



**Town of Concord**  
**Economic Vitality Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**May 4, 2022**

- Present:** Jennifer Schunemann, Chair, Dawn Rennert, Steven Verrill, Marie Foley, Remon Karian and Mark Martines
- Staff:** Marcia Rasmussen, Director of Planning and Land Management, Beth Williams, Tourism Manager and Linda Escobedo, Select Board
- Others:** Mary Hartman, Jennifer Clarke, Kate Yoder and Ann Burke

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 P.M.

**REMEMBRANCE FOR DEBRA STARK**

Ms. Schunemann paid tribute to Committee Member Debra Stark who passed away in April. She stated that Debra was an incredible person, caring and kind and always put the community first. Ms. Foley stated that Debra's goal was to make Concord a community where everyone was welcome. She called that "The Debra Effect" helping to guide everyone on their path in life. Committee Members echoed this sentiment and paid tribute to a wonderful woman who will be greatly missed.

**RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS**

Ms. Schunemann thanked Susan Bates, Select Board for her work in forming this Committee and her great support over the years. Ms. Bates term with the Select Board in coming to an end in May and a replacement will be chosen at the Town Election.

The number of Committee Members has declined and it is important to be thinking about new members to recruit to fill the vacant positions. Mr. Boynton resigned because he has many business dealings in Russia and his business has been deeply impacted by the war with Ukraine. He needs to focus on the welfare of his employees there. In thinking about new Committee Members to recruit it is important that we make sure that all sectors of the business community are represented including the Cultural Community. Ms. Schunemann asked Kate Yoder of the Cultural District Committee to join our meeting today to observe and think about being a potential new member.

Ms. Schunemann asked the Committee Members to think about where the gaps are with our committee membership and where we need to fill in. Mr. Verrill stated that he has spoken to Mike Lawson, former Select Board Member, and he is interested in joining our committee. He is currently on another committee so the Select Board would have to decide if they would appoint him to two committees. Ms. Rasmussen stated that with the challenges we are facing with recruiting new Board and Committee Members, the DPLM is currently talking with the Select Board about modifying the current practice of term limits. With the Planning Board, members may serve a 5-year term but they may not return to the Board even after a period of time has passed. She is looking at revising that rule.

Ms. Schunemann stated that the EVC was formed in 2019 and all members will have served for 3 years at the end of 2022. She asked the Committee Members if any of them are not going to

serve another 3 year term after this year. No Committee Members stated they would be leaving the Committee.

When the Committee was formed in 2019 they were focused on one mission which changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. She would like to return to the original mission that the Committee was formed for. In the beginning the Committee was modeled with a Chairperson and a Co-Chairperson. Do we want to return to that model? With a Chair and Co-Chair we always have to be mindful of the Open Meeting Law and not violating it by talking about agenda items prior to the meeting. We will continue our discussion on Committee Structure at the meeting in June.

Ms. Foley stated we need a succession plan if members decide to leave the Committee. Mr. Martines stated that he would like to see new members with business experience like John and Debra. John brought his knowledge of the permitting process and working with tenants to the committee and Debra brought her business knowledge of West Concord and how that district interacts with the other districts in town.

Ms. Yoder suggested that the Committee Members depart the committee on a staggered rotation schedule so they are not all departing all at once. Ms. Rennert liked this idea.

Ms. Schunemann suggested that another member from the Restaurant Community would be helpful to the Committee. She would like to continue this discussion at the next meeting as well as have the Committee Members think about when they would like to cycle off of the Committee. She stated we have the ability to add 4 new members.

### **ECONOMIC VITALITY OFFICER**

Ms. Schunemann stated that she has filed the year end report with the Town. She would like to develop a “wish list” that would outline the duties that an Economic Vitality Officer would perform. Once this is developed she would like to circulate it to the Concord Business Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce for their comments.

One of the items on the list would be to streamline the process for opening a business in town and how do all the pieces fit together. The DPLM stated that tenants will sign a lease for a space before they speak to the Planning Office about the permitting process. This produces frustration with both parties.

Mr. Martines stated that the Town of Lexington has a Economic Vitality Officer modeled after a Concierge. This officer could market the benefits of doing business in Concord. The Town is interested in recruiting small, sustainable businesses and is not in favor of formula businesses. The officer would also be able to help existing businesses grow. Ms. Foley stated that District Management is an important function as business traffic and retail space is different in each district.

The Committee would like this person to have a business-friendly personality and be the face of Government with the Retail and Business Community. Ms. Yoder inquired as to how to determine the right mix of businesses for the Town.

Mr. Martines inquired as to why there are so many vacancies in town such as where Serafina, Salem Five and Janigian Rugs were formerly located. It was stated that there are many issues involved with new businesses coming into vacant retail spaces such as zoning, regulation issues, a lease and the property owner's choice.

