

Town of Middlebury
Economic Health Committee
Minutes of Meeting
May 9, 2019

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

Kenney asked if anyone had any comments on the latest version of the Critical Success Factors, and Freidin asked what the Committee would do with this document. Kenney thought it would be part of the report, along with the specific items in the Committee Charge, which will be submitted to the Selectboard. He said it would take some more discussion and additional input from outside sources before the Committee can finalize it.

Critical Factor #1 – “Develop Economic vision/strategy for the Town of Middlebury”.

They discussed the recommendation that the Selectboard authorize a neutral facilitator to develop this vision/strategy, and whether or not the Committee should recommend whether the person should be a consultant, staff, or elected official, but decided to leave it up to the Board.

Critical Factor #2 – “Establish [dedicated office or individual] to act as Middlebury’s economic health ombudsman.”

The bullet items under this Factor are suggestions on what this office/individual would do.

They discussed businesses helping and promoting other businesses. Duguay said there is a lot of cooperation between organizations, but not so much between the businesses.

They discussed the need for a “playbook”, a manual on who to go to, where to get permits and what you need to do business here. Kenney said he could get some examples of others for the Committee to see.

Calvi said the bullet items are not meant to be all encompassing, but we’re just saying we need someone. Duguay said these are all the things that are not being done now, but need to be.

Duguay asked if the Committee would also be recommending how this person would be funded, and Kenney said yes, they would be. He said the plan is to look at how other municipalities fund their economic offices, and then attach it as an addendum to the report along with which method the Committee recommends.

They discussed what they had heard from the person doing the economic development work in Waterbury. Duguay said she has two interns working for her this summer and one of them could do

43 some research to see how other college towns, similar to Middlebury, is doing economic development;
44 however the main focus of the research would be how communities are integrating with the college,
45 and how town government and administrations work together.

46

47 Freidin thought one thing that could be recommended would be an inventory of organizations in
48 Middlebury that work on business and economic development, such as ACEDC, Better Middlebury
49 Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce. He said it would be good to know who they are and what
50 responsibilities could be given to them. Kenney said there are dozens of State programs that operate
51 here as well, so it depends on how broadly you want to define it.

52

53 Calvi suggested inviting some of these other towns with different economic development structures to a
54 Committee meeting. Duguay said the Committee is a little further in their work than when Gary
55 Holloway was here last time. She said he gave a rather broad description of how these other
56 municipalities are doing economic development, but now she'd like to hear more details and has more
57 questions.

58

59 Kenney asked if there were any suggestions on funding. Freidin said if the Town is serious about doing
60 something about this, then the Town has to pay for it. He said if you're recommending a full-time
61 position, then that's about 2 cents on the tax rate. He suggested that the Local Option Tax funds is a
62 potential source of funding, but Beth Dow pointed out those funds are being earmarked for capital
63 projects. Duguay thought we should approach the College for funding since they are interested in being
64 a partner in the community. Calvi said the College could have a seat on the committee or board of
65 directors that would guide this position. Freidin wants to see if the Downtown Improvement District
66 funds are being spent and maybe those could be used. Duguay said the DIDC did not allocate spending
67 any funds this past year, since they wanted to wait and see what was needed as the downtown project
68 comes to an end.

69

70 Kenney said they needed to decide if they're also going to recommend, in addition to the new position,
71 an elected political official as an "economic health ambassador". Kenney said this would be an on-the-
72 ground-person, "face of the Town" person. Calvi said he'd like to hear of someone in a similar position
73 and how it works. (Freidin left the meeting at this time.) Duguay said she would need more information
74 as well. Duguay said in a town like Middlebury, she felt we're small enough it isn't necessary and would
75 be redundant. Kenney felt this should not be one of the recommendations.

76

77 Critical Factor #3 – Maintain and improve essential infrastructure and amenities to keep and attract
78 businesses and families.

79

80 Calvi said these are all complicated issues that would take years to accomplish, but he is comfortable
81 with the bullets as presented. Duguay said it could be the person in the new position taking on some of
82 these issues and work towards solving them. Duguay said it isn't up to the Town to promote businesses,
83 that's up to the businesses themselves.

84

85 Kenney suggested each bullet would be a goal then list specific steps to reach that goal. Duguay is not
86 sure these are all steps we can say the Town should take. Calvi suggested identifying where there might
87 be barriers, such as special events permitting. Duguay said as someone who plans a lot of events, she
88 feels the Town is really easy to work with and supportive, so from a procedural standpoint she doesn't
89 see any barriers.

90
91 Kenney will work on getting some other towns to an upcoming meeting. He said he also has a local
92 entrepreneur that wants to come in and someone from Middlebury College. Calvi suggested also taking
93 a meeting to look at Tax Increment Financing, the Middlebury Business Development Fund and Vermont
94 Community Development Grant funds and see if the Committee was ready to give a recommendation on
95 these or do we need more information. Kenney said he felt that these three Critical Factors cover the
96 first part of the Charge, but we do have to look at the funds.

97
98 The next meeting of the Economic Health Committee will be Thursday, May 23, 2019 at 12 noon in the
99 Town Offices.

100

101 Respectfully submitted,

102 Beth Dow

103

104