Members present: Harry Bartlett, Lisa Evans, Carlene Hempel (chair), Margot Kimball, Ann Sussman, Jen Montbach

Members absent: Kate Yoder

Visitors: Marcia Rasmussen, director, Planning and Land Management, town of Concord; Jane Obbagy, director, Concord Chamber of Commerce; Jen Mecca and Kathy McCabe, consultants from McCabe Enterprises

West Concord Junction Cultural District Plan: Consultants Kathy McCabe and Jen Mecca outlined results of three of the four surveys conducted among residents, artists and business owners in and around the Village, as well as laid out the goals of the project.

There were 25 artists represented in the surveys who either live or have studios in West Concord. Among those respondents, 28 percent said they were willing to help organize and participate with the arts district, while 22 percent they were not willing. Kathy thought that second number was worrying, noting “many hands make light work.” More than one-third of respondents said they were willing to participate in organized events but specified they did not want to make monetary contributions. Kathy mentioned that this means sponsorships are necessary to fund future events.

Harry made the point that many people in the Village likely identity as “light industrial” or “fabricator” rather than traditional artist, which might have affected the results of the artist surveys. Others agreed that perhaps “artisan” would have been a better word to use than “artist.”

There were 36 respondents to the business survey, the bulk of whom were retailers.

There were 134 respondents to the resident survey.

Kathy noted that the small business community and artist community have a lot in common in terms of needs. They are also both “stretched” for resources and time, and both supported building the Village into a stronger economic base.

Kathy and Jen recommended advancing a “Main Street” model for the Village, which would involve creating a private/public partnership including various constituencies including the town, businesses and residents. The effort would have a four-point approach: Design (which looks at improving the physical environment of a place and “placemaking”); Organization (developing a
public/private partnership and building organizational capacity); Promotion (image and branding including signage and wayfinding), and; Economic Vitality (ensuring visitors to the area who will pay for events, art, support businesses, etc.). An effort such as this requires seed money funding, which would likely involve establishing a business improvement district, noted McCabe. But she cautioned against certain phrasing for such an effort, such as creating an “economic council” because some constituencies would bristle at that suggestion.

Kathy and Jen noted that the full report would be available for the committee’s review by late June.

Porchfest update: Jen handed out a map with the participants so far, which included 9 hosts and 11 bands. The goal is 25 hosts. She noted tasks to be completed over the summer, including contacting the Concord Journal, Patch, etc., developing a social media campaign, creating lawn signs and developing partnerships with local businesses such as Reasons to be Cheerful.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

Next meeting: The next regular meeting is scheduled for July 2, 7 p.m. in the Harvey Wheeler Community Center.

Respectfully submitted,

Carlene Hempel