

Town of Middlebury
Economic Health Committee
Minutes of Meeting – Work Session
March 28, 2019

Present: Fred Kenney, Mary Cullinane, John Freidin, Ben Calvi and Scott Gemignani. Farhad Khan, Karen Duguay, Steve Boyce, Becky Dayton and ex-officio member Jennifer Murray were absent.

Also present: Michael Palmer.

The meeting began around 12:15 p.m.

Minutes Approval – None

Citizen Comments – None

Kenney said this meeting was a work session to find commonality between the lists developed during the SWOT process. He said he felt they could all agree that one thing they've felt since the beginning is the Town needs to have a long-range economic vision. He said in doing the long-range planning it will determine not only our goals, but our identity and goals.

Kenney also said if they came up with five Critical Success Factors (CSF), he didn't think they would need to rank them since they'd all be equally important. He said they didn't have to flush out the recommendations today, but maybe some ideas that support each Success Factor and then get more data and develop recommendations later.

Freidin said his idea was to find ways to distinguish Middlebury from other communities, and to develop a "battle cry" that could be used by all businesses and non-profits, so one business could help another business get attention. Freidin said he wasn't sure what a Town economic plan would be. He said we have all kinds of town plans and county plans, so he didn't think we needed another unless someone explained what it means.

The need for a marketing plan was mentioned by Calvi and Gemignani. Gemignani said we don't want to market what's here now, only to have people come and find there's nothing else here. He said we want to let people know there are businesses opened here now and that there are opportunities here to open other businesses.

Cullinane said she assumed the Downtown Master Plan that Town Planner Murray was working on would have questions on what the vision for Middlebury is. Freidin said the Town Plan is really just aspirational and doesn't make any choices, and doesn't give any real direction, so he doesn't think what they're working on now will be any different. Cullinane said she read the Town Plan and she thought the Economical Development had a lot there that actually applied, and Calvi agreed. She said the last

42 pages of the Town Plan there is a matrix that says how it's going to happen and who was responsible for
43 it, and some of those items have happened.

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45 It was a consensus that the first CSF #1 would be to develop a common vision for the town and establish
46 what makes us unique from other towns.

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48 Cullinane read from the Town Plan Economic Development Section that listed the strategies the
49 Planning Commission felt were needed to reach their CSFs for Economic Development within the Town
50 Plan. She wondered as Murray does the Downtown Master Plan, what the Committee's part would be
51 in that. Kenney said he understood the plan would be very tactical steps for the downtown, where our
52 look is a broader one of the whole town.

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54 Calvi felt developing a marketing plan should be a recommendation to the CSFs to have a vision for the
55 town. Cullinane wondered if it should be added that there is a need for a point person, a dedicated
56 resource that is responsible for the economic development of Middlebury, and their responsibility
57 would include funding and implementing a comprehensive marketing plan for the Town. Calvi said that
58 had been discussed quite a bit and one of the recommendations might be to have a permanent staff
59 person. Kenney said that was one of the CSFs he had on his list, and one of the recommendations could
60 be how that might be structured for Middlebury. He said it might be a staff person at Better Middlebury
61 Partnership or Addison County Economic Development Corporation or a Town staff person.

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63 Freidin said he's very skeptical about hiring someone to do it, and he was skeptical when they hired
64 Jamie Gaucher, and he feels this plan has to be done by a top elected official in the town. Calvi said
65 there is no town official to do that, so it would mean changing Town governance and that's a big change.
66 Freidin said the Selectboard could say that one of their officers' responsibilities is to take this
67 responsibility and maybe they should be paid for this. He thinks once a staff person is hired the Town
68 just turns their back on it and lets them do it. Kenney said he was suggesting one of the CSFs be that
69 there be a point of contact, an office or a liaison or ombudsman for Town government, to proactively
70 address vacancies and development projects. It was agreed that another CSF would be that there needs
71 to be a dedicated resource to focus on Economic Development.

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73 Cullinane said while the Town Plan speaks to common and clear-cut zoning and permitting, which she
74 thinks is super important and agrees with, she would like to find a way for our practices to understand
75 the urgency of the process. She said the Town had been great in supporting her in the work she's doing
76 in developing her property, but she wishes the timeline for the process could be quicker. She said she
77 understood and was fine with the system, but would like there to be an overlay of urgency to it. She
78 said she would pay more to expedite the process, so maybe there could be an option for applicants to
79 pay more to have it processed sooner. Calvi suggested perhaps the person or office could have some
80 sort of executive authority to make decisions that don't have to go through layers of committees and
81 bureaucracy. He said while those layers are important, there should be one person with the authority to
82 make these decisions, and thinks that sense of urgency has to be foundational to everything we do.
83 Freidin said that's what a mayor would do. Cullinane suggested conducting meetings of the Design

84 Advisory Committee and Development Review Board in a virtual format so there doesn't have to be a
85 physical meeting. She said within the system, how do we create a way for someone to choose an
86 expedited path. Town employee Beth Dow stated that there are legalities around public hearings and
87 those aren't something someone can waive. Cullinane said it would be good to get what are legislative
88 actions and what aren't, and then see what can be done. Cullinane also suggested that it would be nice
89 if projects in designated downtowns could be expedited. Calvi wondered if permitting was something
90 this Committee wanted to tackle, since people had such strong philosophical views on any type of
91 regulations, and what can we do about it. Cullinane also discussed all the permitting fees involved in
92 developing, and wondered if there was a way the Town could offer financial support or resources
93 towards these fees. She said these fees are real hurdles for businesses.

