

**TOWN OF WAITSFIELD, VERMONT**  
**Selectboard Meeting Minutes of**  
**October 27, 2008**  
**Waitsfield Business Community Forum**

- I. **Call to Order.** The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. at the Big Picture Theater, Carroll Road, Waitsfield. Present were Selectboard members Roy Hadden (Valley Animal Hospital), Paul Hartshorn (Hartshorn Logging), Charles Hosford (Project Harmony, Selectboard Chair), Bill Parker (Creative Microsystem), Kate Williams (Vermont Yak Company; Northern Forest Canoe Trail); Town Administrator Valerie Capels; Moderator Peter MacLaren (West Hill House B&B); Tony Italiano (Channel 44/45), Lisa Loomis (Valley Reporter); Brian Shupe (Vermont Natural Resources Council, DRB Chair); Planning Commissioners Russ Bennett (Northland Construction), Brian Fleisher (Spiritual Healing), Robin Morris (Irasville Business Park), Steve Shea (Paige & Campbell, PC Chair); Joshua Schwartz (MRVPD); Mike Anastos (Yellow Farm House Inn), Claudia Becker (Big Picture Theater), Barry Bender (Clearwater Sports), Ian Buchanan (FitWerx), Bill Curley (Inverness), AnneMarie DeFreest (Round Barn Inn), David Dion (David M. Dion Real Estate), James Foreman (Feather River Productions), Darryl Forrest, Yvonne Fugate (The Collection), Adam Greshin, Mark Grosby (Mark Grosby, Esq.), Jim Halavonich (MRV Chamber), Pat Halloran (True Value Hardware), Nicholas Harmon (Verilux), David Hartshorn (Hartshorn Organic), Carol Hosford (Waitsfield Legislative Representative), Bernie Isabelle (Egan's Big World Pub), Jon Jamieson (Jamieson Insurance), Bev Kehoe (Vermont Festival of the Arts), Sharon Kellerman (Valley Players), Jim Leyton (Eastern Systems), Dick Kingsbury (Kingsbury Construction), Laura Kingsbury (Kingsbury Construction), Sean Knight (E-Doorz), Timothy Piper (Round Barn Inn), Lisa Russell (Maximum Fitness & Rehab), Mike Sharkey, Drew Simmons (Pale Morning Media), Leanne Taddonio (Apropos).

II. **Waitsfield Business Community Forum.**

1. **Introductory Comments.** Selectboard, Planning Commission, and Development Review Board members present introduced themselves, as did Valerie Capels and Joshua Schwartz. Selectman Hosford provided opening comments and introduced Moderator Peter MacLaren. Selectman Hosford noted that this meeting is among one of the action items from a meeting in August of the three boards as one way to improve communications.
2. **Ground Rules.** Mr. MacLaren outlined the agenda and ground rules. He explained that the first part of the agenda will be for oral presentations, where key points will be captured. Following a short break, four or five key points will be distilled from the first part of the agenda. The S.W.O.T. approach will be used: *Strengths* are things that are working well which can be built upon; *weaknesses* are areas where there are current problems that can be improved; *opportunities* are ideas that can be used to move things forward in better directions; and *threats* are things that could become weaknesses if we don't address them.
3. **Business Community Input.** Bev Kehoe commented that this is an incredible place to live. It's easy to start a business but hard to grow a business here. We struggle with communication and cohesiveness.

Yvonne Fugate of Moretown noted that a lot of Waitsfield business owners are not able to vote. It is nice to be able to partake in this opportunity.

Nicholas Harmon commented that more recreational facilities are needed to attract business to the Valley and improve the quality of life, such as a public community center. The current Selectboard meeting space is not conducive.

Drew Simmons located to the Valley about 4 years ago. The Valley's strength is its brand. It's a great place to live. The transportation infrastructure is the worst of any place he's ever lived: lack of shoulders for bicycling and crosswalks. It's easier to drive from the post office to the grocery store. Retailers want people to get out of their cars and enjoy being here. Roads seem to be only plowed for cars and not pedestrians.

Mike Sharkey, who has lived in the Valley for 35 years, expressed concern about the lack of bicycle lanes on Route 100. We need to demand that they be included in the Route 100 road project. They will be very important for our tourism.

James Foreman noted that when his office was on Bridge Street, he observed how people used the area. He recommends that something be done about the parking there. It's not a user-friendly place; there needs to be more investment in infrastructure.

Mr. Harmon noted that historic buildings in the Village were unduly burdened with higher taxes than other buildings, which may work counter to their preservation and put them at a disadvantage to other buildings that have better parking.

