

**TOWN OF OLD ORCHARD BEACH
TOWN COUNCIL WORKSHOP
Tuesday, February 23, 2010
TOWN HALL CHAMBERS
7:00 p.m.**

A Town Council Workshop of the Old Orchard Beach Town Council was held on Tuesday, February 23, 2010. Chair MacDonald opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

The following were in attendance:

**Chair Sharri MacDonald
Vice Chair Michael Tousignant
Councilor Robin Dayton
Town Manager Jack Turcotte
Assistant Town Manager Louise Reid**

**Absent: Councilor Laura Bolduc
Councilor Shawn O'Neill**

One of the primary goals of this Town Council was to increase the ability to bring more businesses to the Town of Old Orchard. Often known as a summer season community, over the past few years the efforts toward making it a four season community has been intense. The OOB 365 Committee, when newly formed by local businesses, had a mission and goal of providing activities during the Spring, Fall and Winter months to enhance the summer activities of the local Chamber of Commerce.

The Chair presented a document, *Bring Business to the Beach – Economic Growth Initiative*, which was used for a discussion piece with the aim – *Businesses Working Together to Spark Local Trade*.

There was a very good attendance at the meeting which was extremely upbeat and encouraging. Several individuals spoke including James Harmon, Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce; Ken Shupe, President of the OOB365; Pat Holland, Robert Quinn, a gentleman from Scarborough that failed to give his name; Peter Prinz; Lucien Hoot; Pierre Bouthiller, Councilor Robin Dayton; Chair Sharri MacDonald; Vice Chair Michael Tousignant; Gary Lamb; Jacqui Deveneau; Mike Dickinson; Winn Winch; Michael Gray; Jason Webber; John Martinez; King Weinstein; Town Manager Jack Turcotte; Assistant Town Manager Louise Reid.

Some of the facts presented included:

**Old Orchard Beach has over 300 year-round-businesses.
Many of the town businesses are run by local families.
When people have jobs the local economy is helped.
When business is thriving in a community, the community thrives.
Previous issues brought to the Council by the public which in large measure encompass the question of growth to a community including:
policing the beach; motorcycle noise; weather; parking tickets;
parking in general; trolley service.**

Discussion continued on activities listed by the Chamber of Commerce and those listed by the OOB 365

Some of the considerations presented were:

- **Brainstorming ideas on how to fill the current store fronts of Old Orchard Beach.**
- **Discussion on how bringing business to the beach will also allow for employment opportunities for our citizens.**
- **What have been the challenges of the past year and how can we make improvement to move Old orchard Beach ahead?**
- **Discussion of the events that Old Orchard Beach offers from all groups and what affect it is having on the community.**
- **How does the business community reel about the potential draw of the ballpark initiative?**
- **How does the community feel about starting an open air kiosk market in the Town Square?**

Many individuals spoke giving opinions on ways to increase the awareness of what our community has to offer. There was great support for OOB 365 events continuing; the Ballpark development initiative; and Town Square open market. The suggestion for the need of an economic development director perhaps in combination with a Events Coordinator; part time at the beginning and possibly in collaboration of funding with the municipal government and the Chamber of Commerce or/and OOB365. Additional considerations included the hiring or a part-time grant writer. Towns that do well can write grants on everything from conservation, economic development, transportation (with the Department of Public Works help), sewer and water infrastructure, flood prevention infrastructure, and many others. If you take the time to find the right person with journalism or similar background; you can make the job at an hourly rate; it would be minimal cost that can produce many dollars of grant income for each local dollar spent. Filling vacant spaces (especially in today's economy) may very well take Old Orchard Beach having a professionally organized community marketing effort, to be led by OOB365 and the Chamber of Commerce type events but followed up by staff or consultant man-hours to beat the phones, attend trade shows, and following corporate leads for businesses we want to have in our community. Such an effort is supported by, but cannot be operated by, business people who are all busy running their businesses 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. or more.

Other suggestions included reminding everyone that economic development often means education and engagement by individuals and businesses. A committee dedicated to mobilizing the community through door-to-door canvassing, holding community and block meetings as well as going to schools and churches to get community involvement is another means of starting to get outside businesses to know what our Town has to offer. Meetings such as this allow us to know what our community would like to see in their community and make those connections for to establish a year round business mentality, it is important that those who live here year round need to have those kind of businesses that they would visit and connect with during a year. Groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and the OOB 365 Committee need to continue to create a coalition of businesses involved with the community and providing support networks for businesses. We need to get our notoriety out there, to let everybody know that there is a business association in the area trying to attract more businesses, trying to get the entire community more involved in supporting the endeavor.

Physical improvements of our downtown environment are critical and the work of the Community Block Grant program has been successful in bettering the frontage of our community. Perhaps a Chamberfest or an OOB365fest would be a thought. This is a one-of-a-kind indoor/outdoor business expo drawing thousands of people each year who are eager to hear about our businesses. Contacting other Chamber of Commerce's in the State and surrounding States is a good start. This is a great opportunity to network with the community and show off what we actually have in our community.

