

# Town of Belmont Economic Development Committee (EDC)

Location: Hybrid meeting in Conference Room 4, Town Hall and via Zoom

Thursday March 7, 2024, 7:00 pm

DATE: April 16, 2024

TIME: 8:48 AM

## Attendees

In person: Paul Joy, Erin Brown

Virtual/via zoom: Wendy Etkind, Armine Humphrey, Deran Muckjian, Marie Warner, Schuyler Wiggin

Also in attendance: Chris Ryan (30 min)

Not in attendance: Jack Sy, Renee Guo

Meeting led by Committee Chair Paul Joy

Minutes taken by Wendy Etkind

## 1. Call to order at 7:13 pm.

## 2. Approval of meeting minutes

Wendy reviewed the meeting minutes from the February 7, 2024 meeting.

*Motion: approval of meeting minutes from the February 7 EDC meeting. Motion was approved by a vote of 6-0 (Schuyler abstained).*

## 3. Communication Lead Update: March 12 Networking Event at Hanami

Erin reviewed registrations to date, and it's in line with what we've had at our past events. She's feeling good about the mix of registrations and is hoping for another 10. This will be our 4<sup>th</sup> event. She compiled historical attendance over our first three events so that we'll have all of the participation information in one place. She shared the analysis with the committee, who has regularly attended and the number of new participants.

All three Select Board candidates have registered. She asked for suggestions of landlords who might consider attending.

She reviewed speakers, content, order. The headline for businesses for this event will be to introduce the WBLA (Work-Based Learning Alliance) internship program. Liz Baker will talk about the student experience, and a representative from the WBLA will discuss expectations/requirements of a business. Superintendent Geiger is likely to be there as well in support of this program.

Paul recommended removing the discussion on wayfinding from the agenda. Paul had wanted to talk with the Select Board about fundraising for wayfinding, to involve the town and request that

they be in charge of installation. However, the conversations about whether this is possible haven't yet happened with either the Select Board nor the town. His plan was to first present this to the SB, then meet with the town departments, but we weren't given that opportunity as requested. The committee agreed that discussing this at the networking event before aligning with the town would not be the right order to proceed. The next steps will be to talk with the garden club, and also get updated written prices to understand installation fees. Also best to wait until after the election given all that's going on. The conversations will happen with the SB first, then stakeholder groups, then businesses.

Wendy suggested offering the SB candidates a chance to present their views on businesses at the event; members recommended not letting this be a political event. This can be done informally.

#### **4. 2023 Presentation and Report Overview**

Paul walked through the presentation that would have been presented in a joint meeting to the Select Board. Instead, Paul submitted it to them at the end of last month. It covers our committee's Vision, re-states our charge, summarizes our goals, lays out our 2023 accomplishments organized by area of our charge, and asks for the Select Board's support of our work in 2024. Paul will send it out to members, and post it on the EDC's website for the public to see.

#### **5. Continue: Belmont EDC Goal Setting for 2024-2025**

Paul reviewed the draft goals that he outlined in the 2023 summary report, to start the conversation.

Fund the Economic Development Coordinator position

Offer support to the businesses that are here

Push to restart pursuing state grant funding that support businesses and economic development

Refresh survey data to understand why businesses are leaving

Evaluate what we can do to draw more business into our town. He noted that much of this will be done by a market analysis.

Erin shared a draft goals document that she worked on as a way to frame up our 2024 goals, and reviewed it with the committee.

Armine brought up an example of a struggling business who she recently visited, which led to a discussion about how we can help and what we should be doing. We discussed coordinating marketing sessions to help businesses market themselves, ways to attract customers from other towns, connecting that business with the Belmont Voice to share their story, making them a "business of the week" spotlight in local media.

Erin reviewed different forums where businesses are highlighted and that there may be an opportunity to help coordinate these efforts to make a bigger impact.

