

ASHFORD BUSINESS OWNERS ASSOCIATION

Notes of Meeting

Wednesday, May 17th, 2006

Meeting called to order at 7:10 p.m. by Ashford Economic Development Commission members, Kay Warren, Ron Anderson and Gail Metsack.

Attendee Introductions

All attendees introduced themselves and briefly introduced their business.

Bette Giordano, Ashford's representative to the local (Eastern Region) tourism district was present. She explained that she is the connection for businesses that would like to be listed and recognized by Ashford's state tourism district. It is her goal to put Ashford on the map as a good stop for a bite to eat, a farm tour or shopping at our local garden centers, antique or other shops, farm stands, orchard, sugar house, etc. She welcomes any and all comments and looks forward to working with more local businesses to bring attention to our area.

Attendees were also asked if any belonged to other associations. Bryan Becker referred us to an organization he is familiar with - www.BNIct.com – a business referral or networking group.

Remarks from EDC Members

Kay, Ron and Gail explained that the roles of the Economic Development Commission members at Association meetings will be gradually diminishing as leadership of the Association becomes more active. However, EDC will stick with the Association until it is “off the ground.” The EDC would like to see these 4 points covered: an organized structure is formed, officers are in place, membership is growing, and a program of association activities is developed.

Remarks/Suggestions from Attendees since last Meeting

Business Owners were then asked to provide feedback received since the April meeting. Many indicated feedback was positive and most did not realize that Ashford has 160+ businesses operating in town. However, everyone has limited time to attend meetings and take on the additional responsibilities of being involved in building an association.

Most felt we are moving in the right direction and it was time to make something happen. Meeting month after month to discuss what an association could do is not good enough progress. Thus, a discussion took place on how to proceed from this point. EDC members have posted ads, sent postcards or letters and called businesses to notify them of meetings and increase involvement, yet we still do not have even half of all businesses attending.

It was decided that for the next meeting, personal calls would be made. Gail agreed to split up the list of businesses for each volunteer to make just a few calls to invite owners to the next meeting.

Mission of the Association

A draft mission statement was reviewed and discussed. This mission may be edited as the Association forms and more members become active.

The purpose of the Ashford Business Owners Association is to promote and provide support to all businesses within the Town of Ashford. To act as a collective resource of business information and education. To create awareness of Ashford business within the community. To address common business issues with town government and to promote Ashford businesses as positive Ashford citizens.

Nominations of Association Officers, their Roles and Association Details

Following the decision that it was “time to make things happen,” a discussion took place regarding the roles of the officers needed to lead the association. Volunteers were sought to take interim (4 month) positions while the Association is forming. The following agreed to step forward:

Bryan Becker – President

Janice Sentivany – Vice President

Patrick Cosgrove – Treasurer

Gail Metsack - Interim Recording/Corresponding Secretary

The importance of the other officers listed on the April and May agendas was also discussed. More members must get involved and those officers should be elected in the fall when the four month positions for the above four officers expire.

A question was raised as to how much of a voice the Association would have and how much change they could make happen. It was agreed by all that a strong group voice is going to be much louder than individual business owners separately raising issues with the town officials.

Funding for the Association was also discussed. EDC explained that the Commission is a branch of town government and has limited funding from the town budget.

The Association will run on membership dues and fund raisers to be organized. Funding from the town would not be available or desirable as the Association will be a private entity with independence and a distinctly different mission.

This then lead to a discussion of where to hold future meetings – (*i.e.*, at local businesses or at the library instead of the town hall.)

Old Business

Kay, Ron, Gail & Ray Fenn (Chair of EDC) discussed progress on some issues raised at the April Meeting:

- (1) EDC and the Association (once formed) cooperatively sponsoring a conference/workshop for Business Owners to meet with the various departments of town government. At this meeting, town officials will present their mission and describe the function and purpose of their office, board or commission.

EDC members indicated they would gladly work with the Association to put such a meeting together. EDC attempted to hold such a gathering back in 2002 but due to scheduling conflicts and winter weather, it did not happen. Gail stated that she felt this was an important item to put on one of the Association's first agendas. Such an event would not cost much and would benefit all. The Association leadership and members should all become knowledgeable about the town government in order to educate additional Association members and to help guide businesses seeking their assistance. In turn, Ashford officials should become familiar with the Association.

- (2) The Association possibly obtaining a permit and funding for the erection of an Ashford Business Directory to be placed on the Knowlton Hall lawn facing the exit from the parking lot. This would be town property instead of State land and could be visible from Route 44 in both directions. The Association could collect donations for business listings and provide a map to area businesses and resources. When able, the Association should erect another directory near I-84 for all traffic coming into that end of town and perhaps other locations near town borders.

Ray Fenn explained that he already discussed this potential project with the First Selectman. If the Association could fund and maintain an attractive, appropriate directory in front of the library building (and perhaps other locations around town), the town would likely be supportive of this effort.

- (3) Publication of the Business Directory to either be mailed to all Ashford addresses or on display at the central Directory at Knowlton Hall and at the Town Clerk's and Selectmen's Offices. With fees collected for the placement of ads, the design can be updated and perhaps a small amount could go into the Association account.

Kay Warren offered assistance and guidance with this project as she led the EDC in publishing two prior directories. An Association directory could be upgraded to color and businesses categorized by type of business instead of randomly as in prior directories.

Set Date & Agenda for next meeting

Wednesday nights at 7 p.m. seems to work for most attendees so the date of June 21st was chosen for the next meeting. Because another event was already scheduled for Knowlton Hall, the June meeting of the Business Owners Association will again be held in the lower level conference room at the Ashford Town Offices.

The first order of business on the June agenda will be a continuation of items from the May meeting:

Officers named above will lead discussion for:

- Reviewing Mission Statement
- Setting Meeting schedule (consider 2x per month until Assoc. structure is set?)
- Drafting By-Laws
- Determining Dues Structure (future budget/banking issues for Treasurer)

Kay and Brian will do some research to find sample by-laws of other associations.

Gail will contact Valerie Pelletier, who is/was the Chair of the Willington Business Association. She spoke to the EDC back in 2004 about how Willington formed their association and at that time she offered further assistance. Gail will see if Valerie would be willing to speak to our group or at least provide sample by-laws.

As Ron is a member of the Windham Chamber of Commerce, he will contact Roger Adams, the Executive Director to see what assistance he can provide to the Association. Roger may have a listing of other associations, any requirements for registering with the state, or sample organizational documents. As Ray Fenn mentioned, the Windham Chamber has divisions/subsidiaries or association with other local business associations (Mansfield/Hebron) and Ashford should look into this type of connection to the Chamber. Roger would be another good person to schedule to speak at an Ashford Association meeting.

To publicize the June meeting, President Bryan Becker will draft an invitation/welcome note for publication in the Ashford Citizen and Willimantic Chronicle. Kay offered to provide the Association with a listing of local media contacts to assist in publishing meeting notices.

Additionally, as mentioned above, the list of businesses will be split equally among attendees to call and invite all businesses to the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned 9?

Respectfully submitted,

Gail D. Metsack
Interim Recording/Corresponding Secretary