



ANNUAL PLANNING MEETING

January 24, 2024, at 8:30 a.m.

Municipal Building Conference Room / 16 S Main Street

MINUTES

Downtown Waynesville Commission Chair Jay Spiro called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. with the following members present:

Alex McKay
Joyce Massie
Jessica Garrick
Courtney Tetrault
Dave Barone
Grace Mason
Bob Williams
Jon Feichter
Kelly Allred

The following Town Staff were present:

Jesse Fowler, Assistant Town Manager
Beth Gilmore, DWC Executive Director

Others present: Hannah White, N.C. Association of County Commissioners
Cory Vallancort, Smoky Mountain News

Executive Director Gilmore distributed copies of the DWC 2024-25 calendar including meeting dates, training dates, important deadlines and special events.

Regular board meetings are scheduled for the third Tuesday of each month. There are two active subcommittees- the Design Committee meets on the first Thursday of each month. The Promotions Committee will continue meeting on the fourth Thursday.

Board members were urged to complete at least one basic training workshop through the N.C. Main Street program throughout the year.



Gilmore reported she has been working on the annual assessment that determines the organization's accreditation status, due on February 9. The DWC made big strides during the 2022-23 year.

The DWC earns national accreditation each year through the Main Street America program based on a set of six standards used to monitor the organization's progress from year to year. Gilmore presented a video offered by N.C. Main Street, entitled "Tune Up Your Board" to begin a review of the six accreditation standards.

New Main Street Accrediting Standards that went into effect this year, include:

- Standard 1: **Broad-Based Commitment to Revitalization**
- Standard 2: **Inclusive Leadership and Organization Capacity**
- Standard 3 **Diversified Funding & Sustainable Program Operations**
- Standard 4 **Strategy-Driven Programming**
- Standard 5 **Preservation-Based Economic Development**

Discussion about the need to build a stronger volunteer base, being more intentional about recruitment and advocating for the NC Main Street program and DWC as an organization.

Commission members Allred and Garrick suggested using social media platforms to advertise volunteer opportunities and provide a way for the public to engage.

Chair Spiro suggested also adding a link to the downtownwaynesville.com web site where people can donate money and find out more information about volunteer roles. Spiro would like to purchase a tent with the DWC logo to establish a presence at all special events and "put a face to the organization."

After a brief discussion about tracking income and budgeting, commission members discussed forming a "Friends of Downtown Waynesville" non-profit group for the purpose of fund development and securing grants that are not available to municipalities.



Massie suggested the board assign the task of formalizing volunteer recruitment efforts to an Organization Subcommittee. Gilmore said it would be a good idea to have an Organization Committee who could also oversee the review of bylaws and fund development efforts.

Commission members agree to form an “organization committee” and a “fund development committee.” Gilmore suggested that a “community outreach” committee is also a good idea to help coordinate communication and social engagements among merchants, property owners, employees, and residents.

Commission member Mason said she is interested in assisting with a review of the organization’s Bylaws and is willing to chair an organization committee that also focuses on fund development.

A motion by Commission Member Massie, seconded by Courtney Tetrault, to form an organization committee and appoint Grace Mason as chair carried unanimously.

Assistant Town Manager Jesse Fowler distributed a sign-up sheet, asking DWC members to commit to working on specific projects throughout the year. Allred suggested also engaging with veterans’ groups, like the Warrior Clan. In review of the sign-up sheet, Gilmore said volunteers are needed especially to help with event planning and operations.

NEW ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

DWC Members review the 2023-24 assessment by looking at each individual standard and the key indicators that must be met for accreditation.

Discussion about standard one- partnerships and collaborations. The DWC has strong partnerships with the local government and other town departments and has made significant progress toward forming partnerships with other public and private bodies. Chair Spiro suggested pursuing stronger partnerships with Haywood Community College, Western Carolina University, high school civics groups and clubs, the two district churches and the Pigeon Community Center.

Standard two addresses expanding the organization’s reach to connect with all sectors of the community through a variety of platforms including social media channels, digital and print platforms.



The DWC will plan a follow up forum to present organization information, transformation strategies, annual work plan, Main Street program and DWC board information and available resources.

Chair Spiro suggested that DWC members reach out to community groups to request opportunities to do guest presentations. A gathering should also be planned specifically to connect with district property owners.

The DWC agreed to host a forum in March as a follow up to the 2022 visioning forum, to inform the community about the Main Street program and the organization's plans. A second forum will be held during the summer to connect specifically with property owners.

Invitations need to be mailed ASAP for a forum on Thursday, March 21 or 28- depending on the availability of Wells Events Center. The Gem at Boojums should be considered as an alternative location if Wells is not available.

Joyce Massie reported that the Downtown Waynesville Association is planning a celebration around the comeback of the "Gateway to the Smokies" arch on June 1.

