

Facilitators

Denise Clemence

Robert Clemence

Richard Whitney

Monique Manna

Topics of Discussion

Introduction to Group / Purpose

Ground Rules (Behavior)

Mission Statement

Upcoming Events / Community Interests

General Discussion

Action Items

Next Meeting Date / Location

Introduction to Group / Purpose

A formal introduction to the founding group was presented. Purpose of group was discussed. Concerns have been brought forth by members of our community on the negativity of issues taking place.

Our main purpose when forming this group was the issues at hand with the Access Road (Industrial Park). It was made clear that this would be a main topic for discussion and things were to be kept positive and respectful toward the views and opinions of every person that attended this night's meeting. Our sights are "Beyond the Landfill". Due to the proximity of these two issues however, it is a reality that this would be brought up.

It was made clear that our group could be used as a "liaison" for issues that are of concern.

It is our understanding that everyone is concerned for the betterment of our town. By working together this will move us toward solutions to the issues at hand, and help promote the positive aspects of our town.

"To look toward the future of Southbridge ~ To accentuate all the positives that our town has to offer ~ We respect differing views and opinions which will make us much more knowledgeable to the issues at hand."

Ground Rules / Behavior

- Respect each other & their opinions
- **No personal attacks will be tolerated.** It was made clear to people attending this meeting that any personal attacks or "bashing" by anyone is not acceptable. Any individuals knowingly doing this would not be allowed to attend future meetings.

Mission Statement

Our Mission Statement was read to those that attended:

The main focus of this group is to look toward the future of Southbridge rather than being stuck on the negativity of the past.

We prefer to accentuate all the positives that our town has to offer to its residents, potential residents and business prospects.

We respect differing views and opinions which will make us more knowledgeable to the issues at hand.

Upcoming Events / Community Interests

- J.A.G. (Justice Assistant Grant) – Papers were handed out and those who attended were asked if they would like to provide input on the J.A.G. Grant that the police department is seeking. Community input is a requirement for this. Police Department is seeking suggestions on where the community feels the money obtained through this grant would be best spent. Deadline for this is April 27, 2009. However, the police department will continue to accept comments.
- Community Clean Up – Community clean up will be starting by May. Those interested in participating in this community effort should contact our Recycling Coordinator Melissa Joyce at the Town Hall.
- Drop & Swap – April 26, 2009 will be Drop & Swap day for those that would like to donate their "Gently Used" items. Those who "drop" are also able to "swap". However, it is not necessary to "swap". All items that are left over will be donated to family's in need.
- Meet & Greet – Announcement about the Meet & Greet made. June 18, 2009 6 – 8PM at the Community Center.

General Discussion

Discussion was brought up about several different topics.

- Southbridge Hotel & Conference Center
- Industrial Parks (Other Communities)
- Local Newspaper (Sound Offs)
- Access Road

Southbridge Hotel & Conference Center

Southbridge Hotel & Conference Center has been under attack recently in regards to the business this facility generates. Listed below are some facts on the Southbridge Hotel & Conference Center.

- Level of Employment: 64 Employees
- Restaurant – 7 ½ years ago opened (year round) didn’t have the food and beverage contract with the government reduced to breakfast and lunch buffet. Dinner Shades (Pub Menu) in the evening.....Friday & Saturday 5pm – midnight. Mostly everyday during the week.
- Rooms occupied in the last two weeks (April 2009): Week 1: 192 Week 2: 185
- Occupancy Rate – increased every year and now doing very well. Critics has used 40-50% occupancy rates (which the Hotel often greatly exceeds) as fact and imply it is underperforming. The Worcester Business Journal reports Average Worcester County Hotel fill rates ranging between 45 and 62% depending upon the month:

Occupancy and room rates for hotels in Central Mass.

Local hotels saw their occupancy rates decline more than 3.5 percent so far in 2008. But room rates have nudged up more than 4 percent to \$97.30 per night. Total revenues for Central Mass. hotels reached \$68.4 million, a 1.6 percent increase over 2007. National projections in the hotel industry call for a 3 percent drop in occupancy and a 3.4 percent drop in room rates.

