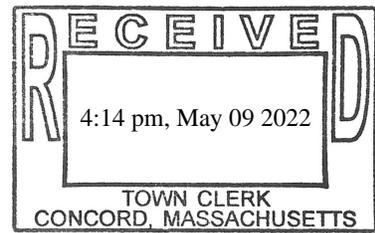


**Town of Concord  
Economic Vitality Committee Meeting Minutes  
February 2, 2022**



- Present:** John Boynton, Jennifer McGonigle, Dawn Rennert, Steven Verrill, Beth Williams, Debra Stark, Jennifer Schunemann, Marie Foley, Remon Karian and Mark Martines.
- Staff:** Marcia Rasmussen, Director of Planning and Land Management, and Susan Bates, Select Board
- Others:** Gregory Higgins

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 P.M.

**MINUTES**

**December 3, 2021**

**January 5, 2022**

Ms. Schunemann suggested the following changes to the December 3, 2021 Minutes:

- a. Jennifer Clarke is the Executive Director of the Concord Business Partnership
- b. The gallery that opened in Concord Center is the 3 Stones Gallery.
- c. The Umbrella Arts Center should be referred to as such instead of they
- d. Page 5 – Many people in Town are not happy about Steven Crane’s departure

On a **MOTION** made by Mr. Boynton and seconded by Ms. Stark it was **VOTED** to **APPROVE** the minutes of the meetings of December 3, 2021 and January 5, 2022 as amended

Mr. Martines -	Aye
Ms. Schunemann -	Aye
Ms. Williams -	Aye
Mr. Boynton -	Aye
Ms. McGonigle -	Aye
Ms. Stark -	Aye
Ms. Foley -	Aye
Mr. Verrill -	Aye

Ms. Rennert abstained from voting.

**TOWN UPDATES**

Ms. Williams stated that the Select Board discussed how to use \$5.6 Million Dollars provided to the town through the American Recovery Fund. After speaking with Division Managers, Senior Management Team and the Unions the Town Manager’s Office put together a slideshow to outline many ideas for how to use the money. There are many more ideas than the money will

provide but it was a great meeting with a promise of what could be done. The town has 2 years to encumber the money and 4 years to spend it.

Ms. Bates stated that the Select Board and the Town Manager will make decisions on how to spend the money. There is a difference between a Capital Project and a one-time project. Transportation issues and Broadband issues are long term projects and we will need to see more of what would be involved long term before we would make a decision on such a project. The money is to be used for infrastructure, affordable housing, transportation and places more heavily impacted by COVID-19.

Ms. Rasmussen stated that the town received \$5.6 Million Dollars based on the population and need of the town. If the state receives more money it will be dispersed through grants and the town will research applying for such grants. Replacement of Lost Revenue funding is used to replace money the town lost due to COVID-19 such as Parking Meter Fees and Hotel Tax. The town is looking at several projects where the money could benefit the most.

It was noted that Outdoor Dining has been extended to December 22, 2022 but that is not final yet. Although the town agreed to let Outdoor Dining continue the final determination has to come from the state and they have not made that determination yet.

The ability for Board and Committees to meet remotely has been extended to July 1, 2022.

Ms. Rasmussen stated that the time to return the survey that was sent to residents has concluded. She did send the survey back out to the business community in the hope of getting more responses and she did receive a few more responses. Ann Burke is compiling the information and they hope to set up focus groups in the near future.

Ms. Schunemann stated that Concord Together should be taken off future agendas of this committee as they are no longer meeting as a committee. Concord Together was formed to pull businesses together during the pandemic and now that businesses are up and running again they will serve as consultants for the Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Foley stated that the Chamber of Commerce will be overseeing the Summer Solstice program that was formerly administered by Concord Together. The Chamber had a very successful membership drive and will now be reaching out to the community for potential membership. The Chamber will be holding its first business event on February 9, 2022 from 7:45 A.M. – 9:00 A.M. The guest speaker will be Marty Croyle and he will be speaking on how to improve profits and cashflow while we are experiencing supply chain issues. To register for this event people should go to [www.concordchamberofcommerce.org](http://www.concordchamberofcommerce.org). Ms. Foley is looking forward to future, in person, Chamber of Commerce meetings as she feels they are very effective. The website is up and running after a few earlier issues. Her goal is for the Chamber is to reach out to all facets of the business community and be a great asset to the town.

Mr. Boynton stated that leasing of space in Concord has increased with the Commercial Property Owners. He has a new business moving into The Wheelhouse called Siligrams and they manufacture logos on the bottom of silicone ice trays. Of the spaces he leases only about half of

the workforce has returned to the office physically. He is curious to see what work space will look like in the future.

Mr. Martines stated he has nothing new to report.

Ms. Rennert stated that her business, The Concord Bookshop, has not yet returned to in person events. She has reduced her operating hours by 12 hours per week. Her staff continues to be healthy and she is always open to new ideas. 12% to 15% of her business is now online sales. Fulfillment is not easy as it adds more work to the day but she is able to work on online sales from home.

Ms. McGonigle stated that her business continues to be closed 4 ½ to 5 days per month as opposed to last year. She is very surprised at the rise in cost of merchandise and shipping that has occurred. She has had to discontinue some lines of items because of price increases. The distributors are adding surcharges to vendors like her which makes it difficult to compete with the wholesalers and retailers online. She is not able to carry some new items because the cost is too expensive. Shipping costs are challenging as distributors have raised the minimum order, to receive free shipping, from \$1,000 to \$2,000. There continues to be a shortage of warehouse space in Concord.

