

## **TOWN OF WASHINGTON**

### **Washington Economic Development Committee**

**Tuesday October 19, 3:00pm in person and virtual**

*Minutes are subject to approval of the Economic Development Committee*

**Members Present** -Daniel Sherr, Robyn Gray, Jim Brinton, Fran Keilty, Lisa Stein, Kristen Atlas

Public: Chris Charles, Joan Lodsins, Jay Hubelbank, Blane Withers, Trisha McMahon, Liz Page

Michelle Gorra- Economic and Community Development Coordinator

1. **Call to Order:** Michelle Gorra called the meeting to order at 3:05
2. Motion was made to approve the minutes of September 21, 2021 by Dan Sherr Seconded by Kristen Atlas, unanimously approved

### **3. New Business**

#### **a. Current Business Climate-**

The EDC heard from local business owners about the business trends during the last 18 months of COVID. Blane Withers of Marty's, Liz Page of Five Janes, Lisa Stein of the Food Market and Fran Keilty of the Hickory Stick all contributed. Some of the observations included:

- There has been a demographic change as many of the part-time residents were here full time. That meant most of 2020 was busy all the time instead of the traditional weekend and holiday times that are usually busy. The patron visits have just recently started to drop back to pre-COVID traffic.
- Staffing has been a huge challenge. The college students that were home working on-line have gone back. There has been more of a challenge getting the high school students and full-time staff are not available. The cost of housing was mentioned.
- Cost of goods and supply issues have created challenges. Owners are ordering more supplies than they currently need because they don't know when they will come in. The COVID surcharges and shipping charges have not gone away. The shortage of paper goods has made take out products hard to get as well as bags and other items needed. Prices will need to go up to cover the cost of goods.
- Gilmore Girls and other town events continue to draw people to Washington. We need to improve the communication so businesses can appropriately staff for things such as the Frederick Gunn School's parents' weekend.

#### **b. Kiosk- Michelle and Kristen-**

- Some pictures of possible welcome kiosks were shared. Ideally the kiosk will have 3 or 4 sides with brochure holders. The group felt that it would be good to put out a call for local artisans to design something that was more personal to Washington. It was also suggested that we try to include a digital component, possibly solar. A request for designs will be put in the Selectmen's email and posted around town. The committee will also share with anyone they think might be interested.

- It was agreed that the side lawn of the Town Hall facing the Plaza is a good place for the Welcome Kiosk. We would like to create a nice gathering space that would be accessible and could include: benches, planters, café tables, a bike rack or other enhancements.

#### **4. Old Business**

- a. Update on Zoning Commission Business Districts  
Michelle reported that the Zoning Commission passed all the proposed regulation changes with no changes.

#### **5. Report on activities of the Economic and Community Development Coordinator:**

- **Affordable Housing**. The plan was approved by the Planning Commission at a Public Hearing Oct. 6<sup>th</sup> and will move to be approved by the Selectmen.
- **Sustainable CT**- Still waiting to hear if we passed certification.
- **Titus Concept Plan**- The second meeting with the businesses and the engineers on Oct 14<sup>th</sup> was well attended. The engineers took all the feedback and will put together a final concept that incorporates all the comments. All documents on the EDC web page.
- **New Home Mailing**- 7 in September, slightly up from last few months.
- **Newsletter**- Due date for the Winter Newsletter is Nov. 5<sup>th</sup>
- **NHCOG Economic Summit** -Wayne, Robyn and Michelle attended. It was nice to hear from other communities and from the Commissioner of Economic and Community Development. 5 Points Arts Center in Torrington a great regional resource.
- **Harvest Festival**- Huge success. Thank you to Dan, Kristen and Robyn for helping man the table. We collected over 30 new emails for the Selectman's list as well as Explore Washington. Over 1,200 people attended. The previous high was 700.
- **Channel 30, 20 towns in 20 days**. New Preston was featured.
- **Depot Lights**, Michelle working with WBA to bring back this year. Requires fund raising. Hoping to expand to Marbledale/New Preston. Hoping the lights on order make it in time.
- **Passport**- Will discuss at next meeting.

#### **6. Report of WBA & Selectmen on items not on the agenda-**

Visitors

**Adjournment-** at 4:40

Respectfully Submitted,

Michelle Gorra