

**TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON  
SELECTMEN'S STRATEGIC PLANNING PRIORITIES  
MEETING MINUTES  
WEDNESDAY, JULY 6, 2011  
6:30 P.M. – PUBLIC SESSION – FIRE STATION**

**PRESENT:**           STEPHEN BANNON  
                  ANDREW BLECHMAN  
                  ALANA CHERNILA  
                  DEB PHILLIPS  
                  SEAN STANTON  
                  KEVIN O'DONNELL, TOWN MANAGER

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

Sean Stanton called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

**II. REVIEW STATUS OF STRATEGIC PLANNING PRIORITIES**

Kevin O'Donnell reviewed the updated Strategic Planning Priorities from the last session held on March 2, 2011 and walked the Board through the updates and improvements to the website.

1. Comprehensive Plan – Kevin O'Donnell said that he sent out 4 pages of statistical information to the Board about the community. The one point of interest is that 69% of the land is forest or open space. Kevin added that only 1% is commercial and we won't grow much past this number.

Chris Rembold stated that 5-6% of the open space in Great Barrington is zoned for industrial and business use.

Deb Phillips thought about the idea of "not growing our way out", as well as, the Boards obligation to the taxpayers and said that she would like to look closely at the budget. She would like to cut a decided upon percentage from each department so that each department will look creatively at their department to come up with different ways to cut. She said that they can't keep increasing taxes. Deb said that it takes time to look at ways to cut, but it is essential.

Kevin O'Donnell responded that the Board needs to deal with this through revenues and he is looking at this with the Finance Committee. Kevin cautioned the Board against cutting a percentage per department and said that goods and services are the only things to cut. He also recommended looking at the CIP which drives expenditures.

Alana Chernila said that they are not looking at 'sharpening the pencil' but 'changing the writing implement.' She suggested that the Board look at creative things that other Towns are doing. She added that they are not looking at shrinking.

Kevin O'Donnell said that the Mills and the Fairgrounds are the only two opportunities for growth since there is no other prime commercial space available.

Andrew Blechman suggested hiring a part-time economic development person to bring in businesses and find grants.

Kevin O'Donnell said that he doesn't think that a part-time person could do much good.

He said that there are merging forces in the county that they can tap into.

Andrew Blechman said that it would be great to advertise all that Great Barrington has to offer and to try to aggressively get businesses here.

Kevin O'Donnell suggested a page about this be added to the website.

Stephen Bannon suggested that the Board continue to look at increasing business, to continue to look at sources of revenue, and to look for creative ways to stop tax increases. He added that the Board is not saying to freeze spending.

Sean Stanton said that some things increase every year such as health insurance and insurance in general, which the Board has little or no control over.

Stephen Bannon suggested that the Board should meet again with the department heads to slow down property tax increases.

2. Main Street Reconstruction – 2013 – moving ahead.

3. Improve Park Infrastructure - Kevin O'Donnell stated that the Park Commissioners have \$30,500 in this year's budget. They are putting in equipment and looking at all open spaces.

4. Improve Communication - Kevin O'Donnell said that Chris Rembold now has a 'blog' on the Town website. There is also a header on the home page saying what's going on to draw attention. There is budget information and news about the Main Street Reconstruction Project with notes, plans, and fact sheets. The survey for businesses, master plan updates and the Annual Town Meeting Warrant are also available on line.

Kevin O'Donnell suggested that the 'virtues of Town Meeting' (written by Andrew Blechman) can be put under the 'Frequently Asked Questions' Section.

Stephen Bannon suggested that the Board members name and e-mail should be moved to the Home Page.

Alana Chernila suggested that there be something that says what people need and how to get there.

Andrew Blechman asked that there be a tab with 'Board of Selectmen' on it that has their information on it.

Deb Phillips said that Town Departments and the Directory should be condensed.

She also suggested that people who send in comments have the option to send them to Town Hall or to the BOS individually.

Sean Stanton said that all e-mails sent to 'ask the selectmen' should be shown to the selectmen.

