

The Town of Brooklyn Economic Development Commission

Chairperson, Robert Simons

(860)774-6544

*Meeting the First Tuesday of every month @ 4pm at the
Clifford B Green Memorial Center*

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 2, 2019

Members present: Cary Garcia, Robert Simons, Jeff Gagnon, Chris Landis

Other board/commission members present: Rick Ives, Joe Voccio, Jana Roberson, Austin Tanner, Wayne Jolley, Sandy Brodeur, Lou Brodeur, Jules D'Agostino

- 1) Call to order – Mr. Simons called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
- 2) Approval of minutes – Mr. Landis made a motion to approve the February minutes, seconded by Mr. Gagnon. All in favor.
- 3) Brooklyn Branding/NECOG/Discussion
 - a) Mr. Simons gave a background of the NECOG branding discussion the EDC has been having for the past year, stating that the Commission is looking to create a sub group of individuals interested in helping drive this project. Discussion continued with Mr. Simon's agenda questions:
 - How can the town become a destination for people to do business and to visit?
 1. Nick Stein, of Pomfret, stated that he comes to Brooklyn for Walmart, Sweet Peas, and the disc golf course. Discussion continued regarding a lack of reasons to stay in Brooklyn to grab a drink or a bite to eat.
 2. It was suggested that since Thompson has a disc golf course that perhaps the two towns could have a tournament.
 3. Empty storefronts were discussed. Theresa Lazure of the audience stated she had gone to Colchester and there was a quality consignment store in a plaza similar to that of the Ocean State Job Lot plaza. Comparisons were made to Marlborough and Chepachet.
 4. A green space for visitors was another suggestion. The group agreed that Prince Hill and Riverside Park provided green space but may not necessarily be known to visitors.

5. The group also cited many wonderful programs available through the Recreation Department.

- b) Mr. Voccio requested that rather than go through the agenda questions, Mr. Simons explain what the EDC has accomplished. Mr. Simons discussed that over many years the EDC was involved with the establishment of the Brooklyn Business Association and business recognition/plaque presentations. He stated that the commission feels limited with what it can do as key information related to economic growth in Brooklyn is often not shared with the commission. Mr. Simons stated that the commission could hire a part-time EDC coordinator or have someone currently on staff take on the role if budgeted.
- c) Discussion continued revealing frustrations between the EDC and First Selectman. Both are looking to each other to guide the goals of the commission and Town. Mr. Simons stated that the EDC is looking to gather feedback from citizens of the town regarding what is important to them, with a likely goal of keeping the mill rate down. What is not clear is whether this should be done through an increase in new business or new residential tax revenue.
- d) Communications - It was discussed that Social Media would be an effective way of reaching townspeople. Other suggested options were Spectrum's free public access channel, WINY, the e-subscriber option on the town website, the Turnpike Buyer, and the Norwich Bulletin.
 - Nick Stein stated that in Pomfret, an online survey was posted on the Town website for anyone to complete (town citizens, visitors, etc.). He stated it reach about 40% of the town and provided some good feedback.
- e) Mr. Gagnon began a discussion about the attraction of the Coventry Farmers Market which has become a destination for people from all over the state. He suggested that as an agricultural town we could make our farmers market a bigger success and attraction, specifically by moving it to a nicer location and at a better time. Mrs. Brodeur spoke up stating that she is a member of the Agricultural Commission, which oversees and regulates the farmers markets in the area. It was suggested to the Ag Commission that the farmers market be moved to a better location, such as the Fairgrounds, however the commission said no.
- f) Mr. Gagnon raised the question as to whether Vacancy Taxation has ever been discussed as a way to put pressure on the owner of commercial properties that have sat vacant for years. Mr. Ives stated that it has come up in the past.
- g) Mr. D'Agostino suggested creating some focus groups to ask the citizens of Brooklyn what direction they would like to see the town move towards.
- h) The group discussed how to bring business in when the continued reputation is that Brooklyn is bad for business. Mrs. Brodeur stated that often the frustration comes from not knowing where to go first. She suggested the EDC create a "How to set up business in Brooklyn" packet.
- i) Given that there was a group of approximately 14 individuals in attendance, enough to make a focus group, Mr. Simons asked everyone to answer the agenda questions he presented:

- How can the town make better use of Social Media to communicate within the town and with people from the outside?
- How can the town make better use of its attractions?
 - Fair Grounds
 - Revolutionary history
 - Commercial Corridor
 - Parks
 - Other??
- How can the town evolve and attract new people and industry (what type of businesses would fit)?
- How do people remember the old town and decide what they want to evolve to?
- How can the town website be improved to communicate within the town and
 1. what do people need to be able to access to make it more helpful?
- How can the next revision of the Plan of Conservation and Development be better communicated to various boards, organizations and businesses in the town?

4) Public Commentary

- a) Nick Stein stated that he was in attendance to present a way to evolve and attract new business to Brooklyn through the legal marijuana industry. He feels Brooklyn is positioned as a regional center between both New York City and Boston. He also stated that it would be a tremendous source of tax revenue. Mr. Ives stated that zoning regulations would allow it and there has been some interest. However given the discussion the group just had, it was not an appropriate time to discuss the topic.
- b) Earl Stark brought a guest with him. Ryan and his wife recently moved to Brooklyn and stated that he feels the EDC needs to find its own identity. He had been hoping for more direction from the meeting.

5) New Business

- a) It was discussed that the regular 4:00 meeting time was not conducive to business owners and others who work during that time. Mr. Landis stated that for many years the meeting times were later and there was still low attendance at meetings. However, EDC members were willing to meet later and will hold the next meeting on Tuesday, May 7th at 6:30 pm. Mr. Simons will confirm the date and location with town hall and put out an agenda two weeks in advance to people giving feedback to the above questions.
- 6) Adjournment - A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Landis, seconded by Mr. Gagnon. All in favor. The meeting adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cary Garcia, Secretary