Jon Jamieson grew up in the Valley and remembers the big traffic jams for the early 1980s. There has been a demographic shift with more people moving here who are in their retirement years and fewer buying second homes. We are attracting public relation and computer consulting firms and are still trying to attract tourists. We need to concentrate on things that connect all those components, like transportation and recreation.

[Larson?] of Moretown, agrees that both tourism and clean industry needs to be supported and does not think the industrial park is promoted enough. Mr. Harmon reported that Bosch leaving the industrial park. We need to promote the community's benefits better. There is the sentiment that the Waitsfield Selectboard is not pro-business and this forum is encouraging.

Bev Kehoe suggested that the Valley needs better branding in concert with becoming more pro-business. There is not a clear message to let people know when they've arrived at this place.

Leanne Taddonio does not feel the business community is living up to its potential. There is not good promotion of events and buildings are not well-maintained.

Mr. Sharkey recommended people serve as official hosts or ambassadors to welcome people.

Claudia Becker feels the Valley has a lot to offer, but believes marketing efforts are disjointed. There is no cohesive identity or promotion of events. The Chamber or some other organization should pull together a monthly calendar, a single source of information, of all the events going on in a given weekend. There are a lot of individual efforts. She likes that Waitsfield has maintained its rural integrity and has not become commercialized like Stowe. Ms. Kehoe reported that several groups are in the process of coordinating an on-line calendar as a community calendar that will allow individuals to post events. Once established, it will need to be proactively promoted. Related to the idea of an ambassador, a strength we have is the one-on-one connection visitors are able to have at the Farmers' Market, the Festival of the Arts, and other events.

David Dion expressed appreciation for this forum. He has been involved in a number of projects over the past 20 years in Waitsfield and other communities with businesses who wanted to locate or grow here. He said Waitsfield boards lack the "how can we help you" attitude. Mr. Dion outlined his comments in four main areas. He believes there is a pervasive culture of arrogance in Waitsfield. He believes Waitsfield boards use executive and deliberative sessions inappropriately and excessively. A more open government would promote fidelity, respect, and trust. He believes decisions tend to be based on personalities rather than the merits. He believes there is more of a willingness to fight in Waitsfield than to try to resolve or mediate conflicts.

AnneMarie DeFreest commented that they have not yet decided what to do with the old barn they are fixing because they're studying all the rules and don't know what will be acceptable to the Town government. She echoed Mr. Dion's comments and feels there's an old boys' network and you need to go to the boards with all your guns because someone will be against you, rather than being able to come to the boards with a creative idea that is financially-viable.

Brian Fleisher, speaking as a private citizen, said he has been vocal about the Town government being anti-business and that there is much more of an attitude of blocking development than supporting and promoting it. He provided an update on the bike lane initiative. Regarding alternative energy, he recommended the Town enact a tax stabilization program so an individual's property taxes would not be increased on alternative energy investments, such as wind and solar. Regarding parking on Old County Road, he commented that he has raised the suggestion that the Town level out the shoulder to address the parking problem and does not know why it has not happened yet. Regarding support for existing business, he recommended that the Town enact an enterprise zone to allow nonconforming uses to expand.

Dick Kingsbury said that he has not anyone come to the industrial park in ten years and when they've tried, the Town has thrown them out. They have lost several businesses. It's very difficult to get a permit in this town. He is discouraged that more people are not present at the forum. The community cannot even get a water project in town.

Ms. Tadonio does not know what the solutions are, but there is a lot of energy that can be harnessed to make things happen. It is easy to adopt a pessimistic attitude and complain. We need to shift that negative energy and harness the positive spirit that is already here.

Ian Buchanan observed that the community is very divided and the water project is an example. Some people in town feel threatened by some of the Town government's decisions, which creates distrust and negative votes. The government can help create an environment where people feel there is a community and that they are being heard. He would like to see more people attending forums like this.

Sharon Kellerman echoed Mr. Dion's and Ms. DeFreeest's comments and said that Waitsfield has a reputation as a place that is difficult to start and run a business here. More people might not have attended this forum because they felt "what's the use?"

David Hartshorn noted that he was shocked by comments from CVEDC's Sam Matthews at a business meeting at the 1824 House about a year ago that Waitsfield has a reputation for being anti-business, which should have been a red flag to the board members who were there. He believes the business community is doing everything possible with what they've got.

Mike Anastos commented that a lot of existing businesses are struggling. More attention should be focused on what can be done to assist them before trying to bring in new businesses.

Mr. Foreman noted that some businesses feel disenfranchised from the Chamber. Although there is the Valley Futures Network, there is no other networking opportunity for businesses. Many businesses go outside of the area for their business. He is having difficulty attracting new employees.

