

**Town of Mount Desert
Economic Development Committee Meeting
January 10, 2024
Minutes**

Attending: Megan Bailey, Jamie Blaine, Don Graves, Matt Hart, Nancy Ho, Dan McKay (chair), Kathy Miller, Stephanie Reece, Kerri Sands, Rick Wheeler

Absent: Martha Dudman, Jen Judd-McGee, Durlin Lunt, Wendy Todd, Averel Wilson

The meeting was by Zoom only.

Dan convened the meeting at 4:01 p.m.

1. Matt moved approval of the minutes of the October 11, 2023, meeting. Nancy seconded. Passed unanimously.
2. Updates
 - a. Broadband: Kathy reported that the Broadband Committee had had no meetings and made little progress since her last report, primarily because Spectrum had unilaterally withdrawn its proposed share of the funding, leaving the town to foot the entire bill to connect the remaining 44 addresses to provide universal coverage. The cost? A modest \$250,000. Funding discussions are continuing with Spectrum (hopefully) and the county.
 - b. Heel Way Project: The six-unit housing project was “finally and officially approved” at the Planning Board’s December meeting. Even before that vote, however, seven seasonal residents had appealed to Hancock County Superior Court, asking the court:
 - to determine that the planning board approved in error and so reverse their decision and reject the application.
 - to determine the Town Board of Appeals has primary jurisdiction to hear an appeal, and so send it them.
 - to have the town pay their expenses, including legal fees, for this suit.The court has not started this case and has made no decisions so far. Kathy said 365 will be ready to begin construction after Labor Day if the court approves.
 - c. Main Street Project: Dan noted that the overhead wires crossing Main Street are still there. He will follow up with Durlin. Matt said he has long been concerned that Versant would simply not do this last phase of the project, saying that the town might need to consider hiring an independent contractor to finish it.
 - d. Skating rink: Fundraising for the new rink has been fantastic, with almost 75 percent of the goal in hand and some significant pledges/requests outstanding. Fundraising will continue, as there will undoubtedly be a number of contingencies. The focus, however, will shift to community support and involvement to ensure that everyone in the town, seasonal and year-round, has the chance to support this project. The CDC has been an invaluable vehicle in this process, as Dan will note in his annual letter to the town. Matt asked about a

rumor that someone had offered to pay a substantial sum to the project but was turned down. The town owns the rink; no donation has been turned away.

- e. Short term rental ordinance development: The issue came up at the Warrant Committee's organizational meeting, during which a wide range of thoughts and opinions were expressed. The process will be slightly different this year, in that the warrant (if there is one) will come from the Select Board, based on recommendations of a four-person committee. We discussed whether this committee might help clarifying issues and providing information – purely from an economic development perspective – on what is sure to be a contentious debate. We will revisit that at the next meeting. The committee did not believe we should be taking a position, at least at this point.
3. Discussion of request by the Town of Mount Desert Community Development Corporation for charitable contribution from the Town to support part-time staffing needs: Dan will request \$5,000 from the town to cover: (1) bookkeeping (the only word in the English language to have three double letters in a row), which has become far more time-consuming with the rink donations, etc. and (2) the committee's modest annual expenses, which are paid out of its general funds, are annually diminishing the already modest amount of those funds. Again, the rejuvenated role of the CDC in the rink project was brought up as a future model for the town.
 4. Discussion of potential initiatives
 - a. Village public transportation: The idea, which Megan Asher, a resident, brought to us a couple of meetings ago, sparked a discussion of the role and limitations of a committee that meets four times a year and has neither staff nor budget. It is an interesting idea, and we very much like the role for this committee of incubator and facilitator of new ideas and projects, but we don't have the bandwidth to be the implementer and unclear where such ideas go next. We will invite Meg to our next meeting to continue discussions and see whether and how we can move forward.
 - b. Maker space: Kathy said there is nothing new to report. She is still keen on the idea, but it would undoubtedly be expensive and must be financially self-sustaining.
 - c. Other: Rick asked if we should have a role in updating the comprehensive plan. Megan and Kathy are on the committee that is working on that and will act as our liaisons. Rick also said that, in light of the negative pushback "economic development" often gets, we should more proactively pat ourselves in the back for our accomplishments: broadband; the housing summit; the skating rink.
 5. Other business: The CDC is registered and in compliance with state regulations regarding fundraising activities.
 6. Tony Smith has resigned from the committee. Since he originally became involved because of his role as public works director, Dan will ask Durlin if we might invite Brian Henkel to join us.

The meeting adjourned at 5:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jamie Blaine
Secretary