

UNITY

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

The committee will ensure that its strategies keep in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan by: diversifying the local tax base, creating local jobs, providing citizens and visitors with local services, and improving the overall quality of life in Unity. Strengthening local businesses will be a priority, followed by attracting complementary businesses that will enhance the commercial center and maintain the rural character of the town.

Business Needs Assessment Subcommittee

4/11/2016 6:00 pm Town Office

Decisions and Assignments in Bold Italic

Attendance: Mary Ann Hayes, Tony Avila, Dan McCormick, Gail Chase, Chris Rossignol, Mary Leaming, Emily Newell, Mike Gold (Jane Pinette was ill; Clem Blakney stopped in to say he did not like the meeting agenda and wanted nothing to do with it)

Introduction

Mary Ann asked for a volunteer recorder. Emily agreed to do until she needed to leave at 6:55. Gail agreed to cover remainder of meeting.

It was agreed that the agenda was an appropriate format and contained the right topics to address. Before going through it, ***Emily offered to talk with loan officers from Down East Credit Union and Bangor Savings Bank to find out what gaps in business lending they see. The group agreed this was critical information.***

Next ***the Committee confirmed that its mission*** was to:

- Clarify scope of needs assessment (who surveyed for what purpose; open to public or not?)
- Confirm the EDC's unified message for the public
- Determine the method of the needs assessment (written, interviews, web survey, other)
- Develop an outreach plan and schedule for completion
- Report back to April 18 meeting

Mary Ann noted she felt this one meeting should be sufficient with follow up work shared by email. All agreed.

Scope of Needs Assessment: What are we trying to find out from whom?

Existing businesses are primary audience, who will be reached through direct contact by Committee member if possible. Prospective businesses are secondary audience that will have to be reached through *This Week in Unity*, general media and word of mouth. Respondents will check which they are (both possible) at top of survey. Survey is NOT for general public. Will have separate publicity for prospective businesses to contact the committee to learn about available assistance (referrals at this point).

Should it be anonymous?

We discussed that this was for general information and we did not need to be asking for info that should be kept confidential and needed to be attached to a particular business. **Leave the choice to the respondent. They can identify themselves or stay anonymous.** Discussed numbering surveys as assigned to know which were returned but this would make it possible to spoil anonymity. Will also make a note on the survey that a confidential interview is an option if the businessperson wishes to share more detailed, but privileged information with the committee. We discussed whether they should take the initiative to contact us (they would not need to say who they are but probably would never take the time to do it) or supply their contact info and we would contact them. **We decided to offer both, giving them a selection of people they could choose to contact or be contacted.**

At this point the survey is to find business needs. While tempting to try to use the opportunity to ask more information, e.g. number of employees or if there are plans to expand, that will be left for a follow up visit from liaison if they are interested. **We will need to come up with some protocol for confidentiality.**

Survey Questions

1. Check if Existing Business Prospective Business (check both if applicable)

We decided to have a manageable number of topics: Finance, Technical Assistance, Complementary Businesses, Other (including building improvements, parking, sidewalks) and a question to describe any problems with town regulations.

The hardest topic to frame was financing. We discussed how we should ask and if we should ask about varying types of funding – matching grants, forgivable loans (where a portion of each payment is refunded, still encouraging the payments to be made) and grants. Should we detail the options or not? We decided to go with low-interest loans and matching grants.

For the loan, we started with the draft RLF question Mary Ann had prepared and removed the part “do you believe a loan would help others?” Doesn’t produce the kind of data we are looking for and causes the respondent to share opinions about other business people which is not the intent. It was agreed that YES, NO, MAYBE with Explain/Comments was a suitable choice of answers for the finance questions.

Discussed how to address other solutions like technical assistance, how to get the most accurate results (decided to ask the respondent to prioritize their top three choices so they don’t just mark all because they all sound good). Will also group together “other factors” like supply chain and community infrastructure.

Draft questions:

2. Same as on Mary Ann’s draft, minus “do you believe it might help others?”

Unity could establish a Revolving Loan Fund that would target emerging businesses with low-interest loans of \$10,000 or less. We do not want to compete with our bank or credit union. Funds repaid would be available to loan to others.

Might your business wish to utilize this service? YES NO MAYBE

Comments _____

3. Would a matching grant help you to grow your business? (The town raises half of the funds and you raise the other half) Y N M Comments

4. If you would utilize technical assistance, please indicate your top three choices from the following:
 - a. Business planning
 - b. Market research
 - c. Advertising just your business
 - d. Advertising Unity businesses collectively
 - e. Government Procurement
 - f. Employee recruitment & training

5. What complementary businesses would be helpful to your business? (check all that apply)
 - a. Lumber
 - b. Slaughterhouse
 - c. Copy/Shipping Center
 - d. Lodging
 - e. Restaurant
 - f. Other
 - g. Other
 - h. OtherComments

6. Please check any other factors that limit your business growth or profitability:
 - a. Your building's limitations
 - b. Land limitations
 - c. Internet speed
 - d. Road conditions
 - e. Sidewalk maintenance
 - f. Off-street parking
 - g. Trained employees
 - h. Customer traffic
 - i. Signage
 - j. Other
 - k. Other
 - l. OtherComments

7. Have any town regulations negatively impacted your business? If yes, please describe and offer any ideas for improvement.
YES NO Describe _____

8. How else could the Town assist your business in being successful?

9. Your responses to this survey are anonymous. If you would like a private confidential consultation to discuss your specific business needs or ideas for economic development, please share your name and contact information, notify your Committee liaison or leave a message with Sam at the town office. A Committee member will contact you to make an appointment at your convenience.

Optional: Name

Phone

Best time to reach

UEDC Message

Gail will work from draft on Mary Ann's survey intro and improve upon it. Reference to "helpful to others will be removed." Return methods will be Town Office (mail or drop off), have liaison pick up or fill out on line. 2 weeks after delivery is enough time. Will confirm deadline date at April 18 meeting based on ability of committee members to get them delivered.

Survey Distribution, Return Method and Completion Schedule

We will distribute paper surveys with a postage paid return envelope to all businesses for which a liaison can be recruited from the Committee. The liaison can offer to pick it up if the business would like and the URL will be provided to fill it out on line. It was agreed that Sam would be asked to type in all the hard copy ones that are returned and charge her time to the TIF account. Based on Committee discussion about completing Business List and liaison volunteers, deadline would be set for about 2 weeks after delivery is anticipated, no later than May 31. The results will be available for the first meeting in June at the latest, possibly 2nd May meeting if things move quickly.

Business Directory

As Jane was ill, Mary offered to work with Emily to get the existing file on Google Docs so that everyone could add to it. Anyone who is not comfortable with that can provide hand-written info to Jane if available or Sam and ask her to enter it.

Recap and Next Steps

Tony will find out whether the Town has a Survey Monkey subscription and make sure Sam knows to record the hours she works for the EDC to charge to the TIF account.

Gail will explore whether Unity could use KVCOG's account.

Mary Ann will synthesize the notes from Emily and Gail and do a draft of the survey no later than Thursday for the Subcommittee to improve upon with the version by Sunday shared with the full Committee to finalize on Monday night.

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 pm.