

BETTER HOME TOWN BOARD MEETING
Minutes: October 13, 2009

Directors Present: Mel Gordon, Maureen Grindstaff, Judy Malins, Dick Smith, Patricia Miller Wann, John Yarbrough

Directors Absent: Cullen Chambers, John Yarbrough

Guests Present: Sandy Major

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 9:10am.

Sandy Major, a member of the Economic Restructuring Committee, presented a sticker campaign in support of becoming a Better Hometown Community. This concept is similar to the Buy Local Tybee sticker concept, but would specifically highlight the BHT support from businesses. Majors spoke about Chamber membership and business involvement. The stickers provide an opportunity directly to all businesses. This would not be a Chamber tie-in. It is a local marketing incentive. It is cheap and affordable for businesses. Bonnie Gaster donated the money for the Buy Local stickers. All businesses would have to be licensed on Tybee and would be on the map. The question of whether to include Spanish Hammock was raised.

A question was asked if one has to be a member of the Savannah Chamber to participate in the Tybee Tourism Council (TITC). TITC gets ½ Million dollars each year from the Hotel/Motel Tax. Dick Smith said TITC advertises Tybee and asked if they advertise individual businesses. Chantel reported that the two new employees are trying to reach out to the businesses more. Lindsey is increasing their email distribution to include more businesses for participation. It was noted that Chamber membership is very expensive and the question was raised as to the benefits.

Approval of Minutes:

Judy made the motion to approve the September 8, 2009 Board Meeting minutes with the correction that Maureen was absent and contingent upon Patricia's review and approval. Maureen seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Committee Updates

Design - Cullen

There was a Design Committee meeting on the September 23 which was very productive. The Committee went through the Work Plan and will work with the City Manager and businesses on enhancements and revitalization throughout the business corridor.

Wayfinding is currently underway, which is a way of highlighting the uniqueness of the Island and helping people find their way to key destinations. Tybee Arts Association (TAA) designed the turtle themed signage. Locations and wording are being finalized with members of the design committee, the City Manager, city personnel, and TAA.

Jonathan Lynn, Planning and Zoning Manager, is working with members of the Design Committee and others to update the sign ordinance.

There will be a Historic Preservation Presentation on 10/21/09 and eleven people have already responded.

On 10/26/09 there will be a "Walk About" with members of the Design Committee, the City Manager and Joe Wilson of DPW. They will be looking to see where to put plants, trash receptacles and ashtrays. The Garden Club and Beautification will work with them on visual enhancement and will help to encourage better garbage disposal. This process will not happen overnight. The change will be incremental.

Mel asked about code enforcement specifically with property maintenance and the property at McKenzie and Hwy 80. Dick will call the property owner regarding need to clean up the signage. The City is working on code enforcement. Dick said that enforcement, which is under the Police Department, is one of the biggest problems on the island. He recommended individuals call the City Manager with their concerns. The City Manager is the only person we can ask. Chantel reminded everyone that code enforcement is one of the work plan items being addressed by the Design Committee.

In conclusion, property maintenance and litter are huge issues. Also, the electric box at the corner of Tybrisa and Butler is an eyesore. The design committee is working with the City Manager and DPW to cover it up. Chantel and the design committee have a sign that will highlight the historic street Tybrisa. Sara at the Lighthouse helped with the sign design.

Economic Restructuring - Chantel

There was a meeting on September 30 to review the work plan. Terry Jackson is working on a listing of all vacant commercial properties. Sandy Major and Monty Parks are working on the Tybee Business 411 Guide which will be helpful for new and existing businesses.

We need a new Board Liaison on this Committee because Erin has moved. Chantel asked if anyone is interested. Judy expressed an interest in transitioning off Promotions into the E. R. liaison role. Maureen is interested in transitioning into the Promotions liaison role. These changes will start immediately.

A question was asked if the new Business Alliance is trying to help with the Economic Restructuring Committee as well.

Mel had questions about the vacant buildings on Tybee. He asked how we can make that issue part of Economic Restructuring. Chantel confirmed part of Economic growth is to fill the vacancies. Dick recommended Chantel speak with Lee Grimes at SEDA. Mel confirmed he will also serve on the Economic Restructuring Committee.

Captains Walk was mentioned. Chantel said that they need a CO and the manager and owner have met with the Planning and Zoning manager, Building Official and Zoning Specialist. Mel said he would like to see ways to fill the vacancies and continue the efforts to diversify the south end more.

Chantel mentioned that some towns offer incentives such as free water or waive the business license fee for the first year.

