

Town of Middlebury
Economic Health Committee
Minutes of Meeting
June 13, 2019

Present: Fred Kenney, Becky Dayton, Steve Boyce, John Freidin and Ben Calvi.

Absent: Karen Duguay, Farhad Khan, Scott Gemignani, Mary Cullinane and Ex-officio member Jennifer Murray

From Middlebury College: Sue Ritter, Matt Curran, Peggy Burns, Amitava Biswas, Alison Martin, Tanzim Ahmed, Varsha Vijayakumar, Audrey Olson, John Gosselin, Isabel Lubitz.

Others Present: Rob Carter, Kelly Hickey, Nick Artim and Jim Gish

Fred Kenney began the meeting at 12:05 and said the Committee would like to have a dialogue about one of Middlebury's major assets – Middlebury College. He said the Committee had some questions they wanted to ask: 1) How can Middlebury, the region and State, get students to stay here after graduation; 2) How do we attract Middlebury alumni back to the region; and 3) What can the Town, College and Businesses do to take advantage of the market segment the students, staff and faculty represent.

Kenney started with the first question, of what could be done to attract students to stay in the area after graduation. One student responded a stable job with a good income. Freidin asked him what he considered a good starting income to be, and the student (banking major) said \$60,000-65,000. The student said the work he is doing locally now is all going towards College tuition, and not anything that would keep him here. Another student said students, particularly Economics majors, head towards New York, Boston or other metropolitan areas because that's where the jobs are. A student of Indian/South Asian decent said culture and community would influence where she would settle, and this area doesn't have anything that meets her needs, and she feels staying here would be difficult.

Peggy Burns said that her office has many statistics she could share with the Committee, such as the number on financial aid, students of color and the number of international students. She said the number one field in the 2019 graduating class was media/entertainment/communications, followed by finance and then social impact classes, including education and environment.

Kenney said there is a problem here with workforce development, and the culture in the high schools is for the guidance counselors pushing students into college instead of looking at a broader pathway. He wonders if the same happens in colleges where they don't look at opportunities in Vermont.

One student who is spending the summer here as an intern, said that she's learned a lot about the community this summer, since sometimes students stay on campus for extended periods of time and not ever see Middlebury as a viable place to live and work. She asked Burns if there were other programs where the College partnered with Porter Hospital or local law firms so students had more

43 long-term opportunities to work and live in the community other than just summer internships. Burns
44 said those programs do exist, and she and Ritter are working hard to try and promote these programs
45 and to help students get to know the community.

46
47 Calvi said he grew up in Vermont, went to Middlebury College, and then came back to the area six years
48 ago to work and raise a family. He said he didn't think once when he was at College about staying here
49 at the time, since culturally he feels students are supposed to go out into the world, but when you're in
50 your 30's and starting to raise a family, you start thinking about coming back to Vermont if you can find
51 a job. He feels young people have that expectation that you have to go somewhere else to put what
52 you've learned into practice. He said even if only 5 stay, it would be great. Burns said 10% of their
53 students say they would like to stay in the area, but the fact is maybe only 10 to 15 or so actually stay
54 and half of them work at the college.

55
56 One student said if there was a really enticing job opportunity here, she'd jump on it, and suggested at
57 graduation time they hand out a list of job opportunities specific to Vermont. She said if you're
58 comparing jobs in Vermont to all these places like New York and Boston, she said students are going to
59 gravitate to the city jobs because they feel there are more opportunities there, and it's more bustling
60 and attractive to them.

61
62 Kenney asked if there would be a time during orientation or the Family Fall Weekend at the College
63 where the Town and businesses could hold a reception featuring local products and showcase the jobs
64 available in the area and programs that are available. After some discussion it was decided that the
65 schedule on campus for parents and students is too busy to include such an event.

66
67 Freidin urged the students to consider working here in the same field they might in a city, and think
68 about the advantage of working in a setting with fewer people than the larger firms. He said probably
69 most of them didn't grow up in a small town. One student said she did grow up in a small town in
70 southern New Hampshire, and came here to college, so now wants to go out into the world and see
71 what's out there and experience life outside of a small town, but doesn't rule out the possibility of
72 returning to a small town some years down the road.

