



TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY

Economic Development Commission

Regular Meeting Minutes, Monday, March 27, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.
Shepardson Community Center, Room 26
(approved)

Present: Commissioner David Cappelletti
Commissioner Nicole Griffin
Commissioner Jesse Langer
Chairman Terrence McAuliffe
Commissioner Frank Mirovsky
Commissioner Armando Paolino
Commissioner Mark Petrucci

Also present

Absent

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman McAuliffe called the meeting to order at about 6:35 pm with roll call and pledge of allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Frank Mirovsky MOTIONED to approve the February 27, 2023 meeting minutes, SECOND by Mark Petrucci and unanimously voted.

VIDEO REPORT - DISCUSSION

The commissioners viewed and discussed a ZOOM meeting held Wednesday March 22 with ShawnaLee Kwashnak, owner of Portraits by ShawnaLee, Rudy Marconi, Ridgefield First Selectman, and Glori Norwitt, Chair of Ridgefield's Economic and Community Development Commission. The topics included beautification, civic engagement, and volunteerism.

During that ZOOM meeting, Chairman McAuliffe gave an overview of Middlebury and compared demographics with Ridgefield, citing similarities and differences. Ms. Kwashnak, a former Ridgefield resident, recalled that the initial first beautification effort, the placing of flowerpots on lampposts along Main Street, was a turning point that changed everyone's opinions of town.

Mr. Marconi noted that you can't do anything without money, but most importantly getting volunteers and supporting them. Ms. Norwitt discussed several ways the Ridgefield EDC has used volunteers and other means to generate enthusiasm and improve business, including business organizations and arts committees. She mentioned a "Shark Tank Event" run by volunteers. She also explained that maintaining the beautification efforts, such as watering flowers and small repairs, required continuing commitment. Mr. Marconi said that expenses for this maintenance was now part of the town budget.

The discussion also included town fairs, concerts, and sidewalk activities that drew visitors to Ridgefield and helped fill the restaurants and stores with patrons. Mr. Marconi said most of this was done by sponsors, philanthropists and committed volunteers. Chairman McAuliffe observed that Middlebury does not have the "walkable downtown" that Ridgefield enjoys, lacking sidewalks and the ambience desired by pedestrians. Mr. Marconi said Middlebury should actively pursue grants to improve walkability and should utilize a grant writer.

Chairman McAuliffe thanked them, and said he understood the underlying message was start small, make it happen, don't give up, show progress, and make that progress visible.

During discussion of the ZOOM meeting with commissioners, Chairman McAuliffe said he had sent the recording to Ed St. John, and had asked his OK to show it to members of the currently inactive Beautification Committee at a Special Meeting.

Commissioners discussed possibilities including concerts and firecrackers, an arts commission. Nicole Griffin suggested defining a plan with costs to present to the Board of Selectmen. David Cappelletti suggested local artisans might support a more upscale town fair. He also suggested using Meadowview Park rather than Shepardson Center grounds. The idea of a sidewalk fair was discussed, with Chairman McAuliffe saying Middlebury's center wasn't appropriate but Jesse Langer said it might work at one of the parks.

Chairman McAuliffe said he would ask Ed St. John about a grant writer. He'd also ask them about meeting with the Beautification Committee members.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

None.

DISCUSSION

None

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

ADJOURNMENT

David Cappelletti MOTIONED to adjourn, SECOND by Nicole Griffin and unanimously voted at about 8:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Terrence McAuliffe
Chairman—Economic Development Commission
cc. Town Clerk, Commission Members