### **VILLAGE CENTER ASSESSMENT STUDY – ANN BURKE**

Ms. Burke presented the Committee with the results of the Village Center Assessment Study she conducted. The survey results were provided to the Committee Members and she asked if anyone had any questions. She stated she had a good response from consumers but was hoping for a better response from business owners. She sent out a paper survey and also conducted Focus Groups to see what people wanted to see in Concord.

When asked why people visited Concord the response was:

1. Weekly or Monthly Short Visits – Hair Cut, Dr. Appointment etc.
2. Walkability, Historical Resources and Unique Character
3. Attractive, Friendly and Welcoming

Respondents were interested in supporting businesses who practice sustainability. There was generally a high rate of satisfaction with the businesses in town. They would like to see more events to bring people into town such as music festivals and cultural events. This would bring more destination drivers into town.

One issue that was noted is that new businesses need reliable WIFI and that is not always available in Concord. They would also like to see more connection between Village Districts. While 50% of the respondents said they had issues with permitting, 50% said they had no issues navigating the permitting process. It was noted that the City of Chicopee and the Town of Ludlow employs an expediated permitting process which helps to attract and retain businesses.

The Focus Groups noted the following:

1. They maintained their support for the Buy Local Initiative and they would like that to continue.
2. How do we encourage the Visitor's to shop here? This is a piece of market potential that is not fully utilized.
3. We need more signs pointing to the different districts.
4. More Public Restrooms are needed.
5. Transportation is needed to link the different districts.
6. Permitting continues to be an issue.
7. More Outdoor Seating and Dining is needed.
8. Parking Issues need to be addressed.
9. Incentives for Property Owners to rent to diverse tenants.
10. The Village Centers need to be beautified

The Focus Groups commented that Concord Together was a valuable resource during COVID and they would like to see where they stand as far as continuing as a group.

Ms. Schunemann stated that Concord Together was never formed as a committee. They were a collaborative group formed to help businesses navigate during the COVID-19 Pandemic. They have offered to help us when they can but they have moved on to take care of their own businesses. The Committee appreciates the spirit of collaboration they fostered.

Ms. Burke stated she appreciates everyone who participated in the survey and the Focus Groups. Some of the suggestions were policy recommendations which will not involve using a budgeted amount of money. Other suggestions were recommendations that will involve using a budgeted amount of money. How do we bring both of those to fruition? She noted that 98% of the respondents to the survey were Concord Residents as opposed to Visitors to Concord. It was stated that the Town is not exhibiting a business-friendly atmosphere with Town Officials. Ms. McGonigle is working on a manual on how to get started in business, in Concord.

Ms. Schunemann asked Mr. Karian if the town is exhibiting a desire to continue with Outdoor Dining. Mr. Karian stated that there are many regulations that need to be followed which may result in a significant investment for the restauranter. You need to have a balance between Indoor and Outdoor Dining and separate spaces for Outdoor Dining. He cannot see his business committing completely to a separate space for outdoor dining.

Ms. Burke stated there is a resource available titled “Outdoor Dining Tool Kit” which helps businesses navigate the regulations surrounding outdoor dining. Some towns built Parklets for Restaurants to use. There is a disconnect between the state and towns with Outdoor Dining. It is difficult in Concord because Restaurants are spread out and not in a cluster as in some other towns. You need to create reasons for people to come here. She stated that many people indicated that the Town Staff was very helpful to the applicants while the Citizen Boards were less helpful. How do we streamline Citizen Boards to be mindful of the time it takes for permits to be approved? The town does not want to be perceived as anti-business. She suggested implementing some suggestions now and not to wait until an Economic Vitality Officer is hired as they will not solve all the problems Concord is facing.

Mr. Martines stated he has sent a draft of a letter for the Select Board to Ms. Schunemann for her review. Ms. Hartman stated that sending the letter to the Town Manager and the Select Board was a good idea. Ms. Schunemann thanked Ms. Burke and Ms. Rasmussen for all their work in compiling all the data collected from the survey and the Focus Groups.

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

Ms. Escobedo stated that the Select Board is listening to what the Committee is saying but are facing challenges right now with staffing of Town Positions.

Mr. Martines asked if there were any actionable takeaways from this meeting.

Ms. Schunemann listed the following:

1. Finish the letter to the Select Board
2. Put a “wish list” together for the Economic Vitality Officer Position
3. Think about potential new committee members
4. Complete the “How To Get Started In Business” manual

5. Committee Members may send potential agenda items to her for inclusion on the agenda

She stated the Committee needs to focus on:

1. Helping new businesses coming into town
2. Connecting Residents and Visitors with our businesses

She asked the Committee what their top 2 priorities are and if they are willing to help with getting these done. Mr. Martines states he would like to see the letter sent to the Select Board and allow the Business Community to have input with key hiring positions.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

Ms. Rennert -	Aye
Ms. Schunemann -	Aye
Mr. Martines -	Aye
Mr. Karian -	Aye
Mr. Verrill -	Aye
Ms. Williams -	Aye

to **ADJOURN** the meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 5:32 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn H. Dee