

Town of Middlebury
Economic Health Committee
Draft Minutes of Meeting
August 9, 2018

Present: Fred Kenney, Scott Gemignani, Becky Dayton, Karen Duguay, Ben Calvi, Mary Cullinane (via phone) and Alternates John Freidin and Mike Capra.

Absent: Steve Boyce, Farhad Khan and Jennifer Murray.

Also Present: David Cole

Call to Order: The meeting began at 9:00 a.m. in the Ilsley Library Community Room.

Introductions: Chair Fred Kenney asked everyone to introduce themselves and to state their main concerns. He said that Stacey Rainey had also been appointed to the Committee by the Selectboard, but has stepped aside, so the Selectboard will be appointing someone to replace her at their meeting on August 14th. He said Jennifer Murray is also on the Committee as an ex-officio member.

Mike Capra – Grew up in Middlebury, Co-owner of Denecker Chervolet and three other businesses.

- Feels retail and traffic are important to the town
- Wants affordability so his staff can reside here
- Feels there needs to be more “blue collar” retail stores in town for the locals to shop at
- Wants the Town to be supportive of those businesses

John Freidin – Has been here 50 years, taught at Middlebury College, founded and ran Vermont Bicycle Touring for 14 years, and served in the State Legislature for 8 years, where he helped write Act 60.

- Concerned about the financial stress for 50-60% of Middlebury households and the impacts on the families. Feels you can measure economic development by how much it helps these families.
- The need to identify where to locate retail development in town and the impacts this will cause.
- Feels it’s critical for Middlebury to figure out how to use the Ben Franklin Store and Greg’s Market, and feels the Town and private individuals should take the initiative.

Becky Dayton – Has been here since 1985, owns the business and real estate at 38 Main Street, serves on the Downtown Improvement District Commission, was the Board President of Hope and has served on other non-profit boards in town, and experienced the frustration as a partner in NextBridge, whose mixed use development was tabled abruptly due to lack of support from the community and Town. She’s owned the Vermont Book Store for 13 years.

- Feels the economy in Middlebury is artificially supported by business owners like herself who put all their money back into the business, and by Middlebury College.
- Feels there needs to be businesses and retail in town that appeals to low-income families.
- She thinks the area is no longer farming and manufacturing based so we need to look at where the economic vibrancy will come from.

- 42 • Need to keep Middlebury an attractive place so affluent people want to move here, because
43 they drive the economy. Middlebury needs to be attractive to draw tourists and businesses to
44 want to come here.
- 45 • She is concerned about the impact of the construction on downtown businesses.

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47 Karen Duguay – Has been the Executive Director for Better Middlebury Partnership over five years. She
48 grew up in Leicester and moved to Middlebury from New Haven about 2 years ago.

- 49 • Concerned about the cost of living in Middlebury. When trying to find a house to buy here, they
50 had a hard time finding a home they could afford. She said no one wants this to be a
51 community that young families can't afford to move to. Part of this is high property taxes and
52 wages.
- 53 • She's concerned how the downtown will adapt in the ever-changing retail pressure. Feels a
54 strong and vibrant downtown has benefits that go far beyond the downtown in a community.
- 55 • Would like to re-imagine what the downtown will look like with more family gathering spaces,
56 successful retail that will draw people in and wants to look at other communities with successful
57 downtowns.

58

59 Scott Gemignani – From Bristol originally, moved back with family, owned a State-registered, in-home
60 daycare for 7 years and opened his game store. Both the daycare and game store gave him a unique
61 look at the less fortunate people living on subsidies.

- 62 • Feels we need an attractive downtown
- 63 • We need to reach out to the under-served community and we want people who live here to
64 spend money here, as well as the people from outside the community.
- 65 • Need to look at how technology is impacting retail and communities and adjust accordingly.

66

67 Ben Calvi – General Manager of Woodchuck Cider, grew up in the Fair Haven area and graduated from
68 Middlebury College, Board member and President of Otter Creek Child Center.

- 69 • Feels early childhood education is very important and the need for affordable child care is
70 necessary to attract young professionals.
- 71 • Exchange Street infrastructure is starting to crumble, with water leaks costing his business
72 \$100,000 to \$200,000 every time they have to stop production.
- 73 • Thinks the walkways proposed on Exchange Street will attract more retail to locate there.
- 74 • Skilled labor is difficult to find and takes a long time to fill positions, so they need to attract
75 them from out of the community.
- 76 • They need to attract people to the businesses, because there isn't enough foot traffic coming in.
- 77 • Feels there is a need for better access to capital for growth. 30% of Hard Cider's production is
78 packaging for other small local businesses in the Exchange Street area. He thinks there needs to
79 be attention to scaling small businesses and you need capital to help them.

80 Mary Cullinane – Is co-owner of Community Barn Ventures with her partner, Stacey Rainey. Their
81 business helps small, Vermont businesses in all aspects of expanding their business.

- 82 • Wants to insure we remain a vibrant community by looking for solutions, and having common
83 goals and visions to get as much accomplished as possible.
- 84 • We need to be thoughtful about how retail is changing in America and how people are looking
85 more for experiences than transactions, so we need to think about what needs to be done to
86 meet that transition.
- 87 • How do we insure that the community, civic leaders and organizations are creating an
88 environment that is attractive, and we have to be proactive in this to make Middlebury the kind
89 of place people want to start their business.

90
91 Fred Kenney – Executive Director of Addison County Economic Development Corporation since January.
92 For 16 years, ran the Vermont Economic Progress Council and statewide economic development
93 programs, including business incentive programs and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) programs. Before
94 that , worked for 15 years for Senator Leahy in both Washington and Vermont.