Restaurants in the community need to promote their wares including the most delicious and enticing food that they offer. Admission and parking needs to be free and it need to be in a month or time of the year when business owners are in town. Rental of booths can bring in funding as has been the case in the many events of the OOB365. Those with technical background can work on something like "How to Workshop on Facebook." Facebook has become an important social and business tool, helping people network and socialize online. Facebook has more than 200 million active users; more than 100 million users log on to Facebook at least once per day; and it is the fastest growing demographic of those 35 years old and older. A theme such as "Shop Local" is another way to promote in Town businesses.

Workshops such as:

- Helping business owners understand how their customer bases are changing;**
- Providing business owners with directions for growth.**
- Highlighting new business opportunities and how to capitalize on these.**
- Energize and motivate business owners.**
- Build appetites for further business learning.**

These workshops can be customized to suit different communities. Certainly an international organization like the Chamber of Commerce can arrange for such workshops in collaboration with local business owners and groups. It is important that during these workshops an overview of market trends and opportunities as a foundation and thought-provoking catalyst for a strategy session for a particular group. Suitable groups include local cluster groups, regional tourism groups, Chambers of Commerce, etc. In the format key messages are presented and used as scene setting for the group to reflect on its roles and activities and to map out a strategy for the short-term future to build on the strengths and neutralize its weaknesses. Small Business websites indicates that the cost of such workshops would be approximately \$2,000 and of course one has to decide if this investment is practical and worth the effort. An Old Orchard Beach Alliance needs to be formulated to look for types of funding opportunities to work on multiple fronts to assist exiting businesses, work to locate new businesses, plan and secure funding for infrastructure and support overall community development. Biddeford recently developed a marketing strategy and collaborative efforts between property owners to sell it as a place that will lure visitors and attract investments. They also have hired an economic development director. Empty storefronts are a concern to them as well as to tourist communities like Old Orchard Beach.

One of the other requirements is to take an inventory of all empty spaces to establish a baseline before trying to track growth in terms of investment and jobs. It takes time and effort to manage growth. It has been said that "a healthy downtown is the lifeblood of a community." A cohesive marketing strategy needs to be developed and that plan needs to work in concert with the aims and wishes of the community. We need to bring people downtown and make it part of their normal routine. One of the other ideas was the development of a welcome package for new

businesses to offer support and guidance through the permitting and licensing process. We need to make the process more friendly. Our staff is attempting to do that. One other plus is when businesses already in the Town are a complementary to new businesses so that their aims and goals are the same.

Scoreboard Advertising is another way to bring businesses to our community. It is a cheap and effective way to get your message across and is excellent for businesses that want to have a more focused, localized advertising focus. Scoreboard advertising is an effect strategy to expand businesses and to help spread a company's name and product information. It is an ideal way to branch off with your businesses' advertising program in a completely new way that will help to draw in advertising program in a completely new way that will help to draw in new customers. Diversity is the answer to anyone who is looking to increase their advertising, rather than just forcing through commercial after commercial. Scoreboard advertising is a good way to draw in groups of people with similar interests to your business.

Discussion also centered on the great resource of the Bay and not only possible expansion of the Pier but also the suggestion of the revenue that gambling brings to a community. Discussion continued on how the business community felt about the potential draw of the Ballpark initiative. The history of the Ballpark is known by most who have lived here or researched our Town history. With the resurgence of a strong volunteer effort the Ballpark property is on the cusp of being an active facility and community member.

The question of how the community felt about starting an open air kiosk market in the Town square brought forth several good comments and suggestions. In some communities open air markets and kiosks are a huge draw for many communities. However others raise the question that in paying property taxes for a business – a cart does not pay property tax so why should they get the benefit of a business? Some of the suggestions as to how to get around this issue was: *the town could own the carts and rent them for the summer; perhaps the carts could only sell items that are not sole at other businesses in the area; perhaps a business committee could be set up to oversee what is being sold on the carts.* The more we can offer that is different than our neighbors will bring people to our Town and the better off we will all be.

Again the subject of the Pier was indicated in the brochure and the suggestion made that with the jurisdiction of the waters off of the shore of Old Orchard Beach firmly in the hands of the Townspeople of Old Orchard Beach, it might be a good idea to start thinking about what a longer pier could do for our community. It was suggested that with the technological advances in offshore construction, perhaps it is time to start thinking about making the Pier like the one in the past.

Enormously technical comments were given on the subject on the bay as well as the wind initiatives that have been described and supported by the present State government. Community wind turbines were discussed. The discussion continued on exploring all the facets of wind energy. The emphasis not only on energy exploration but on sources of economic revenue feasibility. It was obvious that we have the citizen personnel and knowledge to advance our town in this particular area of research and development.

Over the past four years efforts to make the town a four season community have been intense. The emphasis was present again by those attending this workshop which was well received by those in attendance. The Workshop ended at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

**V. Louise Reid
Town Council Secretary**

I, V. Louise Reid, Secretary to the Town Council of Old Orchard Beach, Maine, do hereby certify that the foregoing document consisting of five (5) pages is a true copy of the original Minutes of the Town Council Workshop of February 23, 2010.

Louise Reid