

Community Development Committee 8-23-2017

Attending: Catherine Samuels, Phyllis Roth, Evan Miller, Jana Richards, Steve Rickert, Carmen Lone, Bob McHatton Sr., Chuck Renneker, Bob Peabody, Ursula Flaherty, Audrey Knight

Absent: Dave Crowell, Nelle Ely, Justin McIver, Peter Dubrule, Martha Cummings, Margaret Lindsey

Branding

Discussion about the roll out of our new branding for Bridgton. It was generally agreed that we were all pleased with the essence of Bridgton that has been captured in the branding.

Audrey - Just getting educated on the network of our local adult education, and has not yet done the business survey. Met with the Economic Development Committee (EDC) to discuss what problems we are solving for, and what strategies to use. Then, the challenge is getting the distribution going, creating a mailing list.

Chuck - Building a list of businesses.

Town of Bridgton Website

Audrey said the website is still in the works. The community is slowly adding info. It is able to be seen on your cellphone. But, as of yet, we have no IT person to work on it and keep it current. A high school volunteer was suggested but because of the amount of content and the decisions to be made, it was agreed that it would be too much responsibility.

Bob P. thinks we should have one flow point/person to handle fire department, police department, recreation department, etc., and figure out how to merge or link it on the site.

Hospital expansion

Steve – Businesses are smart to locate here. It's a perception. The hospital expansion is a good example.

Catherine – Where are we with the hospital expansion? Do we need to have an official offer for them?

Chuck – Rural hospitals are having economic trouble.

Chuck and Mike Tarrantino will meet with the hospital, and after 1 or 2 more meetings, they will come back to present their information to the town.

Ursula – Surprising they would consider expanding when so many variables, like future funding are unknown right now.

Bob P. – CMMC letting practice go, new CEO cutting back in Bridgton, population is growing, especially in the over 55 bracket, but there are bottom line issues.

Bob M. - Podiatry has been closed at Bridgton Hospital.

Chuck – Hospital brought up the campus idea because it needs to expand in order to compete with Stevens Hosp. and North Conway Hospital.

Jobs -Workforce

Audrey - Thinks we need a goal, too nebulous now, and it would be good to have a time frame.

Evan - It should be over a long term. We need to dispel the myth that residents in Bridgton aren't trained/qualified for jobs here.

Jana - Which part to tackle first. Unemployment is low, so who will work in new businesses?

Chuck- Workforce goes where the jobs are. Bridgton as a core economic center, economic opportunities here – that draws people.

Ursula –It's been tough to hire service workers. A whole state problem.

Chuck – Maybe we have to pay our workers more.

Western Maine needs to offer jobs with higher salaries.

Steve-If they're not getting workers, they'll have to raise the salaries. But then the business has to charge more to pay workers more.

Ursula – Do we have data that says that this is the reason?

Audrey –At EDC meeting we discussed the North Conway growth, the retail hub is expanding, building affordable housing. People will drive to North Conway for the jobs, so we compete with North Conway for workers.

Steve – We want to be known as a place with good paying jobs.

Chuck – We have the lowest income for a town in Cumberland County. We do want good paying jobs.

Carmen – We/Bridgton may lack confidence to pay more/attract business. Lack of economic confidence keeps prices down?

Jobs –Youth

Jana- Need a change in perception for young people.

The school reputation was not good, but now improving.

Want more than just summer retail jobs.

Adult ed has a skills program in Bridgton.

Audrey- EDC thought there is a need for a job fair for 16-18 year olds.

Maybe businesses could open up for prospective employees?

Carmen – We took 5th grade students to a science fair at USM in Gorham. The kids were so inspired, seeing what kinds jobs will happen in the future.

So many businesses in Bridgton. Maybe partner with school system?

Chuck – In the past we met with the principal to start something, but it just died, seemed like an interface problem.

Carmen – Maybe we can see what they have to offer.

Evan – Will talk to them on Monday about new possibilities.

Phyllis – Maybe we should go to the Vocational Center to see what the programs are. The new director is David Morse.

Janna – A big push to make a shift in the environment, to make students feel they can succeed. Staff training in how to support the students better.

It's a good time for a new push, building resilience in students. How do we build that resilience best?

Carmen – What do we want to know? Who goes to whom?

Chuck – Kids need to have a good education. Want to get the word out that we offer to help promote the schools.

Evan – The school didn't want to use the Bridgton News to put out information about the schools.

Phyllis – We have so many artisans and other type of professionals in Bridgton. Can they possibly take on a student to mentor?

Bob P. – Audrey and I are meeting with the Superintendent and can discuss these things.

Carmen – We should be persistent.

Bob P. – Test scores are an important factor in pulling new residents to a town.

Steve – Lake Region SAT scores are not that good. Ursula – What are the school system facts and numbers? SAT scores? How many go to college?

(average 1070) (grad rate 87%)(of 531 students, 52% get free or reduced lunch)

Steve – Maybe something different, not school system for job fair.

Audrey – What kinds of jobs can we bring here, considering the educational opportunities? A different niche, like specialized culinary skills? Long term goal –improve school system.

Different strategies with different time frames.

Carmen – Maybe a Vocational Business Day – A work tour? Could we do it?

Steve – At Hancock Lumber we have an upstairs that is a skilled environment. Would be great for the students to see it. We could probably do an internship.

Chuck – Would be good to talk to students about the “real world” and do it periodically.

Carmen – Want to involve companies that are part of the future

Ursula – Energy is the future.

Bob P. – Work with Gary C. in rec department to organize field trips. He’s great, full of energy, open to ideas

Steve – We need to support the kids to inspire them.

Carmen – ideas around jobs:

- Low unemployment rate

- Increasing wages to get employees

- Medical expansion

- School system

- Businesses open house(field trip) for youth to see opportunities

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Jobs – Financial considerations

Bob M. – A decent wage is what? Every contractor, plumber, and electrician are so busy.

Chuck - \$25/hr or \$50,000/yr is a living wage.

Carmen – Audrey was speaking of barriers to employment- like affordable childcare.

Ursula – We have to talk about realities. Creative childcare such as co-op childcare.

Bob P. – People don’t make enough sometimes to pay for childcare, may not be getting that living wage. May need a subsidy. MBNA had their own childcare for workers.

Audrey – CDBG funds could be used for childcare.

To do’s before the next meeting:

1. Audrey Knight will work on the employer survey
Chuck Renneker will assist with updated business list
2. Stephen Rickert will explore Youth visits to Bridgton employers
(sponsored by Businesses)with Gary Colello
3. Bob Peabody & Audrey Knight will include CDC conversation with the Superintendent of MSAD 61
4. Evan will pitch the school with community promotion
5. Get creative with childcare.

Next meeting September 6th

Future meeting dates:

Sept, 20

Oct 4, 18

Nov 1, 15, 29

Dec 13, 27