

Town of Middlebury
Economic Health Committee
Draft Minutes of Meeting
September 27, 2018

Present: Fred Kenney, Ben Calvi, Farhad Khan, Mike Capra, Becky Dayton, John Freidin, Steve Boyce, Mary Cullinane and Scott Gemignani (arrived immediately after minutes were approved).

Absent: Karen Duguay

Also Present: Ex Officio Member Jennifer Murray and Beth Dow, Town Staff/note taker

Call to Order: The meeting began at 12:00 p.m. in the Town Offices Large Conference Room.

The minutes were approved upon motion by Dayton, seconded by Khan. The vote was 7 in favor, 1 absent, 1 abstention (Cullinane).

Kenney said the Selectboard approved the Committee's revised charge at their September 11, 2018 meeting. Khan said the only comment was one Board member wanted timely feedback, and suggested every 3 months. Khan said the Board was told that whenever there was a milestone or recommendation it would be brought to them.

Kenney said he wanted to discuss how the Committee hoped to proceed, and what kind of information they needed, and decide who would collect and research the information, and also who would the Committee like to have come talk about their community and other economic development success stories.

Dayton thought comparable data from other communities was needed to have some type of benchmark. Calvi wanted to know what were the economic drivers in some of these successful communities and how do we stack up against them. Kenney said a lot data is not available on the municipal level, so they might have to use county data. Cullinane said it would be helpful to know what other efforts are going on currently in the community. Kenney said he knew there was a parking study currently being done by Neighbors Together, Better Middlebury Partnership (BMP) and Public Works, but he wasn't sure if it was going beyond just doing an inventory of existing parking, and maybe this committee could look into whether more parking is needed. Khan said they were also looking at better signage and creating an app for people to download and use to help locate available parking.

Cullinane said the Committee needed to have a good understanding of the charge and roles of all these other groups to be sure they aren't duplicating efforts and are working in a coordinated way. Murray asked how the Economic Health Committee could make policy-level recommendations to the Selectboard unless they're briefed on what the roll of municipal government is and how boards and committees function. Kenney said that had come up before as to what is the municipality able to do legally and operationally, or is it up to the State or region to provide. Murray and Dow suggested the

Citizens Guide to Town Government on the Town's website, and it was felt a brief presentation at the next meeting by the Town Manager and Murray would be helpful.

Freidin said he'd like to see a breakdown of household incomes for Middlebury, Murray said that's all Census data that should be in the Town Plan. He said he'd also like a diagram of where Middlebury's population lives to see where to encourage development, since you want to develop where people live so they don't have to drive there, and they can ride bikes or walk. Kenney wasn't sure how that fit into the Committee's Charge and didn't mind getting data provided it's something the Committee really needs.

Freidin also wanted an inventory of public and private parking and thinks using unused private parking should be explored. He said Hannaford's and the VFW have lots of unused parking spaces and there are other areas as well. Khan felt people parking in downtown spaces all day was more of an enforcement issue and didn't think this was part of the Committee's job. Freidin said this is an urgent matter and alternative parking should be provided to the people working downtown to free up spaces for shoppers. Dayton agreed with Khan that this was an enforcement problem and should be left to the Neighbors Together group and not an economic health issue. This was discussed further, and such things as increased parking ticket fees, parking meters and bike rentals for people parking more remotely were also mentioned.

Murray said the Neighbors Together group needed to report to the Planning Commission, since they are in charge of the Town Plan, and the Planning Commission is the umbrella group over all these issues, not the Economic Health Committee. Murray said she wanted a better understanding of what questions this Committee is trying to answer and at what scale of detail they are looking at. She wondered if they were into things like bike connections and parking meters, or is it more of a vision of where the Town should grow economically. Kenney said it's the higher vision, but also the specific things in the Charge.

Freidin said the Committee is looking at long-term strategies, but felt there were two crises to address, which are parking for the downtown and how to use the Ben Franklin space. He said they couldn't wait for the Town Plan, they need to come up with a solution now, and feels there should be a group of people assembled to take advantage of the opportunity of the vacant Ben Franklin building, and it has to be done quickly. Kenney said he had a fundamental disagreement with Freidin on what the Committee's job is. He said they aren't charged to come up with a solution to the Ben Franklin vacancy, but are supposed to look at a high level and develop the tools and structure to deal with that type of situation, because there will be other empty buildings in the future, and others on the Committee agreed with Kenney. Kenney said he isn't convinced parking is a crisis, but it isn't up to the Committee to come up with specific solution to solve the parking problem, but to recommend the tools the Town can use to build public infrastructure to help the Town.

Cullinane said as they begin to look at other small towns across the region, she thinks they'll see some macro issues they systemically tried to solve and feels this Committee should be focusing their efforts at that level of recommendation. Murray said if we want to get at what our macro issues are, the

Committee could start with some sort of SWOT analysis, or by reviewing case studies from other places, have guest speakers, and look at other ways on how to identify what the macro issues are. Calvi said the Town Plan vision is very clear, but he's not sure what tools are available to reach the vision, so he needs to hear from other communities about what tools are out there.

