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Town of Shaftsbury

Municipal Offices at Cole Hall

Meeting Minutes

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Economic Development Committee

Date of Meeting: February 11, 2025 in person at Cole Hall and remotely via Zoom Members

Members Present: In person: Rick Bennett (chair), John Verocchi, Andrea Bacchi, Scott Grimm-Lyon from the Bennington County Regional Commission and via Zoom Marita Cockburn

1. Call to order

The meeting came to order at 4:30 p.m.

2. Minutes

There were no comments on the minutes of the October meeting. The meetings were paused for the holiday season and pending the BCRC report

3. Conflict of interest

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

4. South Shaftsbury Commercial Sites Inventory and Assessment

Mr. Grimm-Lyon returned to offer more time to the EDC regarding the content of the study. He had already presented the findings to the Select Board at their February 3rd, meeting. He noted that their data was mostly collected over the summer of 2024 and likely have some changes since. Water, Sewer, Traffic were common themes mentioned by businesses.

Parking was discussed regarding the no parking signage at the intersection and flashing light. Andrea mentioned that members of the community were concerned about sightlines at the intersection and that the signage was a recent change. Mr. Bennett and Mr. Verocchi questioned whether parking was a necessary topic at this stage since there were few places in town that needed it.

Mr. Lyons brought up Cole Hall and the open potential to perhaps look into economic opportunities once it is vacated. Mr. Bennett noted that the building, once vacated needs and evaluation on the economic feasibility of repair.

Mr. Bennett mentioned the statistic of the village district having an average age of 65. A discussion took place on the similar state wide issue of age regarding workforce and addressing general needs for a community of that average age and how do these citizens contribute to the economic needs of the community.

Mr. Grimm-Lyon said that Shaftsbury's by laws regarding business were generally good with the possibility of some minor modifications making it less of a need for new or existing business to come before the planning board.

Ms. Bacchi mentioned the possibility of a tiny house community as a solution to housing. She referred to Burlington as an example as well as communities nationwide. Mr. Grimm-Lyon added that tiny house communities can be a good solution for independent living for seniors.

Mr. Bennett mentioned the aesthetics on route 7A and the possibility of attractive new signage for town hall as well as plantings along the new drive, all centrally located and more visible.

Ms. Cockburn mentioned the sewer feasibility study and the need for a solution in order to move forward on any future plans for growth for both business and housing.

Mr. Grimm-Lyon mentioned a sign regulation regarding setback from an intersection. Specifically, Scott's Auto would like a sign near the road. Mr. Verocchi mentioned the possible solution of a compromise for the sign if the cars were not as visible, thus making the intersection more aesthetically pleasing. Mr. Grimm-Lyon mentioned that there may be other compromises, a food truck on the premises for example as a way to make the intersection more appealing.

Mr. Verocchi returned to the average age of 65 from the report and the need for solutions to attract a younger demographic that contributes in different ways. He mentioned 3rd Space (places where people interact outside of home or work) ... parks, coffee shops etc. Can we promote those spaces as a way to attract a younger demographic? Mr. Bennett mentioned that Vermont's population has not grown statistically as compared to any other state besides Montana and perhaps that data is something to promote.

Mr. Bennett mentioned ideas for signage for the new town hall and for involving the garden club in creating new plantings around the new property.

Mr. Bennett mentioned the Halloween celebration in town and getting the town more involved in that. He also mentioned the Robert Frost connection to the town and a possible slogan ... "Shaftsbury, the road less travelled"

Ms. Cockburn explained her family's reason for settling in Shaftsbury was access to land and that she often goes to surrounding towns Albany, Williamstown, Rutland for needs that are unavailable in town. Ms. Bacchi described the town's location as a pinwheel, easily accessible to many towns.

Mr. Bennett spoke about a need to increase diversity in the community. Ms. Bacchi spoke about presenting ideas about overall messaging from the town regarding a marketing strategy.

5. Thrive Business Directory

Ms. Bacchi has 13 responses to the business regarding businesses and freelancers in the area.

7. Other business

There was none.

8. Action Items

The committee will further review the BCRC study and create an action plan to present to the Select Board.

9. Next meeting

The March meeting will take place on Tuesday, March 11 2025 @ 4:30 PM

Mr. Verocchi moved to adjourn at about 5:30 p.m. Ms. Bacchi seconded the motion, which passed 3-0-0.