

Notes from Spencer Economic Development Committee Meeting
Saturday, January 20, 2018 @ 8:30 am
Spencer Town Hall/Conference Room A

In attendance:

Mike Toomey (chair), Chris Woodbury, John Stevens, Tony Pepe, Paul Dell'Aquila (Town Planner)

c.t.o 8:32 a.m.

There was discussion about posting minutes/notes for this meeting to keep the public informed.

There was discussion about reinstituting a Main Street planter and banner program to beautify the street after reconstruction is over. John S. is reaching out to Wendy Bove at Appleblossoms to help get participants and kick off the program. There was discussion whether any Main St. programs should fall under the Celebrations Committee in the future, but seeing that that committee has a specific mandate already, the EDC will take the lead and try to get people to step up.

Chris Woodbury noted the cost for town highway staff to water & maintain flower baskets on poles and that businesses could "sponsor" them. Committee should consider a flyer that can be distributed to generate interest in the program.

John Stevens noted partnership potential with Bay Path students for a banner program.

Tony Pepe noted that the Exchange Club is actively exploring how to put speakers on poles for music/ambiance downtown.

Mike Toomey suggested a staggered roll-out of these efforts to help garner additional press coverage & attention.

Paul will reach out to Steve Tyler to get an estimate on Main Street construction finishing dates so that beautification efforts can coordinate appropriately.

Chris Woodbury noted results of recent town survey (n = 270 responses) and would share results with Town Planner.

There was discussion about the condition of schools, as relates to perception of Spencer.

There was some discussion about potentially creating a public/civic space/plaza adjacent to the Sugden Block with reconfiguration of intersection of Main & Pleasant Streets.

Tony asked Paul if crime statistics can be included in Town Planner's Slum & Blight analysis. Town would like to create a blight bylaw "with teeth". Paul will send copies of slum & blight reports to EDC members.

Discussion about how town must establish standards and an enforcement process. Paul noted that if the Town was successful in receiving funds for design standards through a Mass Downtown Institute (MDI) grant, the standards could be dovetailed with any blight initiatives.

John gave an update on Town Center Public Art program. Started with student art in Town Hall last year; this year, in coordination with Massasoit Art Guild and with some funding from Doug Cutler's foundation, starting in the Spring, there will be a temporary art installation in the empty storefront in the Sugden Block on Main Street. Funding will pay for matting & framing, display, and lighting. There is potential to hold multiple events with different synergies. EDC will look to publicize this and other events.

Tony suggested that the former Cumberland Farms site across from Town Hall should be a priority redevelopment site. Paul said he knew a café contact who might be looking for additional space and he would reach out to them.

There was discussion about allowing/encouraging breweries in town and also about reaching out to CVS for a potential new Main Street location.

There was discussion about instituting some events at the Fairgrounds as part of tourism/economic development efforts. Barnstorm will be putting on an event there in the Spring and there is possibility to allow some primitive RV camping there, which could support additional similar-type events there in the future. Mike noted the synergies between hikers, equestrians and snowmobilers as a key component of town and regional efforts.

There was discussion about partnerships with local schools. Mike noted the reinstitution of the "Teaching with Trout" program in schools and the upcoming Envirothon. Tony noted the need to get the word out on these through print and social media. Paul & Mike will work on a positive blurb describing the program and reach out to media from there.

There was discussion about using social media, esp. Facebook & Twitter, as outlets for positive stories and efforts we're undertaking. Also, Mike could facilitate stories for "Talk of the Town" on cable access.

There was some discussion about the number of solar projects in town and whether the current bylaw might have to be modified in the future.

Tony noted that there has been some work on putting together a beer festival for August. Also, potential for a food truck festival. These are the type of events the Town would like to encourage more of.

John noted need for and there was some discussion about setting up some kind of non-profit community foundation to facilitate event planning and grant seeking. Mike would look at draft EDC charter for language on 501(c)3's.

There was discussion about enhancing Spencer's appearance in online searches and improving media coverage (New Leader, T & G).

Paul noted that the town's Open Space Plan will need to be updated and that he has been researching formats to create a town development guidebook.

COMPLIED ACTION ITEMS:

Tony: will measure size of potential RV area at Fairgrounds; forward beer festival plan to Paul; forward food truck contacts to Paul

John: will reach out to Appleblossoms about planter program; continue to coordinate with Massasoit about Sugden art installation and Bay Path about banners.

Mike: come up with blurb for Teaching with Trout program; cable tv outreach for positive story placement; find previous EDC charter language

Chris: will forward survey results to Paul

Paul: reach out to Steve T. about Main Street project schedule; send PARP & Blight reports to EDC; reach out to coffee shop contact about Cumberland Farms location; research zoning for blight, breweries, and solar projects.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:26am

Next Meeting: 2/24/18 at 8:30am in Conf Room A.