

Town of Pownal Economic Development Committee

Meeting Minutes

01/08/2020

Present:

- Matt Barlin
- John Bushee
- Shannon McLenithan (Chair)
- Marlena Pellon (*ex officio*) [remote]
- Gerol Petruzella

Absent:

- Bob Jarvis (*ex officio*)

Guests:

- Mike Gardner, Zoning Administrator
- Erin Roy, prospective Committee member

The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 7:00 PM.

The first order of business was the approval of the minutes of the previous meeting.

- On motion of Mr. Bushee, it was proposed to approve the minutes. After seconding by Dr. Petruzella and discussion, the motion passed with all in favor, none opposed, none abstaining.

The next order of business was the approval of the agenda.

- On motion of Dr. Petruzella, it was proposed to approve the agenda. After seconding by Mr. Bushee and discussion, the motion passed with all in favor, none opposed, none abstaining.

The next order of business was the requirements for posting of minutes. As per Committee practice, the Chair requested a member to volunteer to scribe the minutes. Dr. Petruzella agreed to scribe. The Chair noted that minutes should be sent to Linda Sciarappa and Jen Holley.

The next order of business was to hear public comments.

The next order of business was to interview the prospective new Committee member. The Chair recognized Erin Roy, and invited her to introduce herself to the Committee.

The next order of business was to follow up on action items assigned to Committee members at the previous meeting. The Chair requested each Member to indicate by “yes” or “no” whether they had made progress on assigned action items, after which detailed discussion could occur as needed.

- Updated school data (Mr. Barlin): deferred, as Mr. Barlin was not yet present.
- Realtor feedback (Chair): Yes.
 - Chair spoke with area Realtors about how they answer questions about the quality of schools/districts. Realtors can direct people to state data, but cannot express direct

comparisons of quality, though they can express perceptions of a school which their own child attends, for example.

- Request to school board for website (Mr. Bushee): No.
 - Mr. Bushee indicated that he will pursue this action item. It represents a low-cost, high-impact opportunity for local control of how our school is perceived, instead of relying on inaccurate or outdated 3rd-party websites.
- Recommended permit changes to Planning Committee (Mr. Bushee): No.
- Skill fair flyer (Chair): No.
 - Chair is awaiting more confirmed participants before designing advertising materials.
- Daycare/food for fair (Chair): Yes.
 - Chair reported Jamie at the CDC will put together refreshments. Chair reported that Oakhill Children's Center declines to provide monitored child care during the job fair, since they would have liability. Chair suggests offering an unstaffed "Kids Corner" with activities. Marlena suggested that the Committee might reach out to Mrs. Daly at Sacred Heart, as there is a community service requirement for students there, which they might fulfill by volunteering at the event.
- Transportation (Mr. Bushee): Yes.
 - Mr. Bushee reported that he is in conversation with a cab service which may be interested in providing transportation for the job fair, but with the presumption that it would be a paid service, not volunteer. The Committee expressed interest in determining whether the Town's bus could be used. There was discussion as to whether the bus currently has sufficient insurance to be used. It was generally agreed that the Select Board should be consulted to determine the status of this issue.
- Invitations to fair (all): Mr. Bushee, No. Chair, Yes. Dr. Petruzella, Yes.
 - Chair would like a minimum of 12 to 15 confirmed presenting organizations by the end of the week. Discussion of potential further organizations to invite:
 - Bread Loaf
 - Bennington Rec Center
 - Pownal Rescue Squad
 - Bennington Rescue Squad
 - Oak Hill
 - Energizer
 - Kaman
 - SVSU
- Post 3 vacant seats (Chair): Yes.
 - The vacancies are posted at <https://townofpownal.org/news-and-announcements.php?id=101>.

The next order of business was to address old business.

- The Chair invited Mr. Barlin to speak about his research into the issue of School Grading.
 - Mr. Barlin reviewed the background and context of his work, as well as the results of his analysis of data from zillow.com and greatschools.org. Mr. Barlin shared scatter plots of the most recently updated state school data, which indicated that in general, Pownal falls in the upper third of all Bennington (SVSU) schools on several metrics.