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95 Kenney said another thing discussed at the Roundtable was infrastructure, and he is suggesting that be
96 added as another CSF. Freidin said he doesn't understand why we should put time and money into a
97 roundabout at the end of Exchange Street or sidewalks on Exchange Street when we don't have
98 sidewalks on some other streets where people live. Gemignani said there should be a list of things that
99 need to be done. Dow suggested they go on the Town website and read the Infrastructure Committee
100 meeting minutes, because they have been delving deep into this and \$22 million worth of water system
101 upgrades were identified in a recent study. Kenney said even though there are others doing work at
102 looking into the infrastructure, maybe it would be important for this Committee to support that as well.

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104 Calvi suggested a possible sub-committee of the Economic Health Committee to study what the
105 Infrastructure Committee is doing and report back. He said at one time this Committee said it would be
106 good to hear from other committees, so whether someone from the Infrastructure Committee comes to
107 a meeting, or we could look into what is going on and report back.

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109 Freidin wanted to add cell phone service and local sources of energy to the list of infrastructure. He said
110 we'd be in good shape if we could cut in half the amount of money that goes outside of the county for
111 heat and electricity. Cullinane said she didn't know enough about the pros and cons on the best source
112 of electricity and heat, and isn't sure if it would be cheaper than going outside of the area for those
113 things. There was discussion on what the Town could do to help develop local energy, or if going
114 outside the area to get cheaper rates would be more beneficial to allow businesses to save money that
115 could then be used in other ways within the economy.

116

117 Kenney said another thing that was brought up in the Roundtable was keeping the sidewalks
118 maintained. He said this goes along with the aging population being an economic driver in this town and
119 the need to keep the sidewalks in good repair and keep them clear in the winter.

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121 Kenney said a recommendation he would suggest would be the Town commission another parking
122 study, since the one they have is really old. Freidin said a parking study would take years, since the
123 Town isn't going to pay for it, they'll look for a grant for it. Cullinane said the College has a real parking
124 problem on campus right now too, so perhaps the College would pay for a parking study. Kennedy said
125 there are people working on the parking problem for next year during time the downtown will be

126 closed, and they're looking at ways to mitigate the pressure and possibly applying for funds to help. He
127 said Neighbor's Together and Better Middlebury Partnership is working on parking as it relates to
128 getting people into the downtown, and the ACEDC and Chamber are looking at acquiring funds for the
129 businesses.

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131 Freidin said if Economic Development was important to the Town they'd pay for it, but they always say
132 there's no money and they have to apply for grants. Cullinane said it isn't that it isn't important to the
133 Town, but if they're looking at \$22 million in needed water upgrade and other projects, they have other
134 priorities that we aren't always privy to.

135

136 Kenney had suggested a CSF about maintaining and developing basic amenities that attract and retain
137 families, such as affordable housing, childcare, among others. Freidin said one thing missing in this town
138 is an affordable store with general goods, and while it may never happen, it's a problem for a great
139 many of people who live here. Cullinane said you can't deal with the fact that a store like Target has
140 said there isn't the market or demographics for a store here, and stores are closing in other locations
141 because of the market. Calvi said about all we can do is try and recruit to fill the empty spaces in town.
142 Cullinane said Old Navy is the fastest growing segment of the Gap company, and while Gap are closing
143 stores, they're opening new Old Navy stores, and the size of those stores would fit in some of the empty
144 spaces in the Hannaford Plaza. Kenney said if a brand like that is putting out word they're looking for
145 space, there is no one here at the Town to receive it.

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147 Freidin suggested the Town could create a list of websites where people can buy products and have
148 computers in the lobby that people can use to buy things. Calvi suggested instead the Town could hold
149 workshops on how to use websites, and Kenney felt the Town could also help businesses figure out how
150 to fit into the internet market.

151

152 Freidin also felt we need a modern public library/community center. Cullinane said it's her
153 understanding that outlying towns have to pay the library a fee to take books out of the library, so if
154 they dropped this fee for them, maybe that would draw them into town to shop. Freidin said everyone
155 that lives in Middlebury supports the library through taxes, and the Library has talked about trying to
156 work out deals with other towns about paying a portion of taxes to the Library to allow their residents to
157 use it without paying a fee. He said the Library is continuing to work on this.

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159 The meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

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161 The next meeting of the Economic Health Committee will be Thursday, April 11, 2019 at noon in the
162 Town Offices at 77 Main Street.

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164 Respectfully submitted,

165 Beth Dow