Kevin O'Donnell said that he will add more tabs.

Deb Phillips said that they should promote Great Barrington businesses and not all of South County (which the Chamber of Commerce does). This can also be used to promote businesses during the Main Street Reconstruction.

Stephen Bannon agreed and suggested that there be links to businesses on the home page if the merchants choose to do so.

5. Review Recommendations of Housatonic School Campus Task Force – Kevin O'Donnell said that the Task Force will have at least two recommendations for the Board on August 22.

Deb Phillips said that this should be integrated into the master plan process.

6. Court System in Dewey School – Kevin O'Donnell said that there is a 1 year lease until the end of FY12. He is hoping to meet with a representative from the State in August with Sean

Stanton, Representative Pignatelli and Senator Downing arguing on our behalf to keep the Court here and to look at what improvements can be made.

7. Develop PILOT agreements where applicable – Kevin O'Donnell reported that 17% of the total land in Great Barrington is tax exempt; exclusive of government owned property. 36% of the Town is tax exempt. He said that they are trying to work out 102 parcels at this time and they will continue to work on it.

8. Maintain proactive distressed building code compliance – Kevin O'Donnell reported that the Health and Building Departments are working together on properties that have been boarded up. Ed May has not spent any money this year so it will roll over to next year.

9. Implement Buracker Police Reorganization – Kevin O'Donnell said that he hopes to have a full presentation for the Board in September or October. He reported that they are working on getting police accreditation. Chief Walsh said that two assessors need to come and look at the operation, which he hopes will happen this summer.

10. Maximize revenue and minimize cost – Kevin O'Donnell said that they will continue to work on this. Currently, \$90,000 is spent downtown for trash pick up, plowing, etc.. There was conversation about the artistic recycling bins and it was suggested that another contest be created to replace the old ones, which should be organized by the Cultural Council. Sean Stanton asked that there always be a recycling can for every garbage can. There was discussion about the BID district and thoughts as to why it wasn't accepted. Stephen Bannon suggested the Board work to get the businesses together again and 'take another shot at it.'

11. Partnership opportunities – Kevin O'Donnell stated that they resolved the Big Y TIFF, there are plans to grant the easement for NE Log Homes, and the sale of the old Fire Station is going forward. He said that 'Berkshire Creative' is growing and asked how involved the Board wants to get. Kevin said that they are trying to create an economy where people can interact with each other and are focusing on marketing the Berkshire name. Sean Stanton agreed that we should get involved and utilize an organization that already exists.

12. Continue to develop sustainability practices – The Energy Committee is working on an energy reduction plan. Alana Chernila reported that there is one more criteria for the stretch code which is the energy reduction plan. All buildings will have to be assessed for their performance. This part of the process will require the most work. Sean Stanton stated that a 20% decrease in energy use within 5 years will result in massive savings. He said that there would be a cost up-front, but it will give a large savings in the end. Alana Chernila responded that the Energy Committee is looking for grants, but there are not a lot available. She said that once they create the energy reduction plan, they can apply to be a 'Green Community', which will make the Town eligible for grants.

13. Continue to work on broadband development – Kevin O'Donnell said that he anticipates having a draft presented to the Board by the next meeting.

### **III. MODIFY/ ADD STRATEGIC PLANNING PRIORITIES**

Stephen Bannon said that these are a good set of plans that are being worked on and suggested that they keep them as they are and continue to work on them for the next 4 months. He does not think the Board should slow the progress down by adding on to them. All agreed.

Alana Chernila asked to talk about the transfer station.

Kevin O'Donnell said that they will talk about it at the next BOS meeting.

### **IV SELECT NEXT STRATEGIC PLANNING PRIORITIES MEETING**

The next meeting will be held at the Fire Station on Wednesday, October 5 at 6:30 PM.

### **V. ADJOURNMENT:**

On a motion by Stephen Bannon, seconded by Deb Phillips, the Board adjourned its meeting at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Cara Becker

Recording Secretary