- The Chair invited Mr. Gardner to speak about permit process updates.
 - Mr. Gardner described the permit approval process as needing to be responsive to many different types of application, based upon construction, location, etc. Most holdups are because an application is incomplete, missing some necessary information (e.g. a missing septic design). Abutters receive mailed documentation; however, no explanation is included with this mailer, resulting in some confusion. A clarification of this process would be desirable. Mr. Gardner stated that while some permits have been delayed, and some have gone before the DRB for a variance, none has been denied to date. Mr. Gardner stated that he has received quite a few inquiries, including emails and phone calls.
 - The Chair recognized Mr. Slattery, Chair of the Planning Commission, who stated that a process of changing the bylaws, with the help of a consultant, is underway, and so now is a good time to know what we want in terms of any process changes. Mr. Slattery stated that, in his view, major changes are not needed, and that the current process is user friendly, and not a hindrance to economic development.
 - Ms. Pellon commented that she had heard recent positive feedback from permit applicants about the process, and then asked: where does an average citizen find information about permits, whether submitted or approved? Mr. Gardner stated that, after approval of a permit, information is sent by mail to property abutters, who are given a certain amount of time to respond. He also noted that approved permits are posted on a wall inside Town Hall. There was discussion about providing a clear location, and method, for the public to find permitting information: at present, a person seeking this information might go to the Town Clerk, or the listers, or the Zoning Administrator. It was suggested that the Town website could usefully have a page answering “Frequently Asked Questions” about zoning.
 - The Chair sought the sense of the Committee as to whether the topic of permit process updates should be removed from future Committee agendas as a standing item, on the grounds that the process seems to be working well at present. No opposition was raised.
- The Chair invited the Committee to speak about the Career Development Fair.
 - Updates on this topic had largely been provided earlier in the agenda (under “Action Items Follow-up”).

The next order of business was to address new business.

- The Chair recognized Mr. Bushee on the topic of new business opportunities.
 - Mr. Bushee stated that the Committee could usefully address reasons businesses might choose to locate in Pownal, or not, including factors such as available resources and infrastructure. The Committee recognized that individual businesses have individual needs: for example, a bank needs different factors to be viable than a manufacturing plant. The Committee discussed how it can best use its limited resources to be effective; it was noted that factors such as communication and advertising, and Town processes, are within the scope of what we can influence and control, and therefore represent useful focuses for the Committee’s attention.
- The Chair recognized herself on the topic of grant opportunities.

- The Committee recognized that there are about 100 businesses registered in Pownal at present, and it is important to support existing businesses, as well as potential ones. The Village Center designations should be explored to determine what grant opportunities exist to support existing local businesses. Local expertise is desirable.
- The Chair recognized Mr. Fred Miller. Mr. Miller suggested that the Committee take an inventory of existing empty properties in Town. It was noted that inclusion of a property on such a list would require the consent of the property owner.
- Ms. Pellon offered two recommendations. 1: Invite a bank representative to speak with the Committee to explain the factors in their decision not to establish a branch in the Town. 2: Research, and potentially invite, Dominic Cloud (town manager of St. Albans), who has given a 45-minute presentation on how St. Albans pulled itself out of a crisis, over 10 years, through funding and partnerships, improving empty buildings, and creating low-income housing. The Committee noted the barriers of Act 250, and acknowledged that “slow and steady” is the likeliest successful strategy for sustainable growth, as for example North Adams MA and its partnership with MASS MoCA.

The Chair opened the floor for any other business.

- Mr. Bushee inquired about the status of the economic development survey which the Committee had previously worked on, and suggested that the Committee could ask the Select Board to use their printer to print copies to distribute at points around town, in addition to sharing online and through social media.

The Chair established 5 action items for the next meeting:

- **Action Item 1:** The Committee tasked Mr. Barlin with cleaning up and finalizing a presentation of his school data to present to the Select Board.
- **Action Item 2:** The Committee tasked the Chair with updating the job fair flyer.
- **Action Item 3:** The Committee tasked Mr. Bushee with clarifying whether the Town’s current insurance on the bus is sufficient to use it as transport for the job fair.
- **Action Item 4:** The Committee tasked Dr. Petruzella with inviting the higher education organizations listed on the working spreadsheet, as well as Kaman Composites, to the job fair.
- **Action Item 5:** The Committee tasked Dr. Petruzella with finding, and sharing with the Committee by email, the most recent survey draft the Committee had developed to seek residents’ input on identifying and prioritizing needs for economic development.

The Chair noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday February 12, 2020 at 7:00pm.

On motion of Mr. Bushee, it was proposed that the meeting be adjourned. After seconding by Mr. Barlin, the motion passed with all in favor, none opposed, none abstaining. The Committee adjourned at 8:08 PM.

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Gerol Petruzella, Scribe for 01/08/2020