

Town of Yarmouth
NOTES FROM THE COMMUNITY VISIONING ROUNDTABLE
January 27, 2021

A virtual Community Visioning Roundtable meeting was conducted at 3:00 PM on Wednesday January 27, 2021 with members of the Yarmouth Business Community to garner their feedback and ideas on their vision for Yarmouth. This was not a public meeting of the Planning Board as no quorum was present, but served as an informal roundtable discussion with business community members.

Participants: Joanne Crowley, Planning Board Chair; Liz Hartsgrove, Planning Board Vice Chair; Kathy Williams, Town Planner, Kyle Pedicini, Economic Development Coordinator, Mary Vilbon, Yarmouth Chamber of Commerce Executive Director; Mary Lenihan, Jason Siscoe, Tom Nickinello, Jack Hynes, Betsy McNamara and Amy Neill.

1. **Introductions:** Joanne Crowley welcomed everyone and expressed appreciation for their attendance and participation. Planning Board members, staff and participants briefly introduced themselves. The six members of the business community had a wide range of experience in banking, the arts, entertainment, restaurants/bakeries and hospitality industries.
2. **Brief Presentation:** Kathy Williams, Town Planner, gave a brief presentation outlining background information and the purpose of the visioning project.
3. **Discussion Questions:** Joanne Crowley facilitated feedback with questions tailored to the business community.
 - a. **What are Yarmouth's strengths and why did you choose Yarmouth for your business?**
 - Family history in Yarmouth (family run businesses, visiting during the summer, parents grew up here), close proximity to other businesses they owned.
 - Fell in love with Yarmouth.
 - People and business owners are wonderful. People make Yarmouth special.
 - Cape Cod location, which is well known and a place people want to be.
 - Funding from the Town (financial help provided to the Cultural Center).
 - Mid cape location, easy place to come to and easy to get around Town.
 - Other businesses like the Inflatable Park and Pirate Museum have created a destination with activities which helps other businesses.
 - Farmers Market served as entry into new business.
 - Some businesses were started many years ago when Route 28 was more vibrant and fun, with less regulations, easier to make money.
 - Good experience overall, but varies by Town Department. Appreciate the coordinated early inspections for renewals from fire, health and building, and the licensing department is a huge asset. The Town reduction in liquor license fees during COVID was very helpful.
 - b. **What are our challenges and what could the Town do to make your business better and more sustainable?**
 - Need to revitalize Route 28. Many older properties have not kept up with the times. Need tools for them to redevelop. Need to keep financial viability of projects in mind.
 - Hospitality industry used to be the biggest industry, but has changed with third party bookings and excess inventory, which keeps room rates low, resulting in less money to reinvest in properties to keep them in good condition.

- Consider reinstating the portion of the HMOD1 bylaw that allows for conversion to residential within existing motel structures, not just raze and replace. Hard to find apartments with lower rents.
 - Need buy-in from everyone including seasonal residents so once the rules are set, businesses can move forward more easily. Developers want certainty.
 - Diverse populations (families, seniors, second home owners) want different things making consensus and buy-in difficult. Need to meet the needs of the Town as a whole.
 - Difficulty finding seasonal workers, used to be the college kids who when they started a family would come back to Cape Cod. Now they go elsewhere.
 - Need seasonal and year round employee housing.
 - Lack of stability in the Town Administrator position gives a perception we don't have our act together.
 - VCOD Bylaw was enacted but nothing seems to have happened. What is the point of visioning when no considerable changes occur? Need to implement the ideas.
 - West Yarmouth leaves a bad impression with visitors. Require achievable and appreciable changes to reach a certain level of curb appeal to show community pride. Although it may be a hardship to require property owners to upgrade, need to ask to get some of the way there.
 - Municipal wastewater was universally seen as a strong necessity for all businesses. Projects are being restricted or limited due to septic regulations. Need sewers for economic development and to keep our water healthy. Property values go down for everyone if our waters are polluted.
 - Consider use of a two pipe system to allow for treated wastewater effluent to be used for irrigation to spread out around Town rather than discharging at the Bass River Golf course next to the Bass River. Water is a commodity.
 - Chamber, Town Hall and the Business Community should work together towards common goals. Improve communication with businesses and show that the Town supports them, not just regulates them. Town should have provided more direct outreach during the first 3 months of COVID.
 - In the Business Community, there is widespread belief, not just perception, that Yarmouth is not business friendly.
 - Consider a Business Liaison at Town Hall who can work with the Business Community, fostering good relationships and helping navigate regulations.
 - Concerns that the visioning survey may not be anonymous and expressing opinions may result in pop inspections if speak out. Possibility of hard copy surveys with more business specific questions.
 - Chamber of Commerce is great, helpful during business start-up.
 - Bylaws and restrictions result in business opportunities going elsewhere.
 - Retain businesses that draw people to Yarmouth (i.e. RMV), as once in town people can be attracted to other businesses.
 - Some projects, such as Public Art, wrapping of traffic control boxes and banners, get stalled at Town Hall with permitting, regulations and process, even when projects have wide support.
 - Use creative art in vacant store windows to help stir interest.
 - Acknowledged that Town Hall staff was reduced in 2008 and have not been replaced, putting added work onto fewer staff. Need to look at workloads and priorities so as not to burn people out.
- c. Closing Remarks and Summary: Good opportunity with new Town Administrator and the feedback from the Visioning process to convey to the Board of Selectmen what our business community wants, including a more collaborative relationship, more communication, and a more business friendly environment. Encouraged more feedback from the business community and continuing the conversation.