vermont Economic Development Authority – VEDA and Middlebury Area Land Trust
222 (MALT) Board) said in the name of economic development, he wondered if there couldn't be some
223 exemptions or flexibility in the zoning which seems to be very black and white, but when it clearly looks
224 like a project makes sense it can be allowed. He relayed the story of the MALT application to open the
225 education portion of MALT which is expanding, into space at the Aurora School. He said they were told
226 no because they also need office space for their conservation work, so they can't be in an educational
227 building with Aurora. He said they are actually thinking of rebranding MALT to be an educational
228 program, but why should they have to jump through hoops. He said he knew this was difficult with
229 State requirements, but if we can be more permissive in permitting maybe we can compete with other
230 towns.

231
232 Kenney asked if your business is not located downtown and an appropriate space is made available
233 would you move downtown, and if you are downtown have you ever thought of moving out and why.

234
235 Susan Shashok said she isn't big enough to move downtown, but she is looking for more pop-up
236 opportunities downtown.

237
238 Ross Conrad said the Middlebury Food Co-op chose to stay there and expand downtown so as not to
239 contribute to the sprawl and to keep the downtown vibrant.

240
241 Kelly Hickey said that incubator space has to be changeable and she would be interested in short-term
242 space. Ben Calvi said the incubator space is being brought up a lot, and wondered if the expectation
243 was the Town would develop this or make it easier for developers. Amey Ryan said it would be better
244 for the Town to make it easier for investors to develop these spaces and remove the red tape.

245 Bryan Phelps (Stonewell Properties) said he'd been one of the partners in Next Bridge Partners who
246 submitted a proposal to develop the EDI site. He gave a brief history on the project and the land owned
247 by the Town behind the Town Offices. He said an RFP was put out by the Town and Next Bridge was

248 only one of four to submit a proposal for that site. He said what he's hearing revolves around real
249 estate and space, and there seems to be an opportunity to develop this on Town owned land. He said
250 you've asked what the Town can do, and there are some things the Town can do and there are some
251 that fall on the private sector. He said the Town is not in the real estate business, nor should they be,
252 but they do happen to own a piece of real estate in the downtown, so he encourages everyone who
253 brought up the need for space in downtown to learn more about that site and hopefully the
254 conversation about what to do with that site will continue. He said any plans for this site have been on
255 hold for over 2 years while the Town does a Downtown Master Plan.

256
257 Freidin asked why the Ben Franklin space couldn't be an opportunity to do what they'd proposed.
258 Phelps said the cost of obtaining that site is different, since it's private, and it's an existing building and
259 not open land, so the economics are very different.

260
261 Artim said he sees this breaking down into two categories: What the Town can do, such as
262 infrastructure, emergency responders and public works, and the Town can smooth the way for business
263 so they aren't running into obstructions. He said unfortunately, there is this element of the population
264 that want to obstruct development and think that anything new is bad. He thinks there are things to be
265 done as a community to create a positive message. He said he's a big fan of the Downtown Master Plan
266 and wants to see it happen whether we get the grant or not, and it should be done within a year, so that
267 when 2020 happens and the 10-week closure is done, we know how are we going to develop this
268 downtown. He said this EDI project could provide a couple of key anchors to show that this place is a
269 happening place and they want to be there.

270
271 Artim said when Jamie Gaucher was here, there were other developers that were looking at properties
272 with different ideas, but they never took it any further because they were afraid of hitting a wall that
273 would not let them take it further. He said when looking at what the Town can do, also look at what
274 the community can do to really create this positive environment.

275
276 Amey Ryan said when the Town approved the funding for Jamie Gaucher's position; there was a lot of
277 enthusiasm from the Town, community and College, to hire one person to wrap all these things up
278 together, so when it fell apart everyone gave up. She said there's still money in that fund, so she feels
279 all the things talked about today will just get kicked down the road unless someone shows up to do the
280 job. Kenney said they have all kinds of models on ways to make that happen.

281
282 Ben Wells said the College requires that all students have full board on campus, so students don't come
283 downtown to eat, which would really help businesses. He said finding and retaining quality employees
284 is challenging, and health insurance is prohibitive to most businesses, so some kind of Town incentive
285 for health insurance, or wellness programs for businesses so they aren't taking the hit would help and
286 then maybe young people will want to work here.

287

288 Bruce Baker said over the past 40 years he's sat on a lot of boards and committees, and what excites
289 him the most is all the young people in attendance at this meeting and how energizing it is for him to
290 hear all these new ideas and he thanked them for showing up.

291

292 Claire Tebbs said she was confused by Fred Kenny's role in this Committee, and he said while he headed
293 the Regional Economic Development Corporation, he was chairing this local community committee on
294 economic health. He said the charge is to give recommendations to the Selectboard on economic
295 development tools, strategies and actions and they need to submit a report by 2020, but if they find
296 something the Town can act on now they can make interim recommendations.

297

298 The meeting ended at 1:35 p.m.

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300 The next meeting of the Economic Health Committee will be Thursday, January 24, 2019 at 12 noon in
301 the Large Conference Room in the Town Office at 77 Main Street.

302

303 Respectfully submitted,

304 Beth Dow

MEHC Business Roundtable Attendance 10-Jan-19

Last Name	First Name	Affiliation	Position/Title
Artim	Nick	Town of Middlebury	Selectboard
Baker	Bruce	Sweet Cecily	Co-Owner
Benjamin	Jordan	AquaVitea	CFO
Bennett	Suzanne	The Residence at Otter Creek	Director of Business Development
Brooks	Bill	Henry Sheldon Museum of Vt History	Executive Director
Burdine	Elizabeth	ACEDC	Finance Director
Burns	Peggy	Center for Careers & Internships, Middlebury College	Director
Corbett	Michael	VEDA	Commercial Loan Officer
Conrad	Ross	Dancing Bee Gardens	Owner
Cotel	Sivan	Stonecutter Spirits	Co-founder/Dir Ops
Dunne	Melanie	Residence at Otter Creek	Exec Dir
Gish	Jim	Town of Middlebury	Community Liaison, Rail and Bridge Proj
Harding	Barbara	Otter Creek Used Books	Owner
Hickey	Kelly	edie&glo	Owner
Hills	David	Waypoint Management Services, LLC	Owner
Kearns	Sarah	Vt Small Business Development Center	Busines Advisor
McIntosh	Daniel	Owner	Forth 'N Goal Sports
Murray	Andrea	Vermont Integrated Architecture	Principal
Phelps	Bryan	Stonewell Properties	Owner
Putnum	Spencer	Climate Economy Initiative	
Rainville	Mike	Maple Landmark	Owner
Ritter	Sue	Middlebury College	Special Asst to the President
Ryan	Amey	IPJ Real Estate	Broker/Owner
Shashok	Susan	Caroline's Dream	Owner
Sinks	Bill	Multy Builders	Owner
Tebbs	Claire	Middlebury Studio	Board member
Todd	Vince	Langrock, Speery, Wool	
Tomb	Gregory	Main Street Stationary	Owner
Wells	Ben	Middlebury Marquis	Owner
Romano	Travis	G Stone Motors	
DeWind	Victoria	works downtown and interested citizen	