Now that the DWC has developed the new "Appalachian True" brand, the focus should shift toward developing that brand and getting it out into the world.

Discussion about board diversity and whether the makeup of the current board accurately reflects the community it serves. The current DWC board reflects a diverse range of professional experience, talents and skills; and a balanced mix of gender and ages but lacks ethnic diversity.

The DWC has a strong board of directors and active committees driving the organization's work plan. Gilmore shared that commission member Jon Feichter has requested to step down as Economic Vitality Committee Chair. Commission member Allred urged the board to keep that committee intact and search for a new volunteer to chair economic development efforts.

Commission Member Mason has agreed to review the organization's By-Laws for updates and revisions.

The DWC receives little funding from the private sector and should consider new ways of diversifying the organization's funding streams.



Barone suggested establishing a sponsorship program that's tied to education about the organization's programs and projects.

Executive Director Gilmore will meet with members Mason, Allred, Garrick and Barone to discuss sponsorships and fund development. Allred will spearhead the fund development group. Merchant Ann Walsh, Ava & Owner, would be a great resource for help with planning sponsorships and fundraising initiatives.

Spiro suggested also reaching out to banks and real estate companies.

Valliancort asked if the board would consider not remaining revenue neutral as a way of generating more revenue. Feichter said he suggested last year that the DWC should consider raising the Municipal Service District tax by one penny but the amount of revenue it would have generated was miniscule. He said he is willing to consider it again. "I'm all for, if the commission decides collectively that we need to increase the amount of revenue that we are getting from the MSD side of things then I am perfectly happy to carry that water to my council," he said. "Whether or not I can convince two more of them to support it is the open question. But I think we need to increase the amount of revenue. ...there is money out there. We just need to show the value."

Commission member Williams pointed out the rising cost of materials and the impact that raising taxes will have on merchants. Williams suggested that "it's a timing issue" for merchants who are already adjusting to higher costs of doing business.

The DWC has strong financial reporting practices and accountability in place through the town's finance department and Barone as Board Treasurer.

The DWC does not have good metrics in place for collecting market data and/or tracking visitor trends.

Gilmore will reach out to Tourism Director Corrina Ruffieux about preparing a presentation for board members and district stakeholders with market data and tourism trends, in addition to an overview of the TDA's marketing plan so that advertising efforts can be made collaboratively.

Feichter suggested that municipalities within the county might consider sharing a subscription to a service that provides consumer and market data as an economic development tool.



The DWC has strong preservation ethics but can do more toward communicating with property owners about those standards, incentives, and resources available.

There also remains room to grow to be better at telling the organization's story. That's because in many ways, "we have been writing our story," Gilmore said.

Spiro agreed. It's like "we've been trying to put the wings on the plane, while we're flying it," he said.

The DWC agreed to sign up to host a minimum of two or three merchant socials throughout the year, coordinated by Twigs & Leaves Gallery. Board members were encouraged to attend all the merchant socials throughout the year.

REVIEW OF ANNUAL WORK PLAN

Gilmore reviewed the organization's three transformation strategies and annual work plan adopted in February 2023 asking members to focus on plan updates and the "measurable objectives" part of the plan.

Members entertained a long discussion about measurable objectives, considering a range of ideas for measuring the plan's success. Commission member Feichter suggested using a metric that is easily trackable, like increasing sales tax revenues. Consumer surveys were also discussed as a way to measure trends in visitor traffic.

Feichter said the TDA is capable of tracking credit card spending trends, suggesting a measurable objective be to see an increase in local spending in the downtown district. Gilmore will follow up with the TDA about what consumer data is available.

Feichter suggested allocating a certain portion, or all of the DWC's advertising budget to target the local community. Tetrault suggested only 25-percent of the budget be spent on local advertising.

"Why not half?" said Feichter. "And maybe more than half ... the TDA spends an ungodly amount of money marketing the 28785-86 zip code... So, I say let's go big. Weve wanted to get locals back downtown for as long as I can remember. This is one way to go about that, so let's rock and roll."



The following objectives were added to the annual work plan draft:

Strategy #1: To increase sales tax revenue generated within the MSD by at least 10% due to economic activity tied directly or indirectly to outdoor recreation; Strategy #2: : Expand the number of retailers offering locally sourced, handcrafted goods by 5 percent; and Strategy #3: Spend 50-percent of advertising budget on local marketing.

After some discussion about action items necessary to move the annual work plan along, Gilmore agreed to finalize the plan reflecting the board's feedback and provide a final copy for board review during the next meeting on February 20.

Assistant Town Manager Fowler distributed draft copies of DWC budget documents for board members to take home for review.

A motion to adjourn by Alex McKay, seconded by Courtney Tetrault, carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

ATTEST:

Jay Spiro, Board Chair

Beth Gilmore, Executive Director