Jim Halavonich reported that the Mad River Valley Chamber of Commerce is in the process of changing the Chamber's structure in response to many of the things that have been expressed. It will allow them to expand and be more integral to things going on in the Valley. In addition, he believes water, wastewater, and housing are critical to creating a more compact, less dispersed business environment.

Barry Bender said there is a lot of arrogance in this town over the years and it is a struggle and battle to get anything done. The Town had an opportunity to work with Virginia Houston on a water project but it got shot down and then the eminent domain issue scared a lot of people. He believes she deserves an apology. The new boards and new structure is a positive change. Mr. Fleisher countered some of the statements regarding Ms. Houston.

Bill Curley complimented the forum and recommended that there be more of them and they be made more open to non-Waitsfield businesses to attend. The lack of infrastructure is a big problem that needs to be addressed, such as parking, the bike path, bike lanes, sidewalks, etc. Regarding branding of the town, he questioned how it can be done if we do not know who we are and what we want to be. The Town has said it does not want sprawl, but then requires only one house on ten acres.

Mr. Fleisher said he heard that Circus Smirkus was interested in locating settling in Waitsfield and asked if there was there anyone lobbying for them with an attitude of what can be done to help or was there an attitude of how can we control them. We need to be proactive, inviting, welcoming, and developing and sustaining businesses here to develop an economic infrastructure that will support families and retirees.

Mr. Simmons noted that the State's economic development council is comprised of only 4 or 5 people for the entire state. He suggested that one person be tapped by the Town to help connect with new or existing businesses.

Ms. Kehoe suggested that we look at the specific reasons businesses have come and gone on a case by case basis. On a positive note, she reported that the Washington County Field Days is moving to the Mad River Valley which would be an opportunity to nurture this new event.

Jim Leyton emphasized the need to buy local. He would like to encourage efforts to support each other in our purchasing and service delivery decisions.

Mr. Jamieson encouraged citizens to get involved and run for the town boards.

Brian Shupe said he agrees with almost everything that has been said and disagrees with others. One strength of the town has been the ability to work together to get things done. In the 20 years he has been here he has seen the development of the Mad River Rec Path, the relocation of the Chamber from its poor location in Irasville, the development of a public restroom, the development of the Laureau swim hole, the development of the senior center, and the Farmers' Market, to name a few.

- 4. Open Discussion.** Mr. MacLaren reported that he identified the following four broad themes (1) infrastructure, (2) identity, (3) supporting existing and new business, and (4) communications.

Identity. Mr. MacLaren summarized that the issue of identity came up in a number of different ways: what is it we are trying to achieve in Waitsfield (appearance, zoning); branding; physical appearance of buildings (deterioration). Identity is key because it frames all the other issues.

Ms. Kehoe noted that Waitsfield's biggest identifier is as part of the Mad River Valley, which is not a geographic entity that is on a map. There was discussion about whether Waitsfield is distinguishable from the other Valley towns. It is its commercial center, but lacks a town center. The distinctions between Irasville as a place and Waitsfield Village are confusing. Ms. Becker suggested that the Mad River Path projects are an opportunity to connect those two. The pond and its surrounding green are underutilized and could serve as a Town green as well as help tie the two areas together.

Mr. Foreman suggested that signage could be used to help convey the town's identity.

Mark Grosby observed that the Town voted for a Town Plan that describes what the town is supposed to be. All the zoning decisions are supposed to be based on that. He suggested having a discussion with the business community comparing that plan to what they see as their vision. Mr. Curley noted that while the business community might agree that Waitsfield is the commercial district serving this resort community, do the voters and town residents agree with that? Mr. Shupe affirmed that the Town Plan identified Waitsfield Village and Irasville as the downtown and mixed-use center for the Mad River Valley. There is a disconnect in that vision with the lack of support for the infrastructure.

Joshua Schwartz observed that the plans from the neighboring towns suggest there is a Valleywide perspective that supports the notion of Waitsfield as the commercial center. The jurisdictional boundaries are confusing.

Selectwoman Williams suggested that with respect to branding, the Chamber or other group address the ambivalence of what it means to be tourist/resort community and its context for other sectors, such as green energy businesses. Ms. Becker agreed and suggested that integrity of the community be integrated in the branding.

Mr. MacLaren summarized the following:

- Town Plan - it is a good time to understand what is in the Town Plan and think about best ways to get others involved in discussions about its update.
- Coherence and lack of town center – better use of the Town Pond.
- Signage - concept of Waitsfield as the downtown of the Mad River Valley is an interesting starting point. Is separate signage of Irasville as a separate area confusing more than it is helping?

