

Brattleboro Planning Commission

Monday, April 1, 2019

Meeting Minutes

Planning Commissioners: Felicity Ratte, Tom Mosakowski, Jessica Gelter, Josh Steele, Kate Audlin, Kathy Urffer, Jessica Gelter

Staff: Sue Fillion, Planning Director

Brattleboro Listening Project: Sharon Fanti, Chrissy Lee, Gabby

A. Meeting called to Order

Ms. Urffer, acting Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:07 PM.

B. Announcements

No announcements.

C. Public Comments

No public comment.

D. Approve Minutes of January 7, 2019 and review notes of March 4, 2019

Ms. Ratte moved to approve the minutes of January 7, 2019 as written; seconded by Ms. Audlin.
Pass 6-0.

No action was taken on the March 4, 2019 meeting as they were not official minutes since there was not a quorum.

E. Planning Commissioner resignation and Election of new Chair

Ms. Fillion advised that Elizabeth McLoughlin had formerly submitted a resignation letter as she was recently elected to the Selectboard. She advised that there needed to be a new Chair appointed who would serve until the PC's annual meeting in July 2019.

Ms. Urffer nominated Felicity Ratte to serve as chair; Ms. Audlin seconded the nomination. Ms. Ratte accepted the nomination. Nomination passed 6-0. It was agreed that Ms. Ratte would assume the role at the May 5 meeting and Ms. Urffer would continue to chair this meeting.

F. Windham Regional Commissioner appointment

There was a discussion of the role of the WRC Commissioners. It is a 1-year appointment. Mr. Mosakowski expressed interest in the position. Ms. Fillion will pass his name along to the Selectboard so that they consider appointing him.

G. Brattleboro Listening Project – Chrissy Lee and Sharon Fanti

After introductions, Ms. Fanti and Ms. Lee explained how the Brattleboro Listening Project came to be and what they have been doing (see attached handout). They noted that they are both new board members of the Arts Council of Windham County (ACWC) and feel that feedback and information that they have collected will also be used to inform their work on the ACWC board. Through activities such as community working, co-working space, talks and artmaking events, the BPL has collected information about the creative

The Commissioners and BPL discussed some of the key themes that have emerged, one of which is the lack of affordable arts space. It was noted that several low-rent art spaces and the underground culture of small performance spaces in the downtown are being lost. BLP also spoke to lots of people that feel served by the arts community. Some people felt that the arts community was built by a particular generation but because those grassroots organizations have grown into organized establishments and there are not enough smaller spaces. They did hear about the silo effect in the arts community.

BLP went into this without a goal or outcome. They wanted to pursue conversations and see what happened. They have been able to make connections with people. There was dialogue around community outreach that the Planning Commission has done. Ms. Urffer responded that is usually in conjunction with a project and so they are taking the pulse on an issue, such as the Parking Study. There was discussion of the need to identify different groups and start earlier in the process.

Ms. Urffer spoke to the CT River Conservancy's partnership with Vermont Performance Lab and how the community paddle was well received by the community and how it provided free community space.

Ms. Lee advised that in her experience, the most effective public engagement for a project is when the infrastructure is already in place. It can be an active planning commission or a civic organization that works closely with the community - an organization that is funded to do that kind of work. She suggested that when a plan or project comes along, the channels that already exist can be used and suggested that how those structures can be fostered. She noted the BLP is a volunteer project and not sustainable as a volunteer project. They would like to continue to do activities but will need to pursue funding channels. Ms. Urffer noted that there is a lot of focused foundation money that is in this area.

There was a discussion of arts and economy. It was noted that the CEDs document does not include art projects and there is no commitment of staff or funding for arts. This may be an opportunity for advocacy and change. BLP advised that the economic metrics (job creation, etc.) of the arts are important but the impacts on quality of life and social infrastructure and there are ways to quantify that impact.

There was discussion about feedback that BLP received and connections and other connections to the Downtown Design Plan. BLP recommended following up on access to the waterfront, redesign of Bridge Street, scale of development on the riverfront, relationship of development to the riverfront. Strong guidance language could help the project with public space and public access desires.

Other topics of conversation between the Planning Commission and BLP included: gentrification, reliance on tourism dollars, art live-work space, affordable artist space through artist cooperatives. A continuing thread in the conversation was gentrification. Ms. Lee spoke about community benefit agreements so that as reinvestment and redevelopment happens, the new development can be steered in positive ways to align with what the community wants.

BLP suggested a follow-up conversation with the Planning Commission as they pull together their data and stories. The Planning Commission thought that would be nice and expressed a desire to hear more about how their outreach reached different groups of people. The BLP is open to hearing

suggestions for future activities for the BLP and would like to move forward trying to partner with organizations so they are open to suggestion.

Mr. Mosakowski stated he would like the Planning Commission to take one the top themes that came up and try and figure out the range of opportunities are.

I. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:09 PM on a motion by Ms. Gelter; seconded by Ms. Ratte. Pass 6-0.