Freidin said he thought two critical long-term issues are long-term affordable childcare and affordable housing, so he asked if this was something the Committee could get involved in or not. Murray said that was more of a micro level issue. Freidin felt the very least the Committee could do is say these are very big impediments to economic growth. Kenney agreed and said that child care was identified as a top issue at a recent work-force development summit he'd attended, so the Committee could recommend what the Selectboard role is in this matter, yet understanding the issue at large. Freidin felt they could suggest ideas, such as using under-utilized public schools for child care, and suggesting ideas that could be tried that don't cost a lot of money. Kenney argued they can tie everything to the economic health of Middlebury; traffic, infrastructure, child care, housing, but how do they focus on what the Committee can make recommendations on to the Town.

Murray said looking at what other communities have done is a good place to start. Freidin said he'd like to get Caitlin Myers from the College Economics Department to speak with them. Gemignani said she is aware of this Committee and is interested in having her students share their findings, but that's a semester away. Dayton said she likes the idea of using the resources of Middlebury College and the students, but it's important to realize the limitations of that. She said students are students and don't know any more than the Committee does, so doesn't feel it really produces useful information. She said she is not an expert in economic health but can learn, so the only thing she thinks would be useful would be hearing from other communities who have done this successfully in Vermont, so suggested identifying these communities and invite them in to talk to the Committee.

Kenney said he had spoken to Gary Holloway of the Agency of Commerce, Department of Housing and Community Development, and he's willing to come and talk to the Committee about what he's seen around the State and what's working for other communities. He said he'd also bring the Waterbury Economic Development Director.

Dayton said she'd like to learn what a Revolving Loan Fund is. Kenney said it's his opinion this is not what the Town needs to do, since they are available already through Addison County Economic Development Corporation and other financial lenders. He said that is what the previous Economic Task Force had recommended, but he said he has other ideas for that money.

Gemignani left the meeting at this time, after suggesting everyone read through the available data on the Town website that might answer some questions.

Kenney explained that a Revolving Loan Fund is gap funding for businesses, and is the 3rd party in the financing so has the highest risk and charges a little more. He said if the Town chose to offer a Revolving Loan Fund, it would have to offer something different than what is already available and

would have to take super risks, because there are plenty of alternative financing sources available out there. Kenney will give a brief presentation at a future meeting and examples of companies that have used this gap funding.

Kenney reviewed the 7 recommendations the Economic Health Task Force had made to the Selectboard and what had happened so far, and what hadn't. One of the items mentioned was the Local Option Tax funds, and some weren't familiar with these, so Khan and Dow explained what they were and that they are being looked at for larger infrastructure projects, but any use is subject to voter approval at Town Meeting. Kenney said that was good to know in case the Committee recommends something involving infrastructure.

Calvi thought it would be helpful to hear from the various Town departments and committees about what they're working on and could this Committee help them. Murray didn't see the need for this since the minutes are available, and suggested the Committee could attend some of the other committees' meetings.

Kenney said one of the items on the Economic Health Task Force list of recommendations was to explore creating a Tax Increment Finance District (TIF), and described to the Committee what a TIF is and how they're used. He said they need to talk about it since it is in their Charge, but he said if Middlebury did use this tool, they need to determine if there would be enough infill development in downtown Middlebury to create enough revenue to pay for the scope of infrastructure needed, and he's not sure the equation equals out, but it's not off the table.

Murray came back to the Town committees reporting to the Economic Health Committee, and recommended that only committees with long-term projects come and talk to this Committee. She said not all committees have long term projects, like the Infrastructure Committee who only review items referred to them by the Selectboard with no real long-term needs of their own. She went over a scenario of how things are developed and referred for review and approved, and said the best person to start with is Town Manager Ramsay. Calvi said it's really about finding out who are the key players in the Town government to have these conversations.

There was more discussion on the Town Plan and what the status of accomplishing the vision laid out in the Plan is. Murray said the Plan is just a vision and a long-range plan that is updated all the time, so recommendations coming out of this Committee could be incorporated into it at some point.

Kenney went over the upcoming meetings, and groups that could be invited to come and speak with the Committee. The next meeting will be on October 11th, and Kenney said he'd do a summary and send it to everyone, and they'd work on that at the next meeting. He said Gary Holloway will be attending the October 25th meeting and then Ramsay, Murray and Neighborhood Together would be at the November 8th meeting. They also agreed to move the 2nd meeting in November to the week following Thanksgiving, November 29th.

Freidin volunteered to talk to the owner of the Hannaford Plaza and VFW about using some of their parking, but wants the Committee approval before doing so. Kenney said as long as he wasn't representing himself as being from the Town, but a Committee member, it would be fine.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Dow

DRAFT