



TOWN OF RANDOLPH, VERMONT

Economic Development Council

Via Teleconference

Minutes of November 2, 2020

Members Present: Mary Richter, Damian DiNicola, Ken Cadow

Guests: Wink Willett, Sarah Jackson, Gary Dir, Kezia Frayjo

Town of Randolph: Joshua Jerome

Selectboard Liaison:

Public Attendees: None

Mary informed this meeting is being recorded to document minutes. Do I have any objections to the recording? No objections.

1. **Establish Quorum** (no quorum)

2. **Call to Meeting to Order**

Mary called the meeting to order at 6:36 pm.

3. **Public Comment**

None.

4. **Randolph in Motion (RIM)**

- Randolph in Motion Guide, Randolph Bucks

Josh and Mary updated the group the Fall / Winter edition of RIM was inserted and distributed by the Herald and social media on October 22nd.

A group of RIM members is distributing and replenishing the Guide throughout the area.

The Guide has been well received, and copies are available at Town. Anyone interested should contact Josh.

Copies of the Guide were circulated with Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation Board members. The board is comprised of prominent people from across Vermont and was impressed by the quality of the product and the efforts from a small town group.

Ken commented he shared the Guide with the faculty and staff throughout the region who live outside the area. This is an excellent way for them to understand better what's going on in our community and their children's activities.

Josh updated the group on the RIM website. A lot of the information in the Guide will be on the website and more. There will be the food and recreation sections, and the goal is to expand with a real estate component.

There will be a concentrated effort on what's in the marketplace regarding inventory and land, including a section on commercial real estate that will be highlighting that Randolph is an opportunity zone and a lot of demographic information. The goal is to present why it's advantageous for somebody to move to Randolph or open up a business.

Josh plans to complete the website in another 2 to 3 weeks and would like to share with the RIM core team and the REDC members for feedback and run a beta test.

Another suggestion is to have our local children contribute to the Guide, and the faculty can help them. There was quite a bit of brainstorming and conversation. Josh commented if there is not enough room in the Guide, the children's contributions could be included on the website.

Mary commented this is a great take away; the team will reach out to Ken to be added to the RIM next meeting agenda.

5. RACDC / RAMAN Updates

- Randolph Bucks
- Illuminated Downtown, Downtown Wi-Fi

No Update / No Representation.

6. White River Valley Chamber of Commerce Updates

No Update / No Representation.

7. CoVID-19 Regional Testing and Economic Recovery Updates

No Update / No Representation.

8. New R3 - Energy, Environmental, and Agriculture Initiatives Updates

Gary updated the group with a recent event on electric vehicles and hybrids. The event was in planning for two months.

Bethany Fleishman, Transportation Manager from Vital Communities <https://vitalcommunities.org/> is working on an E-Bike initiative for next year with the school system.

Gary commented on developing a program similar to Local Motion in Burlington <https://www.localmotion.org/>. Gary would like to work with the Gear House to get a couple of E-Bikes and traditional bikes for next spring for people to tour around Town.

Gary suggested an E-Bike/Traditional bike event partnering with the Gear House and local restaurants to have a tour and after dinner supporting local businesses. It was recommended using a Pro-Camera, drone to capture the event.

Mary commented this event was discussed at the Fall/Winter RIM team meeting and was tabled for the Spring/Summer due to timing and coordinating efforts with the Gear House. Members expressed many great ideas and enthusiasm; we will continue this discussion in the future.

Gary reported on the new R3 has reinvented itself, and it is a work in progress and will launch in the spring.

Creating a new board with two people and expanding to South Royalton with a woman there and potentially expanding to Northfield. Looking to develop regional programs focused on environmental and special projects.

9. **Vermont Technical College Updates**

No Update / No Representation.

10. **Old Business**

- Shared Spaces / Business Opportunities ~ Center on Rural Innovation Update / Matt Dunne

Mary provided a high-level overview of conversations between Damien, Josh, and Kezia regarding the Co-Worker space at 2 South Main and opportunities to explore and build on within this Council.

Damian added that one of the things our group needs to start doing is reaching out to the different types of businesses as to the pluses and minuses of working here?

What infrastructure is needed if people want to relocate to Randolph and keep a business here permanently?

Kezia is a good representative of the other folks coming to Vermont and our Town.

Kezia's perspective will lead to more discussion for our next meeting where we might recruit and bring in more people to Randolph, that is not the traditional manufacturing business that we've seen in the past.

Kezia reported she is a CoVID transplant. Kezia and her husband lived in Austin, TX, and relocated to Chelsea because of why people move to Vermont and its proximity to Boston.

Kezia business is within the tech industry, and she assists with business startups and digital projects for large companies. Kezia is working as a project contributor or a product manager helping with business websites or providing support to engineers, designers, or others globally.

Chelsea has no or inadequate internet service and her business is dependent on this service. She was looking for a coworking spot and searched on the Internet, and nothing came up locally except Burlington and Montpelier. The only way Kezia found out about Randolph was cold calling around Chelsea.

Kezia is a great resource to help Randolph identify how we can attract other businesses, i.e., digital, to the area.

Takeaway:

The next step is to discuss with Josh Jerome as there have been discussions outside this Council and possibly a good fit for REDC. If it is, create a subcommittee with a lead and members to work on this initiative.

11. New Business

- The impact of the local school system's reputation on town development efforts and what we may do to help improve it. (Damian DiNicola)

Damian presented to the group one of the biggest potential threats and opportunities is our school system's reputation. Randolph's been struggling for many years for various factors. With the onset of CoVID, families are looking at our school system, and its reputation is at the forefront again relating to negative publicity.

The discussion is not a personal comment or draw an inference as to the right approach; however, it is another opportunity to focus on the impact these image problems have on our economy and our businesses. It is a complex and multifaceted problem. It's an opportunity to pull together a broader task force from an economic development perspective seeking help on a state, Town, and school board level involving our state legislatures to take a proactive approach to solve the problem.

The negative publicity causes families with more resources or higher-performing children to go outside of the school system. Lower performing children needing extra attention causes the reputation to go downhill. It's a caustic spiral that is hard for anyone to solve, whether it's a school superintendent of schools or the Town.

This issue is not isolated to Vermont as it is happening throughout the country with children. Families are moving their children out of public school systems to place them where they can get full time, private, or homeschooling.

Damian suggested prior to the next Council meeting to talk with folks within the community who should be involved on this topic and start thinking about who to recruit to work on this initiative, including our legislatures. Any communities who have experienced these same issues resolved them and willing to share their success stories.

Takeaway:

The next step is to update if discussions took place on this topic have been discussed further. Are we ready to create a subcommittee with a lead and members to work on this initiative?

Adjourned: 7:55 pm
Respectfully submitted,
Mary V. Richter, Chair