

NOTES OF THE BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
FOR TOWN OF NEW LEBANON
HELD ON JUNE 7, 2021 AT SHATFORD PARK PAVILION

Present: Anna Duhon, Deb Gordon (Board Liaison), Tistrya Houghtling, Erminia Rasmussen, Sharon Powers, Monte Wasch (Chair), Josh Young

Absent: Richard Beckwith, Gregg Carroll, Jack Lancto, Rita Carver, Chuck Gerald, Ellen Ann Kafkalas, Mitch Kelleher, Peg Munves, Erminia Rasmussen

Members of the public: Chris Dreyfus, Danielle Kuffel

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 6:32pm by Monte Wasch who began by asking for an approval of the minutes from the April meeting.

Since there was not a quorum, no official motion to approve the minutes could be made, nor could any motions be passed this evening.

DISCUSSION

Monte Wasch reported that he had received several calls complaining about businesses in New Lebanon. Since the purpose of this committee is to expand business in New Lebanon, Monte referred people who complained to other authorities/committees better equipped to handle complaints such as reporting complaints to the Code and Zoning officers, speaking at a Town Board meeting for privilege of the floor, etc. The mission statement of the BEDC does not include enforcing rules or regulating businesses

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Outreach and Marketing Subcommittee, presented by Anna Duhon

The committee has developed a process around the new town slogan that will be more participatory. Sharon will present the proposal at the Town Board meeting coming up. Basically it will involve a call for slogans, which will include the school community, all slogans to be received by August 8. From those slogans, the O & M committee, in concert with the BEDC, will choose up to 5 slogans and present those, along with the one from the Town Board, in a survey for the town to fill in. Top results will be presented to the town board at the October meeting. The final say on a slogan rests with the town board.

Infrastructure Committee

Deb Gordon read a letter, attached, regarding getting a feasibility study about water and sewer in town. She wants the BEDC's support for the idea of having the town pay Nicole Allen of Laberge Group to write a grant to the Empire State Development Corp (that has a June 30 deadline) for a feasibility study. The cost of the feasibility study depends upon what is needed, but would be about \$30,000. The water and sewer system on the "Miracle Mile" could cost about \$1.5 million but Deb said the town would possibly have the option to do one or the other.

It was suggested that the businesses that would be affected need to be surveyed to find out if they would want water and septic and be willing to pay for it and its upkeep. If the new system were put in place, taxes

for landowners would go up and there may well be future fees for maintenance. Need to find out if the cost would be worth it to them. Anna Duhon asked if all businesses/residents along the Miracle Mile would have to participate and was told they would not. Deb explained that 50% or more of the businesses would need to buy in. Question is if the water and sewer would increase economic activity in town.

Monte believes the town would benefit from the water and sewer and said that Chatham has more business density because they have a water and sewer system. Chatham is currently faced with having to redo some of their older water and sewer and this is what any town would have to do if they had water and sewer.

Feasibility studies are good for only a few years, so once it was done (if it is done), it would have to be acted upon within a relatively short period of time.

Monte Wasch will join Deb Gordon's subcommittee and Josh Young volunteered to be on it as well.

DISCUSSION ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE BEDC WITH NEW BUSINESS

Should we develop a process to talk to new businesses?

Should we be endorsing new businesses? Discussion about if BEDC should be doing this as part of their mission – pointed out that if we didn't like a business, we could become a controversial committee and set ourselves up for trouble.

Consensus was that the committee should be there to assist businesses to get through the process of moving to New Lebanon, or getting out publicity on themselves or becoming successful, without making judgments on their viability since we are not equipped with the facts to do so.

The BEDC should welcome new businesses but not endorse them and not take any formal actions. No motions were made about this since there was no quorum and we will continue this discussion and make our role more formal when we have an official meeting in the future.

Motion to adjourn made at 7:49 made by Erminia and seconded by Deb.

Next meeting: Tentatively scheduled for July 5 but may take place on July 12 because of the holiday. A notice will be sent out to confirm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Powers

Letter from Deb Gordon:

I have something I would like to have put on the agenda for the next BEDC meeting re: water infrastructure. The reason we get nowhere with this discussion is that we have no real information. None of us. Neither those who support water infrastructure nor those who oppose. In the absence of information, it is impossible to have a productive discussion or draw reasoned conclusions. So I propose that we educate ourselves about what types of systems are available to us (given our geography), what the costs and pros and cons of each would be, what funding sources are available to us, and what the cost is of doing nothing.

This means a feasibility study, which is expensive. The good news is, because of government stimulus efforts resulting from the pandemic, financial assistance is available on both the State and the federal levels. Recently I spoke to Nicole Allen of the Laberge Group. She gave the talk on municipal water infrastructure at the Association of Towns training session last winter. She told me that the Empire State Development Corporation gives grants that cover up to 50% of the cost of a water infrastructure feasibility study. Normally there is one grant deadline per year and the grants are quite competitive. This year they have quarterly deadlines (the first is June 30th) and more money to give out, with the intention of making the grants more accessible.

However, Empire State Development will cover **not more than** – and quite possibly less than -- 50% of the cost of the study. But Nicole pointed out that water infrastructure is one of the things supported under the federal stimulus plan, and that the remainder of the cost of the study (the part not covered by the ESD grant) could be funded with this money. This is potentially a big savings to the town. Moreover, if, after studying our options, the town decides to go ahead with some type of water infrastructure, there is now both State and federal money available for construction.

Laberge would charge \$5000 to write the feasibility study grant. That money would have to come out of our coffers. But it would leverage tens of thousands of dollars in grant moneys and permit us, as a community, to have an informed discussion of this complicated issue. Such a discussion was strongly encouraged by the 2005 Comprehensive Plan, the 2009 Housing Study, and the 2014 Hamlet Revitalization Plan...but it continues to elude us.

I am asking the BEDC to support a recommendation to the Town Board that they allocate \$5000 to hire the Laberge Group or another similar firm to write a grant to fund a water infrastructure feasibility study, with the understanding that a match will be provided from New Lebanon's share of the federal stimulus money.

This was my letter to Monte, which I had hoped he would circulate amongst the membership because the subject is complicated and I wanted you all to have time to digest it so that you could formulate questions, etc. I hope you all are faster at absorbing information than I am.

Since writing the letter, I realize that there is another important piece of this equation. The most problematic aspect of contemplating water infrastructure for the Miracle Mile is its relative lack of density (compared to other small towns: think Chatham). The 2009 Housing Study identified a need for low income housing, single family and apartments, as well as housing for the elderly (since our population was and still is aging). In focus groups: “Participants overwhelmingly supported the future construction of affordable senior housing and affordable two story rental housing when asked what types of housing are most needed and would be most welcome in New Lebanon. Participants encouraged the development of cluster housing on smaller lots, mixed use neighborhoods located in the center of Town near services with smaller homes or condos, starter homes for young couples, and multi-generational housing that would not isolate senior citizens but allow them to live with and interact with younger couples. ..[M]any participants felt...that the Town needs to provide incentives to develop a variety of affordable housing types” (page 27).

Density is key to affordable housing. (The well and septic system I put in at Fisher’s Store cost \$25,000.) Water infrastructure is key to density. The center of town has already been identified as the preferred location for affordable housing. It can not happen without water infrastructure, and only the town can offer that “incentive.”

One final thing. I sit on the Comprehensive Plan Rewrite committee. In our discussion of the “housing” section of the plan, one member worried that if we built affordable housing in town, that would attract more low-income people. Possibly true. But we have learned a few things during the pandemic, and one of them is **who**, exactly the **essential workers** are. My personal attitude is: welcome.