Ms. Stark stated that she is having the same challenges with shipping items and she needs to find new vendors for some items. She continues to see 300 less people in her store daily as opposed to before. She has recently hired 3 new employees from Whole Foods in Sudbury. Profit sharing with the employees has been reduced.

Mr. Verrill stated that business is generally slow in January but his online business has increased. He is also experiencing issues with supplies being delayed when distributors are not able to fill orders. He has experienced more of his employees needing to be quarantined and that has resulted in reduced staff.

Mr. Karian stated that he is also experiencing supply chain issues. January is generally a slow month for his business and a snow storm on a Saturday does not help that issue. He will be opening a new location in Lexington in the next few months. The hiring process has gotten a little easier and his take-out business has slowed down because more people are dining in person. He is cautiously optimistic for the future.

Mr. Boynton will write a draft for the Select Board on how to make the town more business friendly as he has a history with the context.

### **BUSINESS LIAISON**

Mr. Karian stated that the Town of Lexington has a Business Liaison who aids the businesses with the regulations when opening a new business. The Liaison was very helpful in navigating the permitting process and the many regulations he had to follow. His experience in opening a business in Lexington was much easier than opening a business in Concord. He will share his notes on the experience with Mr. Boynton.

Mr. Martines would like this committee to send a letter to the Select Board stating that creating a position for a Business Liaison is greatly needed in Concord.

Ms. Schunemann stated that she agreed with Mr. Martines that this committee should send a letter to the Select Board recommending the hiring of an Economic Development Manager.

Ms. Bates stated that the FY 2023 budget process is almost complete and the town would need to find resources with which to fund a new position. Those resources are not available for FY 2023.

Ms. Rasmussen stated that while there is a need for this position the funds will not be available for FY 2023.

Mr. Martines asked Ms. Williams if she has a job description for what an Economic Development Manager would do?

Ms. Williams stated that she will send a copy of her job description to the group as her job is a blended job description. Her job is to be a liaison between the businesses and tourism by supporting existing businesses and building better relationships between businesses and the town.

Ms. Rasmussen stated that Economic Vitality and tourism is a way to grow our business community and that will be done gradually. She stated that when presented with creating a Business Improvement District, which could fund the Economic Development Manager's position, the Concord Business Partnership was not interested in pursuing that. The budget for Fiscal Year 2023 has already been set.

Ms. Rennert stated that this committee needs to send a letter to the Select Board stating that hiring an Economic Development Manager is a priority.

Ms. Bates stated that creating this position is not going to happen in FY 2023. This year's budget was difficult to accomplish. The committee can continue to promote this idea but they need to find the resources to accomplish it.

Ms. Schunemann stated that she wants the Board to send a letter to the Select Board stating that there is a need for an Economic Vitality Manager.

Ms. Stark asked how the Business Liaison in Hudson is funded?

Ms. Rasmussen responded that the Business Liaison in Hudson is funded through the Business Improvement District.

Mr. Verrill stated that it is important to get vacant store fronts filled again.

Mr. Martines stated that this is a different situation than when the Concord Business Partnership rejected the Business Improvement District. This position is needed to connect potential

businesses with town committees. There is a disconnection between the tone and actions of the town.

Mr. Boynton stated the creation of this position would make it easier for businesses to stay and grow in Concord. The committee needs to articulate why the creation of this position would be good for the town. He is in support of communicating this to the Select Board. This letter can come from the EVC as well as the Concord Business Partnership and the Concord Chamber of Commerce if they so desire.

Mr. Martines stated that one committee member should draft a letter and circulate it through the committee. We should then designate one person to collect feedback to the letter. Mr. Martines agreed to draft the letter.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Mr. Higgins stated that he is the President of the Concord Business Partnership. He has spoken with Mr. Anderson to see how businesses are doing in Concord. Although the business community is not a cohesive group he agrees that a Business Liaison would be a good thing for the town. The Concord Business Partnership can offer their experiences with permitting and opening a business in Concord. He will speak with Mr. Anderson before our March meeting. He also stated that people do not come to Concord for the businesses they come for the schools.

### **LETTER TO SELECT BOARD**

Mr. Martines will draft a letter for the Select Board and Mr. Boynton will comment on his draft. The letter will include the need to hire an Economic Development Manager and how we can streamline the regulatory process. He also stated that Ms. Williams has done a great job working with the Select Board and Mr. Crane and this is not about her ability to do her job.

Mr. Rennert commented on Mr. Higgins comment stating that it does matter what the businesses are in town not just the schools.

Ms. Bates stated that people appreciate the uniqueness of the businesses in town as opposed to Lexington Center where the business community is more crowded.

Ms. McGonigle stated that the benefits the residents receive from the K – 12 school experience is more than they put in.

Mr. Martines stated that we need to protect and make stronger the business community.

Mr. Foley stated that the Chamber of Commerce will focus on keeping the business community vital by keeping Concord and West Concord, walkable, desirable and diverse.

Ms. Stark stated that she enjoyed the collaboration with the committee on this issue.

**ADJOURNMENT**

On a **MOTION** made by Ms. Stark it was **APPROVED** by roll call vote:

Mr. Martines -	Aye
Ms. McGonigle -	Aye
Ms. Foley -	Aye
Ms. Rennert -	Aye
Ms. Williams -	Aye
Ms. Stark -	Aye
Mr. Verrill -	Aye
Mr. Boynton -	Aye

to **ADJOURN** the meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 5:24 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn H. Dee