



Task Force Agenda Meeting Minutes – January 4, 2012

In attendance:

Task Force: Brett Akkerman, Scott Bernstein, Mark Chenoweth, Richard Fanning, Kim Fortier, Annette Lund, James Sanigular, Anthony Spears, Dan Swartz, Gary Taylor

Advisory: Patricia Fitzgerald, Jeff Moores, Bruce Nustad, Cherie Rollings,

Other: Shalin Johnson

Facilitators: Ellen Watters, Wendy Helgeson

Staff: Amy Baldwin, Alisha Strowbridge

Welcome by Mayor Lunde:

- City needs to hear good and bad, they are looking to improve and make sure that changes are good/as promised.
- Noted that the committee has no politicians or staff – just business, take this where you want to, we want to listen and take action.
- Thank you in advance for your participation.

Introductions: Why were you interested in being on Task Force:

- New to city/area – would like some connections with city.
- Would like to keep money in the community, set a platform, game plan to invite, welcome and encourage upscale restaurants to relocate to the city
- Better understanding of city, share my experiences with other communities with BP
- Relocating a business from New Brighton, will experience move-in issues from consumer perspective. Would like to know about mentoring/training options.
- Concern about business/city reputation – stigma around BP. Franchise wanted them to name themselves “Champlain Park”. Wants to see city thrive and prosper, believes in supporting other businesses and keep money here.
- Believes BP is one of the most stringent cities in the metro area, but City does communicate well. Wants new programs, beautification and property improvement.
- Economy has been tough, finding and acquiring talented individuals to be employees is difficult, the reputation is difficult to attract and retain innovative business and talent. Wants to attract people who will help business grow.
- Skeptical– the city cares because they have to due to the economy, wants to make connections and change attitude.
- Has watched BP grow and change and wants it to continue –has difficulty finding technically trained employees.
- Has some opinions about the reputation issues of BP and would like to be a part of solution.
- A strong business community equals a strong community

- Would like to better engage youth and how do we get people who come here every day more involved.
- Interested in helping city to be successful, jobs, job training, want to be a partner.

Meeting norms

- Posted in council chambers
- On time
- Come prepared
- Respect conversation
- Voice concerns with respect

Overview of Café Feedback

- All business in BP that they could find invited to meeting, and then invited to 3 different café opportunities – to talk about the issues facing businesses. All issues you brought up were voiced in those initial meetings. Results of those conversations are included in your book.
- Committee members “homework” please read the unedited commentary from those meetings.
- Identified primary areas of concern to provide a rough outline for the Task Force’s work
- There will be six meetings, suggested topics listed on this agenda outline. However, committee can change as they would like.

Introduction of Themes for Task Force

Reaction from committee:

- looks good, seems to cover what they expected.
- Committee’s job to provide more details on themes, as an example: if zoning is an issue – what are the specifics?
- Any mention of transportation as an issue? Bringing employees in to work here is problematic.
- How much can we realistically handle and how much can we really execute? We need more parameters so we don’t come up with so many suggestions – but that we can take action.
- Remember the message from Mayor – don’t feel limited – discuss everything. All reasonable suggestions will be welcome. Ask for what you want and then there can be compromise.
- Maybe we want to have more resources in the room? If we have technical information or questions that need to be answered to move forward.

Topic: Access to Information and Resources for Businesses

What kinds of information does business need from city:

- Find out most things via web and phone calls.
- You get all the information and move forward and then right before it opens – regulators come through and add cost and confusion, not communicated well – not flexible, things changed from initial start of project and opening. Licensors/inspectors delayed things. Costs time and money. Plan approved, but then rules of game changed. Plan, building, specs are all approved but then inspectors say it isn’t right.
- Who are you supposed to use for the specific mandates that need to be completed? Business owners not aware of how to fix. (City can’t recommend, but maybe they could provide a list of licensed vendors)
- If something isn’t up to code – city should provide the “why”.
- Our different customers have different needs, but the one thing in common – people want to deal with one person – no matter what the level of sophistication of process. Businesses want to stay on schedule, prefer no surprises – can’t the city conduct themselves like a business?