Organization – John

John and Chantel walked and met with businesses on Tybrisa September 3 and handed out more brochures about the BHT initiative.

Chantel is working on the next newsletter to email out to those on her e-distribution list.

John is working on a flyer for Tybee for the Holidays. Diane Kaufman put together a temporary Tybee for the Holidays flyer to go to businesses during Pirates Fest.

Dick mentioned he was at a meeting with Diane Kaufman and Chantel's name came up. Dick noted that Chantel cannot do everything and that she has specific things to do. Chantel encouraged everyone to continue reaching out to have people participate with the committees that are working on concrete plans for the betterment of the corridor and island.

Chantel said she continues to reach out to Perb Fortner who is the spokesperson for the Business Alliance, but has not been successful. She emphasized the importance of them working with the Better Hometown Start Up program to avoid duplicated efforts and unnecessary confusion.

Promotion - Judy

\$4,700 has been contributed for banners so far and there will be money left over for decorations and promotions for Tybee for the Holidays. The contributions will suffice for 50 banners. Discussion about the design of the banners ensued regarding using the Turtle similar to the wayfinding design with a Santa hat. Chantel and Judy are working with members of the promotions committee and Fast Signs for finalization. They are also working with DPW to make sure the banners are up before Thanksgiving.

The need to make tybeefortheholidays.com more festive is a concern. Diane Kaufman originally said she would work on the site with help from Steve Lesser and Katrina Murray. Diane is responsible for updating the text and Katrina is to update the graphics. Katrina has been extremely ill and busy. We will continue to make sure the website is updated as needed.

Fall Sale-ing Day is October 24. Business participation so far has been good and resident participation is expected to increase. Maureen will talk with businesses in the Tybee Oaks area to increase participation and let Chantel know.

Community Visit

Cullen, Judy and Chantel made a committee visit to Statesboro on September 24. It was a very good visit. The group left at 9am and returned around 3pm. The structure is different. They are just getting their committees together, but have been designated for many years. They receive funding from the Hotel / Motel tax, which is similar to other cities. Statesboro is in the middle of new streetscape project. They are working on beautification, sidewalks, and signage. Their Mainstreet office works closely with the City of Statesboro and their DPW office. The Averitt Arts Center is their anchor.

There was discussion about visits to Pembroke, Sylvania and other Better Home Towns.

Georgia Downtown Conference

Judy spoke highly of the conference in Roswell and was glad she went because of what she learned. The Economic benefits with revitalization are amazing. She and Cullen were extremely impressed by a presentation made by Kennedy Smith, Principal of Community Land Use and Economics Group, LLC. She addressed issues affecting today's downtowns and innovative changes and solutions available. Chantel mentioned Cullen would like to have Smith speak to Tybee one day. Another item that stood out at the Conference for streetscape improvements was the use of recycled tires/rubber for sidewalks. It makes sidewalk repairs easy and more comfortable for pedestrians walking.

During the conference, Chantel met with John Edwards, the parking consultant DCA recommended. Edwards is looking forward to coming to Tybee to meet with involved individuals to find solutions for Tybee's parking issues. Edwards gave Chantel a guided tour of Roswell and Sandy Springs. Sandy Springs has a public art project with turtles. Chantel said it was obvious when you left the downtown area of Roswell because the streetscape became typical and nondescript.

Three Board Members needed to attend the Conference to submit for Better Hometown designation at the end of the year. DCA set up a one day enhanced training program specifically for Tybee, but one director did not show, which made the anticipated date for submission void. Chantel met with our regional representative, Martha and reviewed the work that has been accomplished for our start up documentation. Martha mentioned the possibility of changing our by-laws to meet the one-third conference attendance requirement. Since Erin has moved, the Board is short one member. We could change the number of Board Members required from 7 to 6. Chantel said we need confirmation from Martha. A question was asked about what is involved in changing the By-Laws. Chantel will talk with Cullen and Jonathan after she hears from Martha.

There will be a Main Street Conference in March and all Board Members must attend. We could submit for designation at that time.

Other Business

Dick Smith said that the approval of the Better Home Town Initiative was a question at the Forum last week and that everyone among the Council and the Candidates said yes they approved of the BHT initiative.

He said that BHT is part of the Comprehensive Plan and that Council needs to realize that you are not going to see a dollar cost benefit immediately. The BHT Program is an incremental program. It takes time to get it going and outreach to overcome past negativity.

Adjournment

Judy made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:30am. Maureen seconded. The vote was unanimous.