



Town of Concord
Economic Vitality Committee Meeting Minutes
March 2, 2022

- Present:** John Boynton, Jennifer McGonigle, Dawn Rennert, Steven Verrill, Debra Stark, Jennifer Clarke, Jennifer Schunemann, Marie Foley, Mark Martines and Cato Anderson.
- Staff:** Marcia Rasmussen, Director of Planning and Land Management, Susan Bates, Select Board and Chris Carmody, Town Manager's Office
- Others:** Mary Hartman, Karlan Reed and Kate Yoder

The meeting was called to order at 4:08 P.M.

MINUTES

The minutes of February 2, 2022 will be reviewed and approved at the next meeting

TOWN UPDATES

Ms. Rasmussen stated that through the Micro-Enterprise Grant six businesses in town received funds totaling \$115,000. Our goal was to distribute \$210,000 in funds but that did not happen. The remaining \$95,000 from the grant was distributed to businesses throughout the other 23 communities that were involved. We did not need to give any money back to the Federal Government.

There will be a new program being offered in partnership with the Visitor's Center and the Colonial Inn highlighting the Alcott sisters of Little Women fame. It will be a living history session held at the Inn and tea and cake will be served.

There have been seven candidates who applied for the position of Public Health Director. Of those candidates three will be moving forward in the interview process. Ms. Rasmussen asked the Committee Members to email her any ideas for questions that they would like her to consider for the interviews.

Anne Burke has held four Focus Groups to discuss what people want to see in the Business Districts in the future. One of her conclusions was that there is a strong interest in continuing Concord Together. She will be conducting a Zoom Meeting on Friday at 9:00 A.M. to meet with members of Concord Together and see what they want to accomplish going forward.

Mr. Carmody stated that Public Hearings have begun in relation to warrant articles for the upcoming Town Meeting. The latest reports have been posted to the Town's website. A new staff member has been hired in the Town Manager's Office to fill a vacant position. Meeting by Zoom Conferencing has been extended until July 2022. Many Board's and Committee's are using the Hybrid Format for their meetings. The mask mandate in Concord has been lifted. There are discussions around how to distribute the \$5.6M in ARPA funding. Ms. Ackerman is developing a list of priorities and the idea of using it in 25% increments over a 5 year period. Ms. LaFleur would not like to use all of the money on one project and reserve some for new programs and ideas.

LETTER TO SELECT BOARD

Mr. Martines stated that he put together a draft of recommendations for the Select Board based on observations from the Committee. There is a strong need for funding the position of Economic Vitality Officer to help new businesses navigate the permitting process in town. He asked whether the Committee could have some input into the hiring of town staff. He stated that the regulatory process needs to be streamlined.

Mr. Boynton asked if someone from this committee would be able to participate in the hiring process of town staff. Ms. Rasmussen stated that hiring of staff is the responsibility of the Town Manager and procedures need to be followed if this were to happen.

Mr. Martines stated that it would be helpful if a representative of this committee were able to see job descriptions and resumes of potential town staff. The Committee Members have diverse backgrounds in business and it might be helpful to hear from them as to the business communities priorities and goals.

Ms. Rasmussen asked the Committee to identify which positions they are referring to. The process of hiring a Public Health Director has been very challenging. She feels fortunate to have candidates, with municipal experience, apply for the job after navigating the pandemic over the last 2 years. The position involves many facets of Public Health that many people are not aware of and that we also cover the Town of Lincoln. The staff continues to be over-worked and under-staffed. There are many historical responsibilities that have been included in the job over time. Mr. Carmody asked of the Committee, what are the needs that are not being met?

Mr. Martines stated that the permitting process in Concord is a challenge. We are losing tenants to Lexington and Maynard where the process is more efficient and less expensive.