There was discussion about whether Moretown is part of the Mad River Valley and the role of the Mad River Valley Planning District. Selectwoman Williams encouraged the forum participants to apply their expertise and remain engaged in this issue.

Supporting Existing and New Business. Mr. MacLaren summarized that this issue came up in a number of different ways: difficulty of establishing and operating a business here; interactions with different regulatory processes; tax policies; welcoming attitude; identify assets that make the area attractive to businesses; how to support existing businesses and encourage buy local efforts.

Valerie Capels noted that the Town has developed business listings on the Town Web site as a way to promote existing business and let visitors and others know what range of services are available in town.

Mr. Shupe summarized the roles of the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Adjustment, elimination of site plan review, and the recent shift to a Development Review Board in an effort to further streamline the process. He cited situations where the Town proactively worked with developers to revise the rules to support business. For example, when the

Northfield Savings Bank's proposal in Irasville was denied, the Planning Commission offered to split the costs to hire a site designer to develop a master plan for the area. Since then the bank has been permitted and the Mad River Green shopping center has expanded. When Northern Power wanted to expand, the Planning Commission formed a study group to draft new industrial park standards to allow for development to happen. There remains room for improvement. The Planning Commission is working on additional revisions to the regulations. He believes the DRB's use of deliberative sessions are generally better for their decision-making process and they are in the process of instituting a draft decision review process to identify potential problems and avoid having to go to court. The Town has had a problem with staff turnover but is confident that the current staff will be able to deliver a high level of applicant support and customer service, including more pre-application assistance up front and a clear understanding of what rules apply.

Ms. Kehoe expressed frustration about the design of the community. She disagreed that the Northfield Savings Bank was a success and does not believe it addresses other problems. She believes the Health Center building is poorly located and does not foster walking.

Mr. Simmons suggested a way to support existing business would be to create a free wireless hotspot in the Mad River Green area. Mr. MacLaren noted that the book store and Three Mountain Café do have free wireless but they're not well-identified. Selectman Parker noted that the costs associated with making the entire Valley a hotspot would cost \$150,000. Discussions are on-going about how to get a return on that investment.

Ms. Fugate suggested "Open" flags be used as a branding point to unify. Steve Shea reported that the Planning Commission will be holding a public hearing in the near future on revisions proposed to the sign regulations. They will be working with the Chamber to help get the word out.

Mr. Dion read a quote that "in politics, perception is reality and the truth is open to verification." There is a perception that Waitsfield is anti-business. The Waitsfield boards and Chamber have begun to collaborate in ways that did not exist a couple years ago. He recommends the line of communication remain open with the overt message that Waitsfield is open for business. He commended Susan Klein's work on behalf of the business community.

Mr. Foreman suggested that a small business assistance center be established to provide technical support.

Infrastructure. Mr. MacLaren summarized a number of points that were raised ranging from water and wastewater; sidewalks; parking; traffic flows; making the town an easy place to get into and be able to stop and walk around once here; and operational infrastructure.

Regarding the poor appearance of some Village and Irasville properties, Selectman Parker asked what we can do as a community to help our neighbors accomplish some things they might not be able to accomplish on their own, such as work projects. Selectman Hosford cautioned that approaching someone with the news that their property is not up to snuff could

be a tender subject. Darryl Forrest suggested there are many things that can be done to spruce things up, such as keeping the grass mowed, picking up trash. The suggestion was made to form a committee to plan and organization clean-up projects.

There was discussion about the poor condition of the Bridge Street Marketplace parking lot. Asked why the Town did not take it over, Selectmen Hosford and Hadden explained that the Selectboard at that time felt the collective businesses there should be responsible for it. In addition to costs for maintenance and the locations of the different septic areas, there was concern about the river bank and that it would be more of a liability for the Town than an asset. The Town continually struggles with fixes that may result in 2 or 3 cents on the tax rate; a penny on the tax rate raises \$50,000. Russ Bennett suggested the Town look into taking over the parking lot as well as possibly the area behind the church and create pedestrian connections. If there was a municipal wastewater system that could render the septic system in the green space no longer necessary, the road could go straight through and the green space be relocated along the river so cars do not have to drive so close to the top of the bank. This would help alleviate some of the congestion at Bridge and Main Street. Water and wastewater systems would enable the Town to get a tax increment finance district, which could help pay for those improvements. The solutions are there but will require collaborations. Mr. Buchanan suggested that once some of the basics get implemented, such as the new sidewalks and the street gets more clearly delineated, some of the issues will take care of themselves.

