

**Better Middlebury Partnership, August 3, 2018 Board meeting
Held at Middlebury Town Offices, 8:00am**

Attendees: Karen Duguay, Megan Mandigo, Jonathan Connor, Christy Lynn, Wendy Hirdler, Chris Hammond, Jim Gish, Russ Marsan, Farhad Khan, Peter Nelson, Dave Donahue, Rob Carter, Nancie Dunn, Amey Ryan, Amy Foote, Dave Hohenshau, Nancy Malcolm, Eric Davis

Minutes:

8:00am

Introductions for several new people attending the meeting, including a few potential new board members.

8:05am

Guest Eric Davis (Middlebury professor of Political Science) presented the idea of targeted tax free holidays for Middlebury as part of the downtown support efforts during construction. Eric and others with the Neighbors Together initiative helped formulate this idea and presented it during the last legislative session at the state house. They had conducted public surveys done at the beginning of the construction process which suggested great support for tax-free periods that would stimulate spending in Middlebury despite construction. The idea is to incentivize people to shop, dine and stay in town with a tax free period for sales and rooms & meals taxes. Tax waived on items up to \$2000. As a handout explained, the Middlebury Selectboard endorsed the proposal on June 27, 2018 and the legislature will be asked to approve the same proposal as part of the 2019 miscellaneous tax bill.

As outlined, there would be 4 tax holidays that would extend 4 days each (Thursday-Sunday) during the 10-week period of intense construction in the summer of 2020. Specific dates would be coordinated with other events that draw people to town and marketed to entice as much traffic as possible to town. Weekend stay/dine/play packages would be developed to highlight attractions and sites in the area as well.

Dave H asked, why not make it a 10-week tax holiday that would extend the whole period of construction?

Eric responded that research on tax holidays shows that shorter periods of time are most effective for drawing attention and creating buzz. He also mentioned that the statewide revenue impact as it stands would likely be between \$400-500,000. A 10-week straight plan would reach \$2-3 million.

Chris H asked about when the decision would be made.

Eric says it will first go to the House Ways & Means committee, who will review the proposal and introduce it as a bill to the legislature. He says opposition will likely lead with the "slippery slope" argument, whereby opponents will worry that every other town in the state will come up with reasons why they should also qualify for tax free holidays. Eric says,

that to that argument he would say that if other towns can prove that the economic impact of a construction project or other public infrastructure project would have similar adverse effects, then fine, they should also have this opportunity. But in reality most would not qualify in the same ways.

Eric also mentioned that Governor Scott and several cabinet members were planning county visits all around the state to review and familiarize themselves with economic activity, struggles and successes. Addison County was scheduled for September.

In conclusion, Eric said he was hopeful that the proposal would be approved thanks to it's long-term vision for success of the town, despite a loss of short term tax revenue.

8:20am

In other Neighbors Together news, Nancy M mentioned that they were reviewing opportunities to establish a free town-wide Wifi program, similar to Bristol's.

8:25am

Karen began a discussion about the board and committee structures, as outlined by the executive committee. In two small groups the executive committee met to outline the board organization and recenter the focus of the BMP as an organization.

Megan presented the ideas generated about fundraising, budgeting and financial structure. Following advice from the Middlebury College office of development, they developed a tiered plan whereby a large percentage of the fundraising budget would be met by a smaller number of higher level sustaining partners (10-12 partners at \$3,000/year). There would then be other local partner options at \$100-200, then potentially a third tier in the middle. The details of these packages are yet to be decided, but would include marketing opportunities on experiencemiddlebury.com and sponsorship of all events.

Dave D suggested that there might be an opportunity to re-engage newly motivated students Will DeGravio and Nick Graber at Middlebury College, who run the student newspaper and want to foster a stronger town connection. Specifically they are interested in bringing back the Chili Festival.

Christy presented the ideas of the executive committee group that considered our mission and what our main purposes include. Three documents were updated, including one about our mission and vision, a document about who we are and what work we do, and a document outlining why and how the business community can benefit by supporting our organization as a partner. Christy said that the idea of these documents is to help us focus on the work we have identified as our priority and be able to also define and confidently stand behind decisions not to take on other projects. With clear objectives, we can then figure out how we can support other initiatives and projects led by other groups and individuals without carrying the burden.

8:35am

Karen presented an overview of the tasks she completes each year, following a self-analysis and rough estimation exercise of her time spent on all projects.

She reported she spends roughly:

54% of her time on Special Event planning

36% of her time on Advocacy & Leadership

10% of her time on Marketing & Communications

Considering she was hired as the marketing coordinator, that seems pretty uneven and potentially should shift.

