

Minutes: Bethel Business Association meeting – May 7, 2008

Rick called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

The minutes of the 4/24 BBA meeting were accepted as submitted, and the Treasurer's report – indicating a total cash balance of \$6,607.06 – was also accepted. 2008-2009 dues has been collected from 41 members (there was a total of 58 members for 2007-2008)

Old Business

Welcome sign restoration: Nick Nikolaidis provided an estimate he got from Scott Fisk for restoration of the four signs. The basic refurbishing would cost \$3,412, while the comprehensive refurb would cost another \$400. See attachment for full text and per-sign breakdown of costs.

General consensus was that the figure was very high. Bev Washburn suggested that we get an estimate from Paul Margeson to compare, and said she would do so. Nick suggested we approach the Town regarding contribution to part of the refurbishing cost, since the signs benefit the town as a whole.

Memorial Day flags: Bev reported that they arrived May 6, and that the cost is \$6 or \$7 each. Rick said that an as-yet unnamed donor will cover their cost.

Legislative breakfast: Rick reported that the last legislative breakfast had 14 attendees sign in. Representatives Sandy Haas and Mark Mitchell (from Barnard) and Senator Dick McCormack attended and engaged in a spirited discussion about various issues.

New Business

Bylaws update: No new developments

Cellphone service on Main St.: Rick mentioned to the Select Board that the BBA is pursuing this matter. He also talked to the Town Hall Committee regarding their potential involvement, per last meeting's minutes.

Burying cables on Main St.: Rick mentioned to the Select Board that the BBA is pursuing this matter. They will look into grants and/or other means to help pay for the initiative. They asked for BBA assistance on grant-writing, and a volunteer is sought for this effort.

Recreation trail in town forest: Rick discussed this with the Select Board, and Dell Cloud noted that the Randolph office of Forest, Parks and Recreation might have grant money available.

Catamount as mixer topic: Rick e-mailed the deputy commissioner of Healthcare Resources Vermont to request that she come speak to the group about Catamount to explain how the program works.

Marketing plan discussion: Toward formulating a plan to market Bethel, attendees held a brainstorming session to identify what a marketing plan might consist of. Elements discussed include the following, although these ideas are not final:

- Objectives
 - Keep local dollars local
 - Bring more customers into town
 - Attract new businesses and/or families to town
 - Retain existing businesses
- Target audiences (those we want to attract)
 - Bethel residents/workers
 - Area businesses (that might be open to relocation to Bethel)
 - Upper Valley residents
 - Tourists
- Messages (what we believe will have impact on our target audiences)
 - Bethel businesses offer a wide variety of world-class products and services, right in your own back yard.
 - Bethel holds a crossroads position in the heart of Vermont, while offering you the opportunity to stretch your investment/family's dollars.
 - Bethel is the *real* Vermont, off the beaten tourist track, with plenty to offer you and your family.
 - Bethel is a town with a deep and fascinating history that you can experience yourself.

Neal Fox noted that an important question that has to be answered before this marketing process will be viable is what Bethel, as a whole, wants to be in the future. Do we want industry here? Do we want tourists? A discussion ensued regarding Bethel's direction and its potential unique selling points. Kirk White noted that without an aura of being a *destination*, Bethel can't compete with locations that offer that type of image – not just a few stores, but also entertainment/recreation/cultural offerings. Special events and unique business ideas were discussed as possibilities to attract people. Neal drew on his experience with the GMEDC to point out other towns' efforts, and to note that \$10,000 to \$15,000 of grant money from the state Department of Community

Development is available if the BBA is willing to go through the grant-writing process, with his office's assistance and guidance. In-depth survey information would have to be collected from Town residents/businesses and a plan for the money's use would then be based on the survey results and submitted to the state for approval. Rick said BBA would send a letter to the membership regarding the grant possibility to get a consensus on how and whether to go forward.

Meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:30 p.m. Next meeting will be May 22

Jamal Kheiry
Secretary