



MINUTES

Thursday – September 19, 2019

5:30 PM

Loose Cannon Café - Bennington, VT

Present: Jock Irons (Woodford), Walt Klinger (Pownal), Ken Harrington (Shaftsbury), Cinda Morse (Shaftsbury), Dixie Zens (Sunderland), Suzy dePeyster (Sandgate), James Salerno (Economic Development), Nancy Faesy (Dorset), Wayn Goodman (Energy), Ed Shea (Woodford), Sheila Kearns (Sandgate), Janet Hurley (Manchester), John LaVecchia (Dorset)

Mike Slattery (Pownal), Chris Damon, Valerie dePeyster, Tim Scoggins,

BRC Staff: Jonathan Cooper, Bill Colvin, Jim Sullivan

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chair, Janet Hurley called the meeting to order, welcoming commissioners and guests.

2. Approval of July 18, 2019 Minutes

July 18 Minutes approved by unanimous consent.

3. Public Hearing – Approval of municipal plans for Pownal, North Bennington, and Stamford

Required number of votes to approve the municipal plans and confirm the planning processes for the municipalities of Pownal, North Bennington, and Stamford have been submitted. 17 municipal commissioner votes and 21 total votes in favor.

4. Public Hearing – Determination of Energy Compliance for Pownal and Stamford Town Plans

Required number of votes to approve a determination of energy compliance for the Pownal and Stamford town plans have been submitted. 17 municipal commissioner votes / 21 total votes in favor.

5. Regional Economic Development Initiatives

Presentation by Bill Colvin and Jonathan Cooper on economic development programs that the BCRC has been involved with recently. Reviewed evolution of relationship with the regional development corporation (BCIC).

Three major areas: business development, workforce development, and real estate development.

Noted that the organization has worked to bring in approximately \$6.8 million to the region over the past 2+ years, over \$4 million related to the Putnam Block redevelopment. Noted that BCIC is the owner of the Putnam Block project, allowing for special funding opportunities.

BCRC has an active Workforce Development committee operating under the BCIC, with broad business and public sector participation. Significant amount of focus during staff's meetings with businesses involves discussion of workforce needs, issues, and opportunities. Numerous activities every year: sophomore summit, business open houses, career fairs, newspaper columns about businesses, elementary school business fairs, VT DOL trainings, etc.

Significant amount of effort directed toward support of entrepreneurship. Training program has led to at least three new business starts. CCV-Bennington now offers a program based on the early work of the BCIC/BCRC. Synergistic relationship between CCV, Lightning Jar, BCIC, and others.

Real estate development work includes property ownership that benefits from RDC environmental clean-up and exemption initiatives. Also, availability of grants and loans to support projects such as Putnam Block. Work beginning on environmental remediation for Phase II of the Putnam Block project.

Review of progress on Putnam Block project in downtown Bennington. Now close to 90+ percent leased for Phase I: restaurant, café/bookstore, grocery, medical and professional offices, retail spaces, and a variety of new downtown residences. Very complex project with 21 funding sources and numerous involved financing and development partners.

Have seen significant economic development improvements in last couple of years: increase in home values, reduction in poverty rate, increase in median family income. First back-to-back years for net job growth since the great recession.

BCRC Inter-regional Economic Development Initiatives

- Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone
44 cooperating towns in Windham and Bennington County.
Programs to spur business development, implement recruitment and marketing program, support workforce development and other related initiatives.
- Southern Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) – prepared in conjunction with Windham County.
 - Includes overview of key issues and opportunities for the region (workforce, housing, child care, educational facilities, broadband and cell systems, water and sewer infrastructure needs to support development, downtowns and village centers...).
 - Strengthen Business + Support People
 - Need to increase population, improve infrastructure, and build economic capacity.
 - Vital Projects – identification of key projects that moves toward attainment of goals. 71 project ideas submitted for consideration by over 40 entities. Some of the projects included: Putnam Phase II, Wilmington village center project, rail project in Windham County, Lightning Jar,
- Southern Vermont Economy Summit at Mount Snow included over 250 attendees.
- SoVermont Campaign launch – sustainable marketing and recruitment initiative. Information about the region and the quality of life available here. Supported by USDA Rural Development – demonstration of broad-based support was valuable in securing that funding.
- Opportunity Zone investments: New initiative identified two census tracts in Bennington as Opportunity Zones – benefits for capital investment in these areas. Prepared a prospectus for investors showing “Opportunity Bennington” zones – downtown as well as industrial/manufacturing sites. Have already seen over \$4.5 million investment in the Zone. Opportunity Bennington most active OZ in Vermont.

Q & A

Putnam grocery store: desire to see a store in Phase I so smaller footprint selected. Hope for future growth.

Putnam Phase II: Plan for a five-story building with medical and educational facilities (SVHC, Castleton Nursing program, and 30 units of housing).

Housing development planned for land along Washington Street (another 30 units). Total, all phases, over 100 new housing units in the center of downtown.

Brownfields remediation: removal/securing contaminated soils, UST removal, clean-up related to gas station.

Medical Space at Putnam: some will involve moving a facility from SVMC to free up space at the hospital. Other clinical space would be new facilities.

Regional Employment Growth? Mack Molding, NSK (also major new capital investment),... Dixie Zens spoke to the importance of downtown development in attracting and retaining professional employees that are in demand by area businesses. Dixie also applauded Bill, Jonathan, and the BCRC and BCIC for helping to orchestrate this new development activity.

Southern Vermont College campus? About to go under contract.

6. Other Business and Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 7:05 PM.