

Minutes: Bethel Business Association meeting – April 24, 2008

Rick called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. There were 12 people in attendance. Rick noted that the officer nominees were elected at the BBA Annual Meeting on April 2nd. Officers are

Chair: Rick Benson

Vice Chair: Matt Washburn

Treasurer: Susan Griffin

Secretary: Jamal Kheiry

The minutes of the 3/19 BBA meeting were accepted as submitted, and the Treasurer's report – indicating a total cash balance of \$6,704.15 – was also accepted.

Old Business

Annual Meeting: Rick said attendance at the meeting was not bad, but could have been higher. About 25 people showed up. Ellen Nobile suggested we use the school's sound system for future meetings in the cafeteria.

Banner system: Rick reported that Nick Nikolaidis couldn't be at the meeting to discuss this item, but had told him that the banners are expensive, and that maybe this should be a back-burner effort. However, it might be useful to talk to the State regarding directional commercial signs on the way into town to indicate what businesses are coming up for drivers heading through or by Bethel. Rick said we would check on the cost.

Welcome sign restoration: Nick talked to the sign painter, who will come up with a proposal by next meeting for restoring the signs.

Mary Floyd wanted to address the meeting, as she had to leave early. Mary said that the BBA is a beneficial organization for Bethel and she appreciates what it does. She would, however, like to see the organization narrow its focus to addressing specific business concerns, like bringing in more clientele/customers, especially as there are some Bethel businesses that are not doing as well as they could be. Cooperative advertising is one idea she said might bring benefits, and a brochure at some rest stops might also be helpful.

There was a discussion about the merits of those ideas, as well as about additional signage and improving cell phone signal coverage of downtown. Continuing with this same theme, Mary was wondering if Economic Development Fund money (New Business agenda item number 4) could be used for some of these ideas. Rick noted that the BBA is looking for suggestions about how that money could be used, and in fact the

BBA is supposed to have a committee dedicated to exploring that very issue, according to its bylaws.

Legislative breakfast: Rick noted that the final gathering of this legislative session will be April 28th at the Black Forest Café.

Main Street flags for Memorial Day: The BBA has 24 flags in good condition, and we need 20 more, (4 are still in good condition but we need to replace 20) so we are looking for donations to cover the cost of those. Bev will order new ones, while Rick will take the old ones to the American Legion for respectful disposal.

Before moving on to New Business, Heidi Nikolaidis and others discussed ideas for getting the Flower Baskets done this year. Whether or not school students would be able/willing to help as part of community service or other programs was discussed. Also, funding is potentially an issue.

New Business

Rick said that he was wondering whether the BBA's existence is sustainable with the relatively low level of regular attendance/input from its members, but based on discussion at the meeting up to this point, he figures that we can spur interest in the organization if it takes on more activities. Jamal Kheiry suggested that BBA might increase participation if it focused strictly on concerns that impact business' bottom lines, and that fundraising be done only in conjunction with specific programs that target specific benefits to members.

Improving cell phone service to Main St. and beyond: Rick and Matt will look into where in town a cell phone signal tower could be located. Rick noted that even if the Town Hall is not a good location due to signal range, it still is possible that funds from it could be earmarked for the Town Hall. Rick will bring this up with the Select Board.

Burying cables on Main Street: Rick is interested in working on this issue to see if he can make progress on it; it would enhance the downtown's appearance. During this discussion, Rick also said that he planned to serve as the BBA's liaison to the Select Board on matters that may concern town government.

Recreation trail through town forest above Main Street: Rick pointed out that the remnants of an old road running behind Main Street in the town forest up on the bank could be turned into a nature trail. This is the type of thing that people look for when considering communities in which to locate, and could be an additional attraction to the downtown.

Use of Economic Development Fund money: Although this was discussed earlier when Mary was in attendance and it was noted that the bylaws called for a committee to work on this issue, it was brought up briefly again as an item of concern that the BBA has strayed from its bylaws as written. Bev Washburn and Ellen Nobile volunteered to update the bylaws so they reflect more accurately the BBA's functions as they've evolved since the last revision.

Green-up Day: Members in attendance thought it would be a good idea to focus on downtown. Sweeping sand from the streets was brought up as an issue, as one sweeping by the town isn't always enough, especially after a very snowy winter. Heidi suggested that perhaps the BBA could sponsor an extra sweeping of the downtown and request advance notice of when it would happen so that cars could be moved from the curbs, allowing for a more complete sweep.

Peavine Park fence: Parts of the fence are missing and need to be replaced. Rick will talk to Del Cloud about fixing it.

In reference to Mary's earlier suggestion regarding marketing Bethel businesses, Jamal suggested that the BBA carefully analyze what they want to achieve, who the target audiences are, and how we want to position Bethel to them before deciding what types of marketing or PR activities to engage in.

Heidi suggested the BBA could go back to its previous format of using the first meeting of each month as a business-oriented meeting, while the second one would serve as a social/mixer type of meeting, perhaps with a speaker or other event. Jay Caruso suggested a survey of BBA member businesses might be a good idea, and Rick said he'd do one.

Meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:15 p.m.

Next meeting will be May 7

Jamal Kheiry
Secretary