

4 TOWN REGIONAL ECONOMIC VITALITY PLAN

MEMBER TOWN STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

March 17, 2021 – via Zoom

2:00pm – 3:00pm

Welcome –

Attendees were welcomed to the meeting between the 4 towns who have worked together to prepare the 4 Town Regional Economic Vitality Plan.

Steering Committee Officers –

The following individuals have been appointed as members:

: Bolton – Josh Kelly, Sandra Pierog, Patrice Carson

: Coventry - Eric Trott, Wendy Rubin, Erica Pagliuco

: Mansfield – Ryan Aylesworth, Cynthia VanZelm, Cara Workman

: Tolland – Mike Rosen, Caitlin Gordon, Jim Hutton

At a future meeting, the Committee will consider officers that can be voted on. However, in the meantime the 4 Town Staff will do a 'round robin' of hosting of each meeting to represent each respective town and to create some variety in the guidance at each meeting.

Reports from Committees – priority action items:

Open space – recreational asset map – Eric provided an update on the subcommittee's work. The subcommittee met earlier in March and had a productive first meeting. Each town discussed their current status with GIS and open space mapping that the staff or volunteers possess. Jennifer Kaufman from Mansfield demonstrated some of the mapping and GPS projects that she has been working on. Mike Cipriano from CRCOG agreed to assist the 4 towns in the effort to create a unified GIS map. The Wander our Watershed map and informational resource is viewed as a good template for the project. It was agreed that each town will compile the list of sites to be included and begin efforts to locate the data that will be shared with CRCOG. The subcommittee will meet next on April 5.

Community calendar – Cynthia provided an update of the subcommittee's work. The subcommittee met earlier in March and also had a productive first meeting. Each town gave a report on the status of their respective calendar. It was agreed that each town wanted to maintain their own calendar. Two towns are in the process of considering updates to their calendar. The goal of having a link created that shares all the calendars is what the subcommittee feels is most prudent. Each town will be working their IT staff to investigate this matter further. It is also possible to have a landing page or website developed where the link

could be provided. Contact with the State Tourism Department will occur to consider what platform they use. It will be necessary to consider the various posting policies and criteria, as well as forms that will be required. Samples to consider were provided by Wendy from Coventry. The subcommittee will be meeting again before the next Steering Committee meeting.

Regional Tours development: Patrice provided a report and indicated that the subcommittee is comprised of 7 members. They are looking to meet in the next week. The asset inventory list will be consulted to begin creating ideas for mini-tours. The idea of creating 'sub-themes' of the overarching 7 themes identified in the study that could be the basis of tour development. These would connect the dots of the various assets in the 4 towns. Also, connection to larger and other regional assets can be considered to further drive visitors to the area.

Local currency: Mike provided a report and indicated the subcommittee has not yet met as it was envisioned that this project would be better focused on in a few months. The hope is that the COVID situation will improve and would cause more of a comfort zone with the particular currency medium that is chosen. Examples of other currencies in and out of the State were discussed. The topic is maintained as an ongoing discussion item with the Tolland EDC.

Mike also reported that Tolland has hired a new Planning Director who will be arriving later this month and is expected to attend the next meeting.

4 Town 'campaign' creation with Nichols College: Tim Liptrap gave a report on the project. Tim reviewed the case brief that was created to examine the outcomes and to conduct a 'test' of the subject with the students at both Asnuntuck College and Nichols College. The title of the project was 'Place Branding a Geographical Area'. Tim found that there is very little research and collegiate publications available on the subject which led him to think that this subject is not as relevant as it once was, particularly for smaller towns or regions. Unfortunately, the results that were provided by the students were not very creative and fell short of expectations.

The subcommittee discussed a number of next steps and ideas to consider, such as, bringing in a marketing expert to provide some guidance on the subject. Richard suggested a firm that he is familiar with and was willing to reach out to and invite to a future meeting. Eric suggested that Erica Pagliuco, the Coventry Farmers' Market Manager could also be brought in for a discussion. Caitlin suggested that the community could be involved in the selection of possible ideas. Cara offered that 'The Thought Exchange', a UCONN entity could be asked to assist, depending on their availability. They assist with the evaluation of answers to open ended questions that are posed to a community that is problem solving an issue. Comments are received, ranked, quantified, bias trends are removed and a report is prepared on the findings. It was agreed that this would be a helpful exercise.

It was agreed that a subcommittee should be formed to explore this issue further. Richard, Cara, Caitlin, Tim and Eric volunteered to be part of the subcommittee. They will schedule a time to meet before the next meeting.

Tim mentioned that he did some research on the subject, in particular the 'Journal of Marketing' to find what the current trends are. He did not find material on branding at the local level, which raises the question is it effective or efficient. Instead, Tim suggested that perhaps the 'brand' can be developed by the individual and shared through social media via photos, posts, likes and shares. The visitor creates the brand with the content contained in the social media platform that is selected. This is an important element that will be carefully considered.

Team stakeholder and Committee list: Eric indicated that the link to the Google document was included with the meeting invite and it reflects the latest input on the inventory and stakeholder list. This will serve as a landing spot for ongoing updated in these two areas.

Next steps:

The subcommittees will continue their respective work and will report at the next meeting in April.

Other business:

Richard indicated that he is willing to reach out to the 'Elements' marketing firm that he recommended and invite them to our next meeting and is willing to work facilitate the visit if there is an expected fee. Richard was thanked and it was agreed.

Next meeting date, time, agenda items -

A day during the week of April 12 will be selected and shared with the attendees.

Agenda items that were on the March agenda will be discussed at the next meeting.

Adjournment –

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00pm.