

Notes from Spencer Economic Development Committee Meeting

Tuesday, December 4, 2018 @ 7:00 p.m.

Spencer Town Hall/Conference Room A

In attendance:

Shirley Shiver, John Stevens, Chris Woodbury, Pam Crawford (realtor), Paul Dell'Aquila (Town Planner);
From Harriman: Steve Cecil and Emily Innes

c.t.o 7:05 p.m.

Paul gave recap/overview of MDI grant Downtown Design Guidelines process to date and introduced Steve & Emily from Harriman, the consultants hired by the state for this project.

Emily walked through agenda they handed out and showed a PowerPoint with process outline and examples from other communities. Their team has done field work and photographs in Spencer and will be reaching to Downtown Stakeholders/Business owners based on EDC and Town Planner recommendations.

Steve poses the question: how will this [Design Guidelines] assist development? Resources for owners to improve properties; Town can be a leader; Whitco is a complicated case.

Shirley asked about trigger for ADA compliance...50% of value.

John Stevens noted poor appearance of the "blue tarp" at 136 Main St.; Paul noted that Cormier's is looking to potentially buy the building they are in (next door).

Emily notes potential for signage cohesion and potential areas for landscaping/softening/planters, etc. at fmr. Cumberland Farms (160 Main) parking lot.

Steve noted a program in Lowell that creates/shows activity in upper floors of under-utilized buildings.

Importance of food & cultural events was noted.

FlexCon was pointed out as an example of potential collaboration...they have a presence downtown (Plant #1) across from Barnstorm and should become more integrated...potential for graphics/appliques?

John asked about pop-up businesses, since many don't want the brick & mortar expenses. Steve notes that pop-up food is a good idea. John also noted the arts community wants to be seen & involved more. Emily had a colleague do a temporary gallery pop up. John notes we need to identify strategic spots with activity/visibility, esp. since Sugden Block is being sold.

Steve noted that the relatively smaller scale of Spencer's downtown is an advantage, since one or two successful projects can make a big difference. "Peer pressure" for neighboring properties.

Harriman will be producing draft recommendations and will hold a public input meeting after the New Year.

The EDC took a brief break to allow Harriman to wrap up and leave.

Paul gave a brief update on a few events. He is still working with Tony on a beer festival for next summer and possibly a hot-air balloon festival. Paul & Tony will meet and we will discuss at a future EDC meeting.

Paul also noted that along with John, he organized a “Creative Economy Focus Group” comprised of folks involved in the creative economy locally. There seems to be a consensus to organize a downtown art festival in the summer and that a follow up meeting was being held tomorrow (December 5) to discuss the idea more.

John also noted that he had completed the QVCDC’s small business class; overall, he had hoped for more attendees, but there was valuable information, especially in regards to marketing. He noted that Aaron Keyes could be a good guest at a future EDC meeting.

John also noted that a new shop called “West of Worcester” would be opening on Mechanic St. this weekend.

Planner Report. Paul gave a brief update on the status of negotiations for the sale of Lake Street School and the Sugden Block, which are ongoing. Paul also noted that a new medical marijuana concern, Wormtown Genetics, is seeking a letter of non-opposition from the Selectmen to open a medical-only growing facility at the former court house site across from the Spencer Country Inn.

Chris Woodbury noted that the Spencer Furniture site is being marketed for \$1.2 million.

Minutes from the July and September meetings were approved unanimously, with a correction to Tony Pepe’s name in the September minutes noted.

Next meeting tbd, but January 22 or 23 are possibilities.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.