

**Charlemont Economic Development Roundtable  
Charlemont Planning Board  
Meeting September 6, 2011, Warfield House  
Draft Minutes**

The meeting had not been properly posted in town hall (weekend days do not count) but had been announce4d on the public bulletin board in front of town hall for several weeks as well as on the town website.

Planning Board members present: Gisela Walker, Chair, Trevor Mackie, Clerk, and Jerry Pratt As well as Jerry Gossetti, Rachel Porter, Chris Loftis (Berkshire East), Hellen and Frank Carcio, Cheryl Handsacker, Carla LaGrassa.

G.Walker opened the meeting at 7.10 pm, thanked the Warfield House for opening their doors and offering pizza and wished Jerry a happy birthday. The low turn out was most likely do to people's focus on the **aftermath of hurricane** Irene and the extensive damage our town suffered. There was much conversation about conditions and their impact especially on businesses such as Mohawk Park, the Olde Willow, Indian Plaza, Zoar Outdoors, National Gas as well as the School and the Sewer System.

However, it emerged that especially now is the time to get together and coordinate how to minimize the damage to businesses from the confusing Rte.2 and other road closings and detours that are keeping people from driving into Charlemont. The group launched a vigorous response that includes contacting Mass Highway, the Mohawk Trail Association, and the Visitor Center in Sh Fls, Boston Globe and TV Stations, Mass MOCA, Mass Vacations, Representative Carriddi to achieve two purposes:

1. The immediate clarification at the East entrance to Charlemont that Rte. 2 is not closed right there but 12 or so miles down the road and that there are detours possible to go west to North Adams for passenger cars starting at Zoar Road, and
2. To create a comprehensive fall foliage traffic guidance and advisory to make sure that we do not lose that audience. Fall foliage routes have to be promoted all the way to Boston and definitely at the Visitor Center in Sh Fls.

Hellen Carcio: routing cars into town and towards NAdams; contacting Rep. Cariddi re detour postings west to east from N Adams

Carla LaGrassa: call Ma MoCA to get them to cooperate bringing customers from the east

Cheryl Handsacker: coordinate fall foliage tour and promotion

Chris Loftis: Boston Globe and local TV stations

Gisela Walker: contact Peter Curtis re banner on his marquees (sp?)

The group decided to make lemonade out of the lemons and to promote detours as especially beautiful fall foliage routes. Group members volunteered for a whole list of activities and decided to have the next meeting relatively soon to move this crucial initiative along.

The question came up again why there was **no sign to the Bissell Bridge**. Jerry thinks that Todd Gerry has the old sign and that we just need a landowner somewhere around the intersection with 8A and Rte. 2 to allow setting it up again.

G. Walker and Chris Loftis then talked about a proposal from the Conway School of Landscape Design to develop a **Charlemont Village Design** next spring. They passed around materials and illustrations from a similar project that was done in Adams. Points were made for and against: This would provide future investments in downtown with a vision and template developed by residents with the help of landscape design students and faculty; it would give us a fresh view of outsiders about the appearance of the Village and opportunities for improvements; it would help tie together aspects of downtown that are now hanging loosely on to the village (fairgrounds, Bissell bridge, river access) and it would be very helpful re attracting new businesses into town and apply for funding. On the other side there were concerns about whether the \$5,000 could be better spent directly on individual improvements, that we know already what we need and the usual worry that such outcome “will just sit on a shelf”. The funding question led to a discussion of the use of Berkshire East’s donation to the town for beautification of the village that was made in connection with the wind turbine. No decision was made but Walker will ask a few more questions of the Conway School; there seemed to be more support for it than not.

Next was the **business survey** which the F Cty. Community Development Corporation has offered to conduct in town. It requires providing them with a list of businesses in town and their email addresses. We put the list together and divided it among members to get the email addresses by Friday. The idea emerged again to invite more business people to the Roundtable and to use the survey for such a push.

Walker reported that the COG is working on the **inventory of empty commercial real estate** and that the final version of the Master Plan chapter on Economic Development is almost done.

Finally the group discussed the **future governance of the Roundtable** once the Planning Board has withdrawn from leading it at the end of the year. At a minimum there needs to be clarity about who calls the meetings and who follows through on decisions, how decisions are being made and recorded. This does not necessarily require forming an official organization and duties can be assumed on a rotating basis but Walker warned that if these decisions are left vague, the effort will fall apart over time. Though it was late at this point the discussion was vigorous about various options for an organizational structure. Definitely more people need to be involved in the decision at a future meeting. At issue was the balance between not being too definitive and limiting and “in-groupy” on one hand and not overly open-ended. This will again be a key topic at the next meeting.

**The next meeting will be on Wednesday, September 28 at 7 pm at the Federated Church Community Room!.**

Respectfully submitted by Gisela Walker  
Chair, Planning Board