

Town of Bar Harbor, Maine

Minutes of Economic Development Task Force Meeting of January 10, 2012

Present: Pat Samuel, Chris Fogg, Chris Vincenty, Karen Baksa, Vicki Hall, John Kelly, Mark Hanscome, Howdy Houghton, Debbie Kiley

Angela Chamberlain, Interim Planning Director, attended for the Town

December 13, 2011 minutes were read, corrected, and adopted. Motion made by Howdy Houghton, seconded by Chris Vincenty

We discussed the Ferry Terminal Study. Erica Brooks sent in her observations.

All agreed that the Terminal and surrounding land are an important asset for the town and surrounding area. It is a Class "A" Port of Entry to the U.S.

Erica questioned the potential sums presented in the report (lease, parking, rents). Chris Fogg, representing the Chamber (which has helped to fund the study), has been on the committee to explore the Terminal potential. He said that some of the figures were meant to be enticing to potential investors and are on the conservative side. Erica's comments led some of the discussions. She was positive about combining commercial enterprise, parking, and a cruise ship/ferry port.

All agreed that the congestion at the wharf in downtown Bar Harbor is a big problem. A docking facility for large ships would ease the congestion and perhaps spread car and bus traffic throughout the area. Chris Fogg explained that cruise ships do not want to continue to tender system (Carnival Lines will not even come to Bar Harbor because of tendering). A pier landing is safer, easier and cheaper. Utilizing the Terminal area would ease congestion as well.

John Kelly asked whether Acadia National Park had been included on the team. Chris Fogg said Len Bobinchuck had been consulted. John felt that it was important to stress that the Park does not want to encourage more cruise ship landings and thus more visitors, rather wants to ease the traffic and problems we already have.

Vicki Hall spoke of her visit to St. Thomas. There is tasteful development where the ships land (not in the center of town) with shops, tourist office, restaurants, and a park at the dock. Shuttles then transport visitors. She felt that this was possible in Bar Harbor with the Ferry terminal. Chris Vincenty pointed out that we already have the bus system (Island Explorer). We just need to have the bus make a downtown loop from the Terminal and make connections. All the members of the EDTF felt that we should be involved in this project. We drafted a proposal to present to Town Council "A public, not private, entity should pursue the acquisition of the terminal and land for maritime use. We would like to see a broader representation of the population be included (EDTF, Acadia National Park, local shop owners and residents)

Vicki Hall made the motion., Karen Baksa seconded it.

The town sold the terminal, and land, for \$1.00 to the Canadian government in the 1950's. Due to financing difficulties, the initial arrangement for the terminal & land to revert to the Town if the Canadian government no longer wanted them had to be rescinded.

Howdy asked what percent of Bar Harbor sales come from passengers on cruise ships. Chris Fogg had heard that passengers spent an average of \$101.00 on their visit to the town. A question arose : was this figure based on a Univ. of Maine study of 2007 based on shopping bags, or a better study?

The Canadian government is waiting to hear from the town with a proposition.

Chris Vincenty described the Maine Downtown Center's report on their site visit to Bar Harbor. He feels that the town can utilize the experience and know-how of the organization, a program of Maine Development Foundation. The town of Bar Harbor needs help to organize and talk to one another. The MDC can help us to set up, give us help in fundraising and grant proposal writing, implement some of the ideas for preservation and development. He emphasized that Bar Harbor is one of the wealthiest communities, and that we have so many resources and attractions already. We are the envy of many communities. But we are not a cohesive group, we often work at cross purposes or for our own self interest. The MDC can help us with strategy. We would need to get a director (Chris himself might consider the position), set up as a non-profit entity (to qualify for grant monies), get the community involved. Establishing a steering committee, perhaps including members of the Economic Development Task Force, that is not attached to the Town Council or other group, is the first requirement. It would be an autonomous group focused on "Downtown".

The next step? There is an educational workshop sponsored by the MDC in Augusta the 20th of January. Pat Samuel, Chris Fogg, Chris Vincenty, Vicki Hall and Angie Chamberlain have all said they would attend

Chris Vincenty then suggested that some members of the new steering committee go to other communities to see how they have handled co-operation and organization. He also suggested that the committee start soon with a visible, easy, relatively non-controversial project like wayfinding signage, directing visitors, both pedestrians and vehicles, to local attractions and Acadia National Park.

Karen Baksa and Mark Hansome both felt that incorporating the Economic Development Task Force into the Maine Downtown Committee would exclude outlying areas (Route 3, Sand Point, Town Hill, Otter Creek). There is great need for those areas to be permanently represented and have a chance to participate in Town Planning.

At the next meeting Pat has asked Dana Reed to come and speak to the Task Force about sewer fees. They are very complicated and costly, preventing some businesses from expanding or being able to stay open year round (Acacia House). The fees are often exorbitant, based on square footage (a way to prevent deceit) but often inhibit growth. Chris Fogg said that the Chamber and the B & B Association has tried to address this problem. It is very convoluted. We need to be informed.

Howdy Houghton mentioned the "Occupy Bar Harbor" event on the 28th of January at the Masonic Hall, There will be speakers, music and forums from 5:00 p.m to 12:00

The meeting was adjourned at 2:25, moved by Howdy Houghton.

Respectfully submitted,
Deborah Kiley, Secretary pro tem.