8:40am

Chris presented the idea and made a motion to Karen's title from Marketing Director/Coordinator to Executive Director of the Better Middlebury Partnership, to better represent the work that the board is asking her to do and the role she has grown into.

Dave D seconded the motion.

Discussion involved full consensus that this title should more accurately represent the work that the board feels is needed by it's only (current) paid staff member. Christy said that based on the work that the board has identified at this point, the appropriate title for that scope really is Executive Director and not Marketing Director.

While it's tempting to change this specific to Karen (who has been an exceptional employee in this role), the important decision is that the board feels it needs an ED for this job.

All approved this motion.

8:45am

Jonathan Connor will become the new treasurer of the board. He and Megan worked on a budget for the 2018-19 fiscal year. They said that the major difference with the budget versus the 2017-18 budget is in the "sponsorship & business partners" line, which reflects the new goal of reaching \$40,000 in local partnerships.

For this fiscal year, the DIDC funds totaling over \$20,000 will help balance the budget.

Amey moved to approve the budget. Dave D seconded.

Discussion started by Dave D about the \$3,000 partnership level and some of the considerations, including:

1. Want to make sure we don't alienate businesses in any given category if we are going to offer category exclusivity
2. Consider what to do if a business wants to "own" a single event
3. Need to work with these businesses to customize a package that really works for their business and might not be the same for all

All in favor of motion to approve budget.

8:55am

Karen provided update on Aug 15 block party event. Event scheduled from 4-8pm. Horse Traders would be playing on Main Street with sod laid by Carpenter & Costin. Cotton candy, snow cones, popcorn would be free. Hot dogs would be small cost, so as to not compete with food trucks. Raffle prize baskets with \$50-100 worth of local items (funded by grant money) would total \$2,000 in prizes to give away. Overall, people very excited about the event.

Karen provided update on Midd Summer Music & Movies series, which were not as great as had been hoped. Weather did not cooperate with 2 movies needing to be moved indoors and one concert rescheduled due to rain (Deb Brisson will play Aug 23). Participants who went enjoyed events, but hopefully we can get larger crowds next time.

9:05am

Nancie D provided quick update on Spooktacular, scheduled for Oct 28. She is building a committee again this year and is looking for more help. Feedback from past included the interest in having more activities leading up to the parade. Perhaps potato sack races, lawn games, cider donuts from a string, etc. Perhaps recruiting a few college students to help organize games/activities would be fun and effective.

9:10am

Karen: Looking forward, we will need to form committees for Winterfest and Very Merry Middlebury. Considering 2 Midd Night Stroll events, perhaps on the first two Thursdays of December (12-6 and 12-13). For Winterfest, considering 2-3 days of activities spread out, rather than just 1. End of February, so as not to conflict with Middlebury Winter Carnival. Russ said that in Rutland they have been able to build Winterfest to span 7 days, with lead businesses for each day who manage the activities of that day. Some ideas: giant sledding hill down their main street, human foosball tournaments, snowshoe softball, snow carving, etc.

9:15am

Karen provided other updates from Neighbors Together work, including:

- Midd Money Match program: Card could be collected from any participating business. If you spend at least \$10 at that location, they give you a stamp. Once the whole grid is stamped (10 stamps), you can redeem for \$10 of Middlebury Money. Launches Aug 15 at Block Party; no end date set.
- Website is rolling along, still on target for August completion. Karen is very excited about the progress and will have a version to show at the next board meeting.

9:20am

Jim Gish provided bridge project update. At the 6-month mark and all is going well, especially compared to other large municipal projects like Brandon and Waterbury that have struggled much more than Middlebury has in terms of impact and communication. Jim mentioned an upcoming public selectboard meeting on Aug 14 that would focus on the future of Merchant's Row and whether it would remain a 1-way road or return to a 2-way. VHB would be presenting both options.

At a TBD meeting in August the project team would also be hosting a meeting about what people wanted out of Triangle park and Printer's Alley, reviewing some proposals from LandWorks about what may be possible.

Jim also mentioned a 1-question survey that went out about what people want in the old Ben Franklin's space as well as the Clay's space. 175 responses so far, will report on findings at a later date.

9:25am

In other comments from the board, Rob C mentioned that when considering winter activities the BMP should also consider the neighboring partnerships who also organize seasonal events in Bristol and Vergennes, in hopes that we could coordinate to not compete but support all local commerce in Addison County.

9:25am

Meeting adjourned.