Ms. Rasmussen stated that she is hearing everything that the Committee is expressing but there are an equal number of people who are satisfied with the level of service they receive in Concord. The regulations are set and although it takes a lot of communication to satisfy the regulations it does happen. She would welcome anyone sharing a specific instance where they were not satisfied with the level of service provided by the Town.

Mr. Boynton stated that the letter that we send to the Select Board will be recommendations. He stated that the hiring of an Economic Vitality Officer is a recommendation to the Select Board as well as the Business Community have a role in hiring of Town Staff. He also stated that streamlining the regulatory process is both a recommendation and a project.

Ms. Bates stated that recommending streamlining the regulatory process is too broad and vague and needs to be focused with specifics.

Mr. Verrill stated that he served on the Natural Resources Commission approximately 10 years ago and they focused on stopping people from doing things within the wetlands. There should be further Customer Service Training within departments.

Ms. Hartman stated we need a Guidebook to assist potential new businesses to town. Streamlining the Regulatory Process is more of a long-term project.

Ms. Foley stated a potential business owner contacted her about opening a flower business in town. They asked her whom they should contact. She directed them to the Town Manager's Office.

Ms. Rasmussen showed the Committee the Guidebook for potential businesses that was developed in 2016 and is currently on the town's website.

Mr. Martines stated that the Select Board and the Town Manager are setting the tone for the Town and Town Staff should be more welcoming to potential business owners.

Ms. Clarke stated that the Concord Business Partnership will be welcoming Economic Vitality Officers, from various towns, to speak at their next meeting.

Ms. Yoder stated that the West Concord Cultural District would like to be included with the Economic Vitality Plan in the future.

Ms. Rasmussen and Ms. Williams will be speaking with a representative from the Town of Lexington about the process of opening a business in their town.

Mr. Boynton stated that there is support from the Committee for the 1st and 3rd items on Mr. Martines list, including the need for an Economic Vitality Officer and developing a Guidebook for potential new businesses in town.

Ms. Bates confirmed that we already have a Guidebook which was published in 2016. The meeting the Concord Business Partnership will be holding, with Economic Vitality Officers from other towns, will be useful.

Mr. Boynton stated that points 1 and 3 that were outlined by Mr. Martines should be included in the letter to be sent to the Select Board.

Ms. Rasmussen stated that the Guide that is already on the website should be combined with one for Economic Development. The Committee would need to figure out how to do this since she has limited resources.

Ms. Foley stated that potential business owners don't know where to start with the permitting process. It would be helpful if a page on the website indicated which department they need to contact for different types of businesses.

Ms. Clarke stated that the hiring of an Economic Vitality Officer will be very helpful to the town.

Mr. Martines stated that there is a need for a liaison between the business community and the town. There is a need for the business community to be aware of legislation and ideas as they

are proposed, such as the building of The Mews. He questioned whether the economic impact of that project was thoroughly studied when it was approved. The vitality of businesses should be a goal like other projects in town. We need to bridge the gap and the Economic Vitality Officer will be the first point of contact for potential new business owners. The recommendations to the Select Board should be made soon to potentially be considered for the budget process for FY 2024.

Ms. Rasmussen stated that the Town Manager from Reading is currently working part-time in the Finance Department and he would be a great resource for the Committee to speak with.

Mr. Martines will draft a letter to the Select Board and the Committee will review it at their next meeting.

Ms. Hartman stated that the Select Board is meeting on March 14 to discuss transportation issues in Town.

Mr. Boynton thanked Ms. Rasmussen for everything she does to keep the town running smoothly. Her work is invaluable and much appreciated.

ADJOURNMENT

On a **MOTION** made by Ms. Stark it was **APPROVED** by roll call vote:

Mr. Anderson -	Aye
Ms. Foley -	Aye
Mr. Martines -	Aye
Ms. Stark -	Aye
Ms. Rennert -	Aye
Ms. McGonigle -	Aye
Mr. Boynton -	Aye
Mr. Verrill -	Aye

to **ADJOURN** the meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 5:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn H. Dee