73
74 Freidin asked the students what they come into town for. One student said he came to eat in the
75 restaurants, or go to the store for food. When asked if they bought clothes or sporting goods in town,
76 the students all said no. One student said the only thing they came to town for was to go to a
77 restaurant.

78
79 Kenney asked what would bring them to town. One student said the Chili Fest was a big hit, and some
80 students she talks to casually talked about a bowling alley, as a way to spend an evening. She said if
81 there were more entertainment opportunities, but all there is here now is a movie. She said promotion
82 nights at the bars would draw students, but it's cheaper to drink in their rooms with friends.

83

84 Kenney asked if there was a declining balance card that could be used in town that gave them a
85 discount, would that be an incentive, and they said it would. Calvi said when you're at a school like
86 Middlebury where room and board is included in the tuition; there is less discretionary spending money
87 to spend elsewhere.

88
89 Kelly Hickey asked the students if the Town or College made space available downtown, such as at 51
90 Main, where students could have Pop-up spaces for activities or galleries, would students be interested
91 in this and would they frequent other businesses while down here. One of the students said she knew
92 of a couple of groups on campus who were always looking for space for various activities, and spaces
93 they'd been using were no longer available, so she feels that is something students already looking for.
94 She said she couldn't say students would go to other businesses, but just getting them downtown would
95 be a start.

96
97 Rob Carter said he thinks there may be a lack of communication between the town and the College on
98 all the events that are happening downtown. He said there are activities that go on all year that would
99 be of interest to any age. Steve Boyle asked if there was a better form of communication that would
100 reach the students about the events. The students were unaware of the various local websites that
101 have the events.

102
103 Freidin said there really is no reason for the students to come down to town other than for food, and
104 Calvi disagreed. He'd heard them say they were looking for activities, experiences and a reason to get
105 together. He said the Committee had talked before about retail being more about an experience than
106 just a place to buy stuff.

107
108 Freidin asked if the students had time to come down from the campus, and one of the students said if
109 there were opportunities that were interesting she'd welcome a change of environment. Another
110 student said a change of environment is good, but tuition also covers all student activities, and there are
111 more activities on campus than they can schedule to participate in, so it's unlikely they'd schedule
112 something else and then have to pay for it on top of that.

113
114 Nick Artim said there are opportunities, and maybe Middlebury could be a place they'd start a company.
115 He said RPI, in Troy, NY, has an entrepreneurial program that works with students starting in their junior
116 year to help them establish a business. He said some of those entrepreneurs stayed in Troy and they're
117 seeing resurgence in the community. Burns said Middlebury College does have a program, and thinks
118 there needs to be some awareness building between the Town and College to make the connections
119 that would be helpful. Kenney said there was a recent workshop on entrepreneurial skills and the
120 College was involved in that, as well as in the Maker Space that's happening at the Hannaford Career
121 Center.

122
123 Freidin asked if the College wanted the students to come downtown, since they have everything the
124 students would need on campus. Burns, Curran and Ritter all said definitely they want them to go into
125 town, but Curran said they also want them to have everything they need, but they want them to

126 experience the town as well. He said some have suggested moving the bookstore downtown, but they
127 don't want to compete with the Vermont Book Store or other downtown businesses.

128

129 Dayton said a simple hour-long session in orientation called "community" could solve problems like
130 where to go in town if you need to buy boots or books, and this is where the police department and
131 town offices are. Kenney said perhaps they could also provide parents with a place they can buy gift
132 cards for their students to use downtown.

133

134 Kenney asked again about the best way to communicate with students. Various ways to communicate
135 with students was discussed, such as the Experience Middlebury website or creation of an application
136 for student phones. Calvi said it isn't just students; he has a hard time finding out what's going on in
137 town. Gish said Experience Middlebury has everything, the problem is getting the word out to people
138 that it exists.

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

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142 The next meeting of the Economic Health Committee will be Thursday, June 27, 2019 at 12 noon.

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144 Respectfully submitted,

145 Beth Dow

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