

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, February 5, 2019

Members present: Cary Garcia, Robert Simons, Jeff Gagnon, Chris Landis (by phone)

Also present: Earl Starks, AJ Kerouac

- 1) Call to order – Mr. Simons called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.
- 2) Approval of minutes – Mrs. Garcia made a motion to approve the December minutes, seconded by Mr. Gagnon. All in favor.
- 3) Public Commentary – AJ Kerouac discussed his ongoing difficulties and frustrations with supposed blight and health department complaints against his property on South Main St. He stated that residents in the area have been instructed to use his property to park on. He feels he is being unfairly targeted stating that other owners of blighted properties in Brooklyn are not being targeted and sent \$50/day fines. He also states that in the year and a half he has owned the property it has not further deteriorated and there were no complaints against the previous owner of the property. Mr. Kerouac also stated that further investigation into the complaints uncovered that there were no actual complaint letters, as he had been previously told. Mr. Kerouac's reason for discussing this issue with the EDC was to make the Commission aware of how business owners and investors can be treated within Brooklyn, and that this is why Brooklyn may be perceived as an unfriendly place for business. Mr. Simons encouraged Mr. Kerouac to discuss the issue with the First Selectman if he cannot get productive discussions with enforcement officials of the town.
- 4) Brooklyn Branding/NECOG/Discussion
 - a) Mr. Simons contacted Thompson First Selectman, Ken Beausoleil, and Town Clerk, Rene Waldron about their experience with the NECOG branding project. Below is a summary:
 - Ken Beausoleil – First Selectman – 1/10/2019 Discussion
 - Began study in 9/7/2017: completed initial study
 - There are 10 villages which people are tied to. How can they be united?
 - Town Website had to be redone from scratch. The town just implemented change this month.
 - They brought in NECCOG to get unbiased help.

- **Goal:** make town more attractive to small businesses and for people to relocate to. There is a plan to renovate 750k Sq. ft. textile mill to residential (not low income). Apartments 700-1300 sq ft.
- Try to figure out how to make the town a destination. Below are some town assets:
 - Quaddick Pond state park
 - Blackstone Line
 - Trails for walking and biking
- The town needs to have a product before they can hire an economic development coordinator.
- Their town planner left for Plainfield subsequently and the project lost some momentum.
- The town used to revolve around mills; everybody walked. How can the town evolve and attract new people and industry (primarily small mom and pop businesses)?
- Rt 12 and Rt 131 corridor: textile mills and mill houses – convert to small neighborhood businesses. Maybe control facades. Add bed and breakfasts. Anya's Restaurant is new and upscale.
- Many people remember what the old town was; however, the town needs to evolve.
- What are reasons to come to Thompson? How does the town preserve its historical sites and heritage?
- **Rene Waldron – discussion on 9/14/2019**
 - Their former Town Planner, Mary Ann Chiantti, did picking choosing of original study/focus group that worked with NECOG representing Business Owners, the Historical Society members, Moderate Income Housing residents, etc.
 - Big issue repeated – how to unite the 10 villages into one town; currently have 4 polling places – can that be changed; people can move into Thompson without realizing they live in “Thompson.”
 - NECOG wrote Draft Report as a result which Mary Ann was not thrilled with. The EDC did vote to accept the report. Mary Ann wanted to go out and spend about \$8,000 to have the study re-done professionally. When she left to work in Plainfield, that effort lost momentum.
 - **CURRENT GOALS**
 - Look at improving upon the Zoning Regulations
 - Create a New Town Website – now complete and much better
 - Develop a social media presence through Facebook; when people Googled Thompson, not much came up. Would like to get Thompson “on the map”
 - Use <http://www.ctvisit.com/> to better advertise reasons for visitors to come to Thompson events. (It's a difficult site to use and some events cannot be listed).

- Phase 2 – Connect and Promote: establish destinations – NECOG has not been involved much after DRAFT – also the NECOG report was in a format that was difficult to edit. Destinations to include:
 - Trails
 - Quaddick State Park
 - Thompson Dam
 - May need to hire a professional to coordinate economic development as well as planning
 - Current Draft Brand – “Thompson – a Green and Growing Community” – start with Tag line and let that evolve.
 - Maybe reduce 4 polling places to 1 polling place.
 - Having trouble getting a quorum for meeting, but has been better since 4 alternates were appointed (total 11 people).
 - Their Plan of Conservation and Development was poorly communicated to various boards.
 - There will be meeting of representative of all Thompson boards at a local restaurant on Feb 6th to discuss further.
- b) The Commission discussed at length the lack of leadership and progress on the branding topic currently in Brooklyn. Since an EDC Coordinator is not supported in the Town budget Mr. Ives has stated that he is the Town representative that will fulfill this role for now. In October he stated he would send out an email and get the ball rolling on a branding committee. To date, this has not happened. Mr. Starks voiced his opinion that he does not understand why the EDC continues to wait months for Mr. Ives. He feels the Commission should move forward with selecting people they feel would be a good representation of Brooklyn. Mr. Simons argued that the EDC cannot move forward without the support of a Town appointed professional. Mr. Kerouac pointed out the imbalance of priorities in the Town budget, citing the new \$70K playscape but lack of commitment for even a part-time EDC Coordinator.
- c) The group brainstormed on individuals who would be vital to have on the branding committee and also discussed the challenge of obtaining a cross section of citizens. It was felt that many people may be seeking information on Brooklyn’s priorities. Could we develop a social media presence useful for town communication?
- d) EDC members thought that the 4:00 meeting time may not be ideal for outside people to participate in a town study. A motion was made by Mr. Gagnon to hold the April meeting at 6:30 and for all Commissioners to bring someone. Mrs. Garcia seconded the motion. All were in favor.
- 5) POCD – Mr. Kerouac stated that as far as he knows PZC has not identified a Chair for the rewrite. He is concerned that time is getting very tight to make the necessary changes. The current POCD was last written before the housing collapse therefore many topics no longer apply. He also informed Commissioners that in East Lyme all investors/new business owners are given a copy of the POCD.

- 6) Brooklyn Business Association – Mrs. Garcia stated that she is no longer part of the BBA. Mr. Simons stated that the next Fun After 5 will be held Tuesday, February 19th at Rude Dog Boxing Club.
- 7) Business Recognition – The EDC made its last presentation to Brooklyn Spirits in December. The BBA has officially taken over the presentation of plaques however EDC will still provide the funds for plaques and advertising.
- 8) New Business - Mr. Gagnon would like to discuss vacancy taxation at the next meeting.
- 9) Adjournment - A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Gagnon, seconded by Mrs. Garcia. All in favor. The meeting adjourned at 5:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cary Garcia, Secretary