Mr. Schwartz described a funding source available to businesses located within the Designated Village Center to help improve historic buildings.

Communication. Mr. MacLaren noted comments were made that included positive responses to this forum; the fact that there is a community calendar under way; and there should be more meetings to allow the community to interact business to business and business to government.

Ms. Fugate suggested that citizens need to know what is in the Town Plan in order to understand and support the infrastructure issues.

Ms. Becker suggested that the Valley Reporter have a weekly comprehensive calendar to list meetings, cultural events, sports events, and other events so that people can get in the habit of looking there to know what's happening. Lisa Loomis (Valley Reporter) expressed support for the idea and noted the other media tools available to the community: a strong local paper, MRVTV Channel 44/45, WDEV in Waterbury, WMRW in Warren, and elementary schools and a high school that has the ability to communicate with every household in the Valley. The Valley Reporter's Web page can also cross reference the links to all the other community calendars.

Mr. Forrest commented that he has been attending the Selectboard meetings since March and watched them struggle to communicate with each other and other board. He thought the 3-board meeting a several weeks ago was tremendous and noted that this meeting is an outcome of that. There is still a disconnect between the Chamber and the Selectboard. Mr.



Halavonich noted that the Planning District with representatives at the table is a way to share information.

Ms. Kehoe expressed concern that the community may be in danger of over-information and suggested a distillation of the Town Plan. She promotes the 125 events of the Festival of the Arts by choosing which are the salient points to capture people's attention and incorporates the rest in the structure. She suggested a 3-sentence distillation be developed of the Town's vision. Selectman Parker asked what the economic mission statement is for this town: to do all things for all people? Are we trying to find a way to ride through poor ski seasons? Do we want to have enough infrastructure so it doesn't matter if it snows or not. How strapped to tourism do we want to be?

Mr. Schwartz encouraged people to participate in bringing information forward for the calendar; it is only as good as the information that's in them, which is only there if people are there. He also noted that the idea of a community calendar was raised at the 3-board summit, which would be a way to get the Town's word out and provide distilled versions of sections of the Town Plan over the course of a year.

Mr. Foreman suggested there needs to be more communication amongst the people, including more of these forums. The Valley Futures Network will be developing an on-line forum. Burlington's Front Porch forum is a good example.

Ms. Kehoe recommended that the Town Meeting Day event be structured differently where there is an opportunity for citizens to meet informally with the three boards and have discussions, perhaps in breakout groups. Selectman Hosford noted that the three Selectboards get together every November to discuss joint issues that affect all three towns, such as law enforcement or other timely topics, and receive presentations from agencies seeking funding.

Closing Comments. Moderator MacLaren thanked participants and said a synopsis of the meeting will be made available on the Town's Web site. He felt it was a useful and constructive dialog.

Selectman Hosford expressed his appreciation and commented that making the effort to have forums like this is a wake-up call; it is an opportunity to hear from people they would not ordinarily hear from at regular board meetings. Ms. Fugate suggested that each person in attendance call three people the next time to let folks know when and where the next one is happening.

Selectman Hadden agreed with Mr. Curley's comments about needing to determine what the vision is and, by extension, what the business community wants. He does not think it's the Selectboard's role to try to determine what that is; the business community needs to tell the Selectboard what that is and what they need. He questioned what it means when people say they do not want to be another Stowe. He thinks everyone wants an economically viable community. From what he's heard, he's not clear about what the things are about Stowe that people do not want.

Selectwoman Williams said this will be one many opportunities to talk with the Selectboard. If ideas come up after this meeting, send an e-mail, make a phone call, or come to an upcoming Selectboard meeting. She encourages more on-going and open communication.

Selectman Parker added that the beginning of each Selectboard meeting is an Open Forum section on the agenda where people can come and raise a matter that is not on the agenda. He reiterated the need for the community to determine what it wants.

Representative Carol Hosford said her vision would be to maximize businesses that depend on technology and/or agriculture, and value-added products through agriculture. Reflecting on the walk-ability of the downtown, she commented on the boardwalk under construction in Irasville and the opportunity to add amenities. Waitsfield has an advantage over Stowe because we still have some space left so the link between the historic Village and the Irasville business center could be a huge advantage if we can make it an attractive place where people want to be.

Adam Greshin noted that the Town of Warren has had similar meetings to identify a vision for the town. He believes towns have a lot of latitude to shape their own future. He believes the State can also help. Investments in infrastructure pay dividends, such as transportation, transit, and wireless coverage. Regarding permitting, every business needs a certain amount of predictability.

**III. Other Business.** There was no other business.

**IV. Adjourn.** The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Valerie Capels  
Town Administrator