



Town of Concord
Economic Vitality Committee Meeting Minutes
April 6, 2022

- Present:** Jennifer Schunemann, Chair, Jennifer McGonigle, Dawn Rennert, Steven Verrill, Debra Stark, Cato Anderson and Remon Karian.
- Staff:** Marcia Rasmussen, Director of Planning and Land Management, Elizabeth Hughes, Town Planner, Gabrielle White, Public Health Inspector
- Others:** Mary Hartman, Jennifer Clarke, Concord Business Partnership

The meeting was called to order at 4:03 P.M.

CHAIR UPDATES

Ms. Schunemann informed the Committee that Mr. Boynton has resigned due to business issues he needed to focus on. She thanked him for his leadership and commitment to the Economic Vitality of Concord and wished him well. He will be missed. She is currently recruiting for new Committee Members and would like to see some more members from the Cultural Institutions as Jan Turnquist, Alcott House, is understaffed and cannot always join the meetings.

VISITOR'S CENTER

Ms. Rasmussen shared some updates from Beth Williams who was unable to attend the meeting. The Bike Share Program launched this weekend. Bicycles are available to use at the Visitor's Center and the Rail Trail. The Visitor's Center is now open Monday – Sunday 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. Around 200 people visited the Center the first weekend they were open. Ms. Williams is working with Bedford, Acton and Community Education to develop a Walking For Fitness Tour of Concord.

VILLAGE CENTER ASSESSMENT STUDY

Ms. Rasmussen shared that the Village Center Assessment Study is complete and is available for all to review. She stated that Anne Burke is willing to come to an EVC Meeting to discuss the results of the study. The Department of Planning and Land Management has developed a draft of a guide, to aide restauraners, through the process of opening a restaurant in Concord. Ms. Hughes and Ms. White will present the draft to the Committee.

RESTAURANT GUIDE

Ms. Hughes and Ms. White presented the document by Power Point which was titled, A Food Service Operators Guide. This is meant to be a guide to the permitting process for prospective restauraners who are considering opening a restaurant in Concord. They stated that an ongoing issue is that restauraners do not come to them with questions until after they sign their lease. They are not aware of the permitting process and the issues that may arise. Ms. Hughes and Ms. White worked with the Building Department to develop this guide to help prospective restaurant owners considering coming to Concord.

Within Concord different business Districts have unique characteristics and different rules for each. There are 9 key items to consider when thinking about opening a restaurant. There is currently a bylaw that does not allow Fast Food Restaurants in town. All restaurants must have

at least 12 seats and 51% of the restaurant needs to have a sit-down option. This was put into place to limit the amount of trash that is generated and air pollution from cars that are idling waiting at a fast food restaurant. This applies to all food establishments in Concord. Ms. Hughes and Ms. White are going to re-examine this bylaw as food establishments have changed in relation to offering take-out especially in the wake of the pandemic.

Restaurants must have a specific number of parking spaces in relation to the size of the restaurant. Many buildings in town have multiple uses and have parking issues. There are also Water and Sewer Issues as the cost of the Sewer Improvement Fee can be significant and must be paid in full prior to opening the restaurant.

The Committee stated that some restauranters are choosing other towns to open their restaurant because of this fee. They suggested that restauranters could go on a payment plan to cover the cost.

Ms. Hughes stated that any changes to this policy would involve a conversation between numerous Town Departments, the Select Board and the Town Manager. This fee is charged to the property owner because it is a sewer access fee.

Ms. Stark stated that for all the work the Water and Sewer Department is doing to bring the infrastructure into the 21st Century, the cost to businesses is a bargain. Mr. Verrill stated that the cost to the business owner is not unreasonable over a period of time just not to be paid all at once. The Committee will continue discussing this at a future meeting.

To open a restaurant in Town Ms. White stated there are certain requirements in relation to:

Restrooms – Must be handicap accessible which involves a large area of space. This is a state requirement

Safe Food Code Requirements - Based on the menu of the Restaurant which indicates what kind of food equipment they will need to process the food. Restaurant Owners should hire a Food Consultant to help with this complicated, costly process.

The Committee inquired whether the Town could hire someone as a Food Consultant. It was stated that Town Employees do not act as consultants.

