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Town of Shaftsbury

Municipal Offices at Cole Hall

Meeting Minutes

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Economic Development Committee

Date of Meeting: July 9, 2024

Cole Hall and remotely via Zoom

1) Call to order

The meeting came to order at 4:30 p.m. Present were committee members Rick Bennett (chair), Marita Cockburn, Shari Miller, John Verocchi, and via Zoom, Andrea Bacchi. Also present was Operations Coordinator, Jen Holley.

2) Conflict of interest statement

No one reported a conflict of interest with any item on the agenda.

3) Jonathan Cooper and David Luongo of the BCRC: progress on the South Shaftsbury project

Mr. Cooper said the designated Village Center is the largest in the two southern counties (about 8.5 acres) and contains a lot of things one expects to see in a village center. He described some of the elements that stood out for him on a recent walk-through of the village. Mr. Cooper shared a spreadsheet of businesses he noticed.

He noted that the GMP substation is within the Village Center, as is Cole Hall, but the new town green parcel is not. Paulin's is not.

Mr. Luongo and Mr. Cooper described some of the items contained in the spreadsheet. The source of the data is the Secretary of State's business database. He asked about possible abandoned quarries. He asked committee members to comment on the data – which are out of date, inaccurate?

Ms. Bacchi said the subcommittee will be looking at home-based businesses or freelancer or small businesses throughout the Town, not just in the Village Center. She said she wanted to capture short term rentals as well. She imagined the list of businesses would be posted to the website. Mr. Bennett pointed out that BCRC is focusing on the village center.

Mr. Cooper listed some sites that might be developed more densely.

Ms. Cockburn asked about how to assist sites like the old medical center re-open. Mr. Cooper said building relationships is essential. The committee might eventually serve as a sort of corporate broker.

Mr. Verocchi said it is very hard to find sites to rent. Mr. Cooper said it's like matchmaking. Mr. Verocchi said the information must be kept fresh. Ms. Bacchi said that's why email marketing is so important.

Mr. Cooper said it is hard to separate tax receipts from the Village Center from other town tax receipts. He said "the assets you have are better than the assets you are trying to acquire."

Mr. Cooper said his team would refine their database and return with suggestions as to what sort of things could be done and where.

Mr. Cooper noted a town-owned parcel opposite Cole Hall. Ms. Holley said she thought the Select Board decided to dispose of the lot.

It was agreed to put on the next meeting's agenda a document to introduce the members of the committee to the business community. Mr. Bennett said he expects the Select Board will ask a representative of the committee to report to them on the committee's activities.

4) Discuss Building Communities Grants Program

Mr. Cooper said \$25K could be awarded, with a match of \$25K required. It can be used by small businesses. For example, one business last year needed a \$18,000 embroidery machine. It received a \$9,000 grant, essentially cutting the price in half. BCRC will be seeking applicants over the summer for applications to be submitted around September. Mr. Bennett suggested bringing ideas as to candidates to the next meeting. Mr. Cooper said it is useful that the program is an annual one, for which businesses can plan. Mr. Cooper will send Ms. Bacchi the grant information; she will share it in her on-line digest.

5) Subcommittee progress (Andrea)

Tabled.

6) SWOT Analysis Exercise Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats

Tabled.

7) Other business

8) Review action items

Bring ideas as to how to introduce committee members to the business committee.

Mr. Bennett noted that on Tuesday July 23 Commissioner Piechak will host Vermont Conversations at the Southern Vermont Arts Center. Mr. Bennett said he thought the Town would pay the registration fee.

9) Adjournment

Ms. Miller moved to adjourn at about 5:30 p.m. Ms. Bacchi seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.