	Occupancy rate	Percent change 2007-2008	Average daily room rate	Percent change 2007-2008	Total revenue	Percent change 2007-2008
January	45.0%	1.6%	\$93.38	4.8%	\$5,995,353	8.90%
February	49.5%	4.0%	\$92.79	5.9%	\$5,916,042	12.70%
March	48.0%	-9.0%	\$95.24	3.8%	\$6,533,757	-3.40%
April	56.8%	4.9%	\$98.40	8.9%	\$7,718,724	15.80%
May	62.0%	-0.2%	\$103.33	7.4%	\$9,444,427	8.70%
June	61.7%	-3.8%	\$97.45	3.5%	\$8,305,044	-0.40%
July	58.3%	-7.6%	\$97.67	4.1%	\$8,092,220	-4.10%
August	59.7%	-1.2%	\$96.27	2.0%	\$8,791,971	-9.30%
September	62.7%	-3.9%	\$98.54	-0.6%	\$8,526,554	-4.50%
Year to date 2008	56.0%	-3.5%	\$97.30	4.2%	\$68,454,342	1.60%

Source: Smith Travel Research.

Average daily room rates for hotels in Worcester



-

“To look toward the future of Southbridge ~ To accentuate all the positives that our town has to offer ~ We respect differing views and opinions which will make us much more knowledgeable to the issues at hand.”

- DOD normally stay for four days – (Some stay for two weeks)
- Not a failed issue – some people perceive this as “failed” Distracters utilize this as a failed industry.

Local Newspaper (Sound Offs)

Several in the group indicated that they would be watching for personal attacks and inaccurate statements in the local news section of the “Sound Offs” and react where appropriate. When something is posted in this section and only focuses on negativity & “bashing” we will get the facts and will send a Letter to the Editor with the facts.

Access Road

Much was discussed on the Access Road. Questions were raised and facts were given. For those questions that we do not have answers for, the facts will be obtained. Questions that facts need to be obtained are listed below:

- A statement was made in regards to Superior Cake that they were offered a piece of land somewhere else besides the industrial park. The assumption was that “He didn’t need to move to the Industrial Park” (Superior Cake)
- Kirsti Pecci’s lawsuit could allow Casella to break the contract... this was said by Kopleman and Paige...is this a fact? Rich Logan stated he asked Mr. Clark to get the information from attorney’s and this is what the attorneys stated a “Force Majeure” could happen.

Miscellaneous Discussion

- Some discussion of our schools was brought up. Most people are under the impression that we have a poor school system. It was brought up that our school system is on probation. The question was raised as to “How do we get off of probation?”
- It was said at the meeting that the bonding capacity for school will not hold because of access road bond – NOT TRUE! *Please refer to fact sheet on Dick Whitney’s Website / page “Future of Southbridge”*
- Will not affect our borrowing power (the bond \$6 million) for the school when they are getting ready to build the school.
- Company is holding bid price for 6 months for Access Road (\$5.4 million) Contractor is bonded for \$5.4 million dollars
- Does this open us up to a lawsuit if contract not awarded – No, contractor cannot sue us.

- Company Lithium ION Batteries – looking for a place to do business toured the AO as it was on list (not for them they looked 04/16/2009)
- Industrial Parks in other community's were brought up. It was stated that Communities thrived with these Industrial Parks located in their community. To name a few:
 - Fort Devens, MA
 - Oxford, MA
 - Putnam, CT

Action Items

- Towns website is poor and out of date – need to utilize the internet (Collect information from Town Managers Office on status of the Towns Website)
- Check Status of DVD about Southbridge
- Put together pamphlets to support Southbridge Promote the entire town...We need a salesman for Southbridge – Someone to sell Southbridge!

Suggestions

- Perception is reality – Communicate all the positive things to a wide audience on a regular basis (goal) try to put out positive business / community related activities. Supply the news with press releases on how Southbridge has improved.
- Do a showcase just of Southbridge – show what is out there
- Downtown Partnership is looking for input from our group on how we may be able to promote downtown.
- Try to get a cinema...is this a possibility?
- Conventions e.g. Star Trek, Star Wars (Host a convention at the Southbridge Hotel & Conference Center?)
- Did ask Mr. Clark to walk Phase I – got the OK – wants to have it video taped to present it to people. Have the DEP walk with us. Anyone interested in walking this?



Apr. 17

“Beyond The Landfill: The Future of Southbridge”