Trash/Recycling – Specific rules for disposal of trash and recycling

Signage/Historic District – Specific rules for signage in Historic Districts

Outdoor Seating – Capacity and where it will be placed

If a formerly retail space is converting to a restaurant they will need to produce a site plan and have it approved by the Planning Board. This process can take up to 2 – 3 months to complete.

There is a Town Advisory Review Team composed of members from the Health Division, Planning and Land Management, Building Division, Fire Services and the Water/Sewer Division. They are available to speak with any potential commercial or residential owner who is thinking of opening a business in town or planning a subdivision. They would like to speak to

people about everything that is involved with the permitting process before they sign a lease. By speaking with people before the project begins the owner has all the information they need and can eliminate costly changes which may occur. Around 70% of new projects applicants contact the team for review of the project prior to beginning the project.

Although some people may choose to open their business in another Town, the Committee agreed that this is a valuable resource for people coming into town and would like to advertise that this is available.

Ms. Hughes will circulate the guide to the EVC Committee and if they have any comments or suggestions they should send them to Ms. Hughes or Ms. White. Ms. Stark stated that she consulted with the Town Advisory Review Team twice and they were a good resource. She stated that Concord is the most difficult town to meet all the permitting requirements. Ms. Schunemann thanked Ms. Hughes and Ms. White for their very informative presentation and will put reviewing this guide as an agenda item on the next 1 or 2 meetings.

TOWN UPDATES

Ms. Schunemann stated that the Patriot's Day Parade is scheduled for April 18, 2022. Roads will be closed at 8:30 A.M. with the parade beginning at 9:30 A.M. There will also be a Dawn Salute, Meriam's Corner Exercises and activities at the North Bridge. All the information for these activities in on the Visitor's Center webpage on the Town's website.

Mr. Verrill stated that business continues to grow. With the cost of food increasing they have had to raise some of their prices at the farm stand.

Ms. Schunemann stated that the cost of materials has risen significantly for her business.

Mr. Anderson stated that there is nothing new with his Insurance Business.

Ms. Stark stated that the expansion of her business continues but the new area is not ready to open. She is hiring new staff for when the expanded section opens.

Ms. Rennert stated that visitors to The Concord Bookshop has increased. This past Saturday she held her first in store event since 2020 and it was well attended.

Mr. Karian stated that he will again be offering Outdoor Dining this summer. He is also experiencing food price increases but does not feel like he can pass that on to the consumer. He is also experiencing supply chain issues. Visitors to his restaurant has increased and his staff continues to return.

Ms. McGonigle stated that the 5-year anniversary of Joy Street Life + Home is today. The Committee congratulated her. She stated that visitors to her business varies day to day.

The tours of West Concord will resume on May 21, 2022. They are usually available when something is going on in West Concord.

Mr. Anderson stated that the Restaurant Guide is a step in the right direction. Mr. Martines is working on a draft letter to send to the Select Board encouraging them to consider hiring a Business Liaison for the town. The Committee would like to get support for this from the Concord Business Partnership, Concord Together and the Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Clarke stated that the meeting this morning with representatives of surrounding towns was very informative and helpful to gain understanding on how they approach Economic Vitality in their towns. Included on the Zoom Call were members of the Select Board, Ms. LaFleur, Ms. Rasmussen and members this committee.

Ms. Schunemann stated that the group known as Concord Together was invaluable during the pandemic in aiding local businesses in navigating resources they could use to help them during the challenging period. Since we are coming out of the pandemic the group has ceased to meet regularly but there is an interest in reviving the group.

Ms. Hartman stated that the idea of creating a position for a Business Liaison in Concord is a good idea and needs to be driven by the Town Manager. She also stated that the election will be held on Tuesday.

Mr. Karian stated that the Business Liaison position needs support from the Town Manager and the Select Board.

Ms. Schunemann encouraged the committee members to reach out to Mr. Boynton and thank him for his time on the committee and wish him well in the future.

ADJOURNMENT

On a **MOTION** made by Ms. Rennert seconded by Mr. Verrill it was **APPROVED** by roll call vote:

Mr. Verrill -	Aye
Ms. Schunemann -	Aye
Mr. Anderson -	Aye
Ms. Stark -	Aye
Ms. Rennert -	Aye
Mr. Karian -	Aye
Ms. McGonigle -	Aye

to **ADJOURN** the meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 5:37 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn H. Dee