- 95 • Concerned about the impact on the economy with the decline of Agriculture and dairy in the
96 area.
- 97 • Wants to maintain and improve the strength of our entrepreneurial ecosystem in the area.
- 98 • Wonders if Middlebury will take steps to ensure that businesses can thrive after the bridge
99 project is complete, and what will be done to take advantage to match the physical change with
100 changes in policy and strategy.
- 101 • How can we increase affordable housing?
- 102 • How will his children who just moved back to the area find jobs?

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104 Public Input

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106 David Cole, who served on the Economic Health Task Force, said he’s interested in economic
107 development, but felt the Task Force was a bit contentious and didn’t take enough risks. He moved his
108 machining and production design business back here from California, but 98% of his income still comes
109 from clients in California. He’s trying to expand his business and make local contacts. He would like to
110 see things improve so his kids will be able to relocate back here.

111
112 Committee Operations

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114 Kenney said the Committee is a public body of the Town, and is subject to the need to warn the
115 meetings and the need to follow the Open Meeting Law. He wants to have a 10 minute public comment
116 period each meeting and one entire meeting devoted to public input in a couple of months, prior to
117 submitting report to Selectboard in November.

118
119 Freidin asked if the Committee had been given a budget, in case there was a need to hire a researcher or
120 pay for people to come and speak. Freidin was also concerned about the timeline, and felt at least
121 another month was needed.

122

123 Committee Charge

124

125 Kenney went over the Committee Charge as prepared by the Selectboard, and how the Committee was
126 to start with the recommendations of the Economic Health Task Force and to suggest economic
127 development tools the Town can use with limited resources and staff. He said they don't mean specific
128 tools, but tools in a broader sense, such as to provide them with an economic development vision and
129 steps on how they can reach that vision. He said they can suggest the Town have tools at the policy
130 level, strategy level and tactical level that they don't have already, and how to better use the tools they
131 do have, such as the Business Development Funds and a website with economic development
132 information, but said the Better Middlebury Partnership's new website would take care of that. Duguay
133 said their new website would be promoting Middlebury businesses and recreational events, and was
134 more about Middlebury being a fun, happy and vibrant community.

135

136 Kenney said the Committee isn't going to have the time to do a full research paper, so parameters need
137 to be decided on and what research is needed to make short-, medium- and long-term
138 recommendations the Town can incorporate into economic development to keep Middlebury vibrant.
139 He stressed this was not just about the downtown, but the entire town and they need to be sure these
140 recommendations work with the Town and Regional Plan, and if they don't, then they need to suggest
141 these plans be changed in order to make it happen.

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143 Dayton felt the charge was too broad for a committee of this size and in this timeframe. She said this
144 has been kicked around for awhile with first a Task Force and now a committee and she didn't feel this
145 was an appropriate charge. She felt they needed to decide what they can actually achieve and what
146 they can offer to as an alternative to this Charge.

147

148 There was discussion over the scope of the Charge and why the deadline is November. Dayton said if
149 everyone was going to put their time into this, they'd rather not rush into a report until they feel good
150 about it. Cullinane said she needed a purposeful plan on how to address this challenge and it isn't going
151 to happen by the end of November. Kenney agreed the Charge was difficult and maybe the
152 Committee can suggest a framework on how the Town can look at economic development and a list of
153 things they need to address, and felt that could be accomplished in this time frame.

154

155 They discussed the retail challenge of this Charge and is this a separate issue from economic
156 development. Duguay suggested that one of the recommendations might be a separate group to study
157 just downtown retail. Freidin thought all retail areas in town need to be looked at and how they can
158 work together, and then look at individual areas like downtown and Marble Works. Kenney agreed and
159 said they need to recommend the Town look at the framework and solution for all areas of retail and
160 what tool will help these areas.

161

162 David Cole said that infrastructure was a big topic of conversation on the Economic Health Task Force,
163 specifically the water and sewer line on Exchange Street and felt this had been put off by the Town, but
164 felt using the Business Development Funds for infrastructure was not what those funds were meant for.

165 Cole asked Beth Dow, Assistant to the Town Manager who was taking meeting minutes, what was
166 happening with the Exchange Street water line. Dow said the Exchange Street water line was top
167 priority on both the Infrastructure Committee and the Selectboard's list of priorities and a hydraulic
168 study was going on now and there could be a bond vote as early as November or at Town Meeting, with
169 construction to start as early as spring of 2019.

170
171 Capra said the infrastructure is important to business and felt municipal officials don't understand
172 business and are just here for enforcement, and suggested they needed more education on what
173 businesses go through. He felt the Town needs to stop requiring businesses spend money, so that
174 money could be reinvested in the business. Gemignani said this construction project downtown and the
175 infrastructure are just problems that keep getting put off and they needed to be faced. He suggested
176 the Town offer tax incentives for day cares and companies until they could get their act together.

177
178 Duguay said the Town of Waterbury has an Economic Development staff person whose job is to find
179 businesses for empty spaces and keep an inventory of what spaces are available for new businesses, and
180 this may be something we want to recommend. She said this is a huge hole that needs to be filled.
181 Gemignani suggested that person should also be an advocate for existing businesses with landlords.
182 Calvi said maybe the Town needs to investigate why businesses leave.

183
184 Cullinane said there's no one group at fault and we need to come together to help the Town and to
185 recognize we all need to work to make this town stronger, and she feels that's the attitude that should
186 be expressed.

187
188 Kenney said he would write something up to present to the Selectboard regarding the Charge. He will
189 also ask for more time and a small budget.

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191 The next meeting of the Economic Health Committee will be at noon on Thursday, August 30, 2018 in
192 the Town Offices Large Conference Room at 77 Main Street.

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194 Respectfully submitted,
195 Beth Dow