

WOLFEBORO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
November 30, 1994

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PRESENT: Barbara Jackson, Bill Wiebe, John Pernokas, Tony Triolo, Andy Milligan, Dennis Plante, Pamela Berg, Paul Kimball, Bob Garland

Vice-Chairman Barbara Jackson opened the meeting at 7:36 a.m. in the First NH Bank Conference Room. She turned the floor over to Bill Wiebe, who gave an introduction to the Main Street program. Their introductory video, which runs for 30 minutes, talks about melding four main ingredients:

- * Organization

- * Economic restructuring

- * Design

- * Promotion

There are additional videos to follow, giving more in-depth training in the various aspects of the program. Bill passed out an outline, and invited members to jot down on it ideas they wanted to discuss further.

The first video started with what has happened to Main Street.

- * Malls have depressed Main Street

- * How Main Street evolved - the continuity of history. Main street stores can afford to coast as their building and decorating costs have already been paid over the years.

- * Malls have to be more aggressive to pay high start-up costs. They also must work together on hours they are open, etc.

- * Main Street merchants should work together to support each other the same way:

- window displays
- parking, meters, metered parking garage
- hours open
- merchandise
- friendliness, personal service
- downtown external improvements and maintenance
- public & private partnership

- * Some towns turn themselves into Disneylands with themes. The colonial is the most successful.

- * Many merchants cover up traditional buildings with an unattractive new suit of clothes. That can be removed and the building touched up to restore its original look.

- * Towns lack design talent. Spending a little on design can save money and result in a more pleasing appearance. Fine design shouldn't be sacrificed for inferior modernization, which destroys the historic progression.

- * Additions in keeping with the original building can preserve the town's flavor.

- * An historic district can preserve the look of downtown.

- * The example is given of Ashland, Ohio which demolished the old bank building to create an ugly pocket park.

- * In earlier times national companies made their look agree with the

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town's appearance. Signs are the worst detractors. Local merchants don't have to accept standard signs from national businesses.

* It's possible to maintain a building's personality and make it functional in terms of today's use. A restoration professional can suggest ideas. Main Street revivals draw people and pay off in the long run. We inherited buildings built by earlier generations - we need to preserve that continuity.

VIDEO #2 - GETTING ORGANIZED

Bill Wiebe introduced the second video by saying that the first concern is meeting the needs of the Town residents; visitors are second. Third is the place (the complete environment), and fourth is how you want to take care of the visitors. This Main Street program has been used in more than 800 communities throughout the country, but for some reason few in New England have participated so far.

This video emphasized the importance of strong organization. The stories of McKinney, Texas; Fergus Falls, Minnesota; and Shelby, NC were featured. McKinney funded a position of downtown coordinator and developed a structure and organization to counteract an active group of outlet merchants. They improved the downtown with public restrooms and free parking without meters. To involve more downtown people they organized downtown block parties, and established a partnership with City Hall and the Chamber of Commerce.

Fergus Falls, Minnesota started its revitalization efforts with a group of business people including attorneys, real estate agencies, insurance companies, merchants, and doctors who worked downtown. They formed a "Riverfront Committee." The group first spent a lot of time deciding their objectives, and then set out to present themselves to the community. They ran promotional events that drew people downtown. They developed short-term and long-term plans, spending about three years getting volunteers together. Then they were ready to hire a full-time director. They set up task forces with specific goals and time limits. This encouraged volunteers who didn't want unending commitments. They found that changing community attitudes was the most important goal.

In Shelby N.C. the revitalization started with the Economic Development Commission. It is a Courthouse-oriented small town. An "Uptown Shelby Association" was organized including merchants, developers, businesses, banks, doctors, lawyers and property owners. They privately raise \$60,000 annually to fund their work, which includes a monthly newsletter and special events which attract people to the area. They have a year-round farmers' market shared by 12-15 small businesses. This has added to the traffic downtown. The Masonic Temple has been renovated for mixed business and housing use. Shelby believes that strengthening their "uptown" area requires continuous attention to promotion and detail.

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Bill Wiebe then described the other materials available from the Main Street program. He believes that Wolfeboro's goals agree very well the program's over-all goals. He asked if the EDC wanted to use the program. Members all agreed that the Committee should accept it and get the Selectmen to actively participate. They decided this should apply to the whole town of Wolfeboro, not just the Main Street-Downtown area, since there are other sections with businesses. The Selectmen need to endorse the principle (which is very similar to EDC's Economic Strategic Plan for Wolfeboro adopted some time ago) and they need to be active participants.

The members discussed the problems that Wolfeboro has that need to be worked on. The lake will always bring the tourists, but what about the residents? Specific problems listed were out-of-town buying, and empty store fronts. One members asked why the public works department, in repairing the sidewalks and making them ADA accessible, hadn't discussed the work with the Chamber of Commerce and considered putting down brick instead of asphalt. The cost might have been more, but merchants might have offered to pay the difference. Lack of communication seems to be problem.

All agreed that a coordinator is needed for this revitalization process to succeed. The committees and their responsibilities need to overlap. Help from the Chamber of Commerce in sponsoring special events (like last weekend's Christmas promotion) is important. The effort needs a focal point, a leader.

Members asked what the Selectmen should be asked to do? Should they be the leaders? The Committee needs to define responsibilities without creating any more committees.

Paul Kimball suggested removing the name "Main Street" from the program, as people will think that's all it applies to. He recommended a blitz to let people know about it, and then a groundswell may urge the Selectmen to get involved. Others suggested making presentations to groups like Rotary, other business, apartment owners, residents. A broad base of involved people was essential for success.

Actually what a program like this does is build Town spirit, they agreed. Residents need to be encouraged to help tourists. The Committee had to take this program to the people, not just invite them. They have to reach consensus within the group, before they do so. It was suggested that they finish looking at the tapes, then set goals and take action. Wiebe described the work books that came with the program, which would provide many more details.

At 9:25 the meeting broke up as some members had left. The group had decided to meet next Wednesday morning, December 10, which is the first Wednesday and regular meeting date, to continue the video viewings and discussions.

Respectfully submitted,
Eric H. Artender
Secretary

