

In attendance: Emily Newell, Mary Leaming, Lucia Picard, Mary Ann Hayes, Gail Chase, Clem Blakney, Tony Avila, Dan McCormick, Chia Murdock

Excused Members: Mike Gold, Jim Buckle, Joe Saltalamachia

Guests: Najean Shedyak, Matt Picard

**Introduction:** The meeting was called to order at 6:05 pm with a quorum of 7 present. Emily and Tony reported that Lori Grant, Jane Pinette and Chris Rossignol were no longer members of the committee, leaving the total membership at 12.

**Minutes:** On a motion by Emily, seconded by Clem, the minutes of the November 7 meeting as edited by Mary Ann were approved 6-0-1 (Chia abstaining).

**Financial Report:** Emily reported that given the community tragedy over the weekend, she had not been able to update the spreadsheet but would get it done well before the January 2 meeting. She estimated that \$20k remained unappropriated in the TIF account. She will talk with Ellery Bane on Friday to obtain an estimate of 2017 TIF revenues. Funds are transferred to the TIF account each September, so that's when 2017 revenues would be available to spend.

**Revolving Loan Fund:** Neither Mike nor Jim were present. Mike had sent an email just prior to the meeting to Mary and Emily including a contract with KVCOG. It was not clear whether this was a draft or something the RLF Committee was prepared to recommend that the Selectmen sign. Emily agreed to connect with Mike and ferret this out. Once there is a contract, KVCOG will prepare loan program documents, including a promissory note, which will be reviewed by the Town attorney. It is not clear when the Committee will set its first deadline.

**Web Site and Business Directory:** Mary Ann thanked Emily and Salty for noting linked document problems. Others noted they worked for them. May be software or platform issues. Gail noted a need to reword a sentence regarding agenda requests. Mary Ann will work on fixing these problems. No other changes were requested.

Lucia, Chia and Mary Ann will team with Kari on taking the existing business contact information and getting into a format that can be displayed (and ideally searched) on the web site. This may result in a request to purchase add-on software for the web site. Mary Ann will coordinate. Lucia will be lead on database set up and Chia will contact all businesses to verify information and obtain permission to include them on the web site. Kari will be consulted and engaged to extent possible as she will be expected to maintain the data once set up. The Committee pledged to get working on it but no deadline for completion was promised.

**Member Terms:** Clarification was asked regarding which members had been appointed to 1 or 2 year terms. It became clear that this had never been finalized. Based on a poll of members present, the following allocation was recommended for action by the Selectmen, noting that all 1-year members were eligible for 2 more 2-year terms before needing to take a year off, per the ordinance. Hopefully all contributing members wishing to remain on the EDC would be re-appointed.

1 Year Terms: Mary Ann, Chia, Gail, Mike, Joe, Jim

2 Year Terms: Dan, Clem, Tony, Emily, Lucia, Mary

**Lodging/College:** Mary reported that President Khoury had apologized for delay in responding to letter but had been traveling a lot and asked to meet after the holidays.

**Making Headway Project:** Mary Ann summarized the feedback that had been shared via email following the November meeting. There seemed to be general agreement around the following:

1. Unity was not in the same position as other communities that had been referenced. Specifically, we were beyond the initial project phase, had recently conducted a major community visioning exercise, were weary of drawn-out processes and had some specific economic development projects already prioritized, chief among them a lodging strategy. We were concerned that energy might be diffused when it needed to focus.
2. While we did not want to turn down the generous offer of the Unity Foundation to fund this effort, we did not want to accept it if we were not confident that the funding and people's time would be well-utilized. Using the funds poorly would be worse for our long-term relationship than turning down the offer.
3. We were not satisfied that the Making Headway project as outlined would be a good use of time or resources.
4. We were not comfortable with \$20,000 being spent on general facilitation and capacity building without a substantial tangible outcome in mind.
5. We were concerned that if \$20,000 in resources were made available, that they would be swallowed up in general facilitation and overhead at the expense of more specialized consultants (e.g. marketing, architecture, hospitality) that might be more valuable.

With this sense of the EDC's position, Mary, Emily and Mary Ann contacted Nancy Smith of GrowSmart and asked if they would be amenable to adjusting their program with a focus perhaps on a lodging solution or other more specific economic development agenda item, and breaking the project into 2 phases: (1) an initial intense discovery and organizational phase over the winter for which a specific budget heavy on GrowSmart facilitation would be in order, and (2) a project development phase, the budget and plan for which would be created once priorities had been confirmed, and which would be open to allocating resources outside of the GrowSmart staff if appropriate. It was further suggested that the best time to engage Unity residents in Phase 1 was in the January-March range. By April, people turn their attention to outside. Could we do something intensive this winter, recognizing that a smaller number of committed teams would be motivated to keep working during the spring and summer?

Nancy indicated that GrowSmart would be very open to this arrangement. Mary and Emily then reported that they had met on Friday with Larry Sterrs and Lori Roming of Unity Foundation, who expressed openness to this approach and presented Mary and Emily with a grant application that would need to be prepared by the Town and GrowSmart and negotiated. A workplan, timeline, budget and deliverables for each would be required. They left feeling very positive about making this work for all involved.

Mary Ann then reported that although she had originally suggested the lodging focus, that she wanted to propose a broader topic for consideration: "How can Unity Become a Destination?," which would include but not be limited to a solution to our lodging challenge and would likely attract more participants than would a "lodging" solution alone. Ideas started to pop up, including strengthening ATV and snowmobile trail packages and ice boating. It became clear the "destination" topic could attract a lot of positive energy around economic development, while driving traffic that would need accommodations.

The Committee discussed this refined approach and members were in agreement that if the project could be structured in this manner, it would be appropriate for the EDC to sponsor it. On a motion by Dan, seconded by Mary Ann, a committee of Mary, Emily, Mary Ann and Tony were assigned to work with GrowSmart and the Unity Foundation to negotiate a program design and budget consistent with the above objectives. It will be brought back to the Committee for endorsement on January 2, with possible email conversation in-between. It would be preferable to have the funds flow through GrowSmart rather than the Town, as long as the Town would be involved in approving progress payments and Phase 2 allocations. The vote was unanimous.

**TIF Program Applications:** Gail opened the discussion with a need for the EDC to determine how projects, especially community events, would qualify for TIF funding as economic development. While the list of eligible activities in the DECD-approved development program is an initial sieve, it is short on specifics and calls for a lot of interpretation of what is bone fide “economic development”. There are no clear answers to this question, which is frustrating. One aspect to pass the straight-faced test is to demonstrate that event will stimulating spending that would not otherwise occur -- more than groceries and coffee required, e.g. have businesses stay open and offer a discount with the event. It was agreed that Unity could not immediately jump to Common Ground Fair level events and needed to provide a framework that was doable for our small town and could treat applicants fairly.

To address this dilemma, Mary Ann suggested that the EDC could declare that marketing Unity as a destination was a formal strategy supported by 4-6 community events/year. Applicants would have to demonstrate how they would be marketing to people who don't already frequent Unity, their expected economic impact, and how they would measure results (e.g. survey specific businesses on what bump was evident from event traffic.) This approach was supported as a starting point for 2017. We would evaluate how it went and refine accordingly. Details would have to be finalized at the next meeting, along with the overall TIF budget. It was agreed the draft documents offered a good starting point. Gail and Mary Ann agreed to take the 3 draft documents and work on their next iteration to have ready for approval on January 2.

The meeting adjourned at 8 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Mary Ann Hayes (reviewed by Lucia Picard)