

Minutes: Bethel Business Association meeting – April 16, 2009

Chair Matt Washburn called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. No Secretary's or Treasurer's report.

Cellphone tower: Matt reported that he has contacted AT&T about the possibility of a cellphone tower in Bethel to improve reception in the downtown area. They informed him that he needs to write a letter to two addresses in the company to request the tower, and they would evaluate the request. He will proceed with the inquiry.

Legislative breakfasts: The next one will take place on April 27th.

Home and Garden Show survey results: Matt reported that he has compiled some of the most prominent and/or recurring suggestions from surveys sent to businesses and individuals who had exhibits at the event. Highlights of the feedback:

- End-time of 3 p.m. rather than 4 p.m.
- More fliers and e-mails should be sent/made available
- Posters should be available for posting earlier (past practice has been two weeks before event)
- Waive fees for non-profits
- Article regarding the event should appear at least two weeks in advance and include a picture (this year's and last year's event included such publicity, although without the picture)
- Tables, electric hookup and benches should be made available to those who need it (Heidi Nikolaidis noted that we could make them available for a fee as a revenue-generator)
- Signage at the entrance and around town should be more prominent (discussion noted that the triangle at Camp Brook and 12 would be a good location)

Survey results will be taken into consideration for planning next year's event.

Business and Planning Commission survey: This survey of businesses and residents in Bethel is part of the Planning Commission's obligation to update the Town Plan every five years. If a grant can be secured to fund the survey, it will be done this fall. The BBA and its members have the opportunity to contribute to the survey to determine what residents and businesses expect from their town. BBA Vice-Chair Neal Fox encouraged members to contribute ideas for questions to the survey, as well as donating time and effort to help make the survey a success. Rick Benson noted that he will attend the next Plan Commission meeting to keep in the loop on developments.

Town improvement discussion: Neal noted that when the BBA was formed, its purpose was to serve as a liaison between local businesses and government and a venue for town/business dialogue. In the spirit of furthering that purpose, Town Manager Dell Cloud attended the meeting and provided a comprehensive update on development and regulatory issues concerning the town.

Dell said that the Plan Commission survey is an important tool for businesses in Bethel to have a say in the Town Plan, which affects all businesses and residents. He added that input to town government from the community is imperative, because it helps prevent the government from becoming out of touch with taxpayers' needs and concerns.

Dell pointed out that the town is working on securing an enhancement grant that will help pay for improvements on either side of the Church Street Bridge, including sidewalks and curbs, street lighting, and underground drainage around the post office.

He also mentioned that he is working on funding for repaving and repairs to a portion of Pleasant St. from the Triangle to the front of the school, and lauded the upcoming Town Hall project (likely going out for bid in May) as a great benefit to the area. He is looking into the possibility of securing US Department of Agriculture Rural Development monies to help with the Town Hall project.

Overall, Dell said that Bethel has a lot to offer businesses that want to expand or locate here in terms of infrastructure, recreation, transportation, water supply, and even a good insurance rating due to sound emergency services.

Discussion ensued regarding various possibilities for further improvement efforts, such as leveraging the town's ownership of Fort Fortitude, the need for an ordinance to address derelict or partially destroyed buildings, and how to address the trees at the parking lot (some have said they are getting too tall to decorate at Christmas, and therefore should be replaced).

Benches downtown: Dell reported that some of the old downtown benches are being fixed by Dave Hodgdon, who is replacing missing wood slats. Rick is still working on the addition of granite benches to the downtown.

Town forest trail: County Forester has yet to make his walk-through of the property to assess the trees and provide his recommendation regarding BBA's plans for the trail.

Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m. Next meeting is May 6.

Jamal Kheiry
Secretary