- In another community – when opening a business I had an “ambassador” that person guided us through the entire process. Held a meeting before we broke ground. Discuss potential challenges before process started.
- City staff should be empowered to act on our behalf.
- Does city provide adequate time line expectations?
- Documents on website are “written in some other language” so I had questions to a staff person and they directed me back to the website. Resorted to anecdotal information because couldn’t figure out the right way to do it and process.
- Sometimes you need to talk to a person instead of use a website. Need customer service.
- Is there an appeal process if inspector requires unrealistic things? Who do you contact?
- Sometimes get the impression that the city just wants to be in control.
- Seems like a lot of city staff doesn’t live here and maybe doesn’t understand it like we do.
- Amy does plays ambassador role and she is an excellent resource – but there is only one of her.
- When I had challenges with licensing/regulations – I did not go to Amy, did not know she could help me.
- Is there a tool kit for people starting a business – if you want to do it in BP – here are the 30 things you need to know?
- City of New Hope has an occupancy permit for businesses opening in their city that don’t need a license or permit.
- City should provide other resources available, training programs, money available for projects

What would help businesses know each other and work together?

- City doesn’t need to come to your door, but there should be more personal interaction and encouragement for businesses to connect.
- Need to use a variety of communication tools and frequency- combination of print, phone, email, website.

Presentation on Available Resources: City staff – see attached

- There are two new loan funds, we work with another agency to review and issue the loan, but city of BP provides the fund, up to \$25,000.
- There is no fee for the business development resources – it is relatively new, now have expanded hours due to demand.
- If Amy doesn’t know the answer, it is her job to find it for you.
- Can’t recommend a specific contractor or expert (structural engineer for example) because of liability issue and difficulty of maintaining current list
- Before large projects we do have meetings to bring everyone relevant to the business to try and get questions up front. Amy gets the right people in the room to get the right answers.
- BP does use a business survey but it is challenging to get the word out about the survey. Is also hard to maintain contact information – who should be getting, updated emails, names etc. Direct mail is the #1 way people hear about the resources. City gets a 10% response from the survey – uses 1200 addresses, 300 email addresses, 200 “development” contacts and also use chambers of commerce.
- Trying to use social media more, particularly for the residents. There is a new tool “nixle” used for things like a water main break, people can opt for an email or text message. It is run through the police department so does have a lot of crime updates.
- City would like to know if we should have an annual business forum – currently do one for real estate/development – should we expand that and build it into something that can be an expectation of the “go to place” for updates on business resources.

- BP is doing a restaurant/retail market analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the community – and preliminary results will be presented on March 7th meeting.

Discussion: Outcome/Recommendation

- Police department is amazing. They do a great job, those that live here feel safe. .
- 1 person hasn't experienced any crime, 1 person has had 4 break-ins in business and 1 in residence.
- It would be nice to have a way to contain the negative information and do a better job of promoting the good stuff – especially to those on the "outside".
- BP does participate in regional marketing – bioscience alley – national/international trade shows.
- If you are not involved in the chamber you are missing a low cost opportunity for resources and networking. We have a really active chamber. They do have networking events that you can attend even without a membership.
- What customer training is provided to employees of the city? That could be a recommendation to the city – invest in training of the "front line" employee. We don't care how much you know, we want to know how much you care. What are the hiring practices to insure employees are well equipped for dealing with people.
- It is clear there is a disconnect between resources available and what businesses know is available. How do you think we can do this?
- Is there a way to notify users of changes in codes?
- Sometimes the "interpretation" of the codes is the problem, but often happens at the last minute. Is there an opportunity to create the codes so there is less opportunity for this? What about establishing an appeals process?
- What about a checklist of codes and once we've inspected something, we will not go back to this when we come back to see the next one.
- One stop shop – Amy is doing the ambassador role, but businesses don't know about it and no one is calling it that. Maybe rebrand her role to community.

Wrap-Up/Next Steps

Next time we will refine these ideas. The Task Force will get the draft recommendations ahead of the meeting. A meeting evaluation will be sent out to group and we ask for candid feedback. A week or so before the next meeting you will receive the agenda and draft recommendations.

Brooklynpark.org/businessforward has all information.

Next Meeting

January 18, 6-9 p.m.