Paul also suggested creating a list of empty retail spaces that can be shared with prospective businesses; this was discussed in The Belmont Voice and VIC is also working on this.

**6. 2024/2025 EDC Leadership and Membership Renewal**

The term for the Chair, Secretary and Communication Lead roles are one year, and it's now time to discuss who in both our leadership and our committee will be returning and how much recruiting we will need to do this year. Paul asked for interest in continuing. Wendy said yes she will continue as Secretary if the committee would like her to, Paul (Chair) said he's interested in continuing as Chair, Erin is deciding whether to renew her seat in June and will continue in her role for the time being.

At our next meeting, we will vote on the leadership and can discuss whether any members would like to take on a Vice Chair role.

We also discussed our renewal process. 6 members' terms expire in 2024. If members don't renew, we should compile a list of candidates to join us and begin outreach once we know how many seats will be vacant. At our networking event, Paul will make an announcement that businesses have an opportunity to engage as a member of our committee.

**7. Communication Lead Update Other: Town Day 2024 (May 18)**

Paul asked whether there is interest in having a table at Town Day, and if yes what would we talk about. There was agreement that we should have a table again and discussion of the value it brought last year.

Wendy suggested that we can use it as a way to raise awareness about the need for and benefit of hiring an Economic Development Coordinator. We should organize our information to present it as a business case - show how it will fund itself through grants and what kind of value that it will bring to our town. The goal at Town Day will be to educate members of the community about this initiative, ask for their support, and ask them to help raise our voice to position this to the Select Board.

Erin suggested a skills matchmaking / recruiting volunteers, business assistance program.

**8. Other Committee Updates**

- **Select Board** – Paul tried for 2 months to get on their agenda to have a joint meeting with the Select Board to review our accomplishments in 2023 and discuss wayfinding; he was unsuccessful. They have a backlog of other things to cover instead. After he followed up several times, they did finally offer 10 minutes for Paul and Wendy to come and chat at the end of a meeting, instead of the joint meeting. Paul declined.
- **MBTA** – they met last night and have hosted 2 public sessions since we last met. They are getting fairly close to a final solution. Paul will give a statement in a week – there were 3 scenarios developed; when they went into the public forum a large section was re-inserted without asking for the committee's input and it was very negatively received. There are

significant concerns about what kind of commercial development is covered; Paul's position is that we're a small community and want mixed use development on our terms not the state's. Use it as an opportunity to support but not replace local business. Once you rezone a business you don't get it back. That committee is not working well together toward achieving common goals; the public has an opportunity to comment at next Thursday's meeting. The SB wants a workable plan by end of March. They learned about \$50k of additional consulting fees at last night's meeting. Committee recommended an economic financial analysis last night which will now move forward.

- Planning Board – nothing to report

## **9. Current State of Business in Belmont**

Belmont Center:

- There have been some shopping theft – Helena's was hit with \$1500 in theft by the same group of 3 English women (2 older and one younger). The same group hit Bessie Blue first and have apparently been doing this throughout the region.
- Outdoor dining was approved on Monday night. It will be available from May 6 or 7 to Sept 15. Two restaurants are doing it; they now have to go through the state-driven overhead of applying for an outdoor liquor license with a \$200 permit and sending out certified letters to all residents within a certain vicinity.
- Erin asked whether anyone had an update on Stone Hearth; there is currently an issue with their lease renewal which is creating some uncertainty.

Other districts:

- Winters Hardware has decided to remain open! The store closing sign has been removed from their window.
- Want List Records was featured in local media.
- Our committee attempted to help Yum Bunnies find another space; had not had success. This example reinforces the value of having a resource of available retail locations which VIC is working on.

## **10. Meeting Scheduling**

Next meeting: March 20. April 11 and 25. May 2x – pre-town day (6 or 13) and post (20 or 28).  
Summer meeting schedule?

## **11. Public comment**

No public comments.

## **12. Adjourned at 9:08 pm.**