



Town of Vienna

127 Center Street S
Vienna, VA. 22180
p. 703-255-6300
TTY 8111

Meeting Minutes

Town Business Liaison Committee

Thursday, November 14, 2024

7:00 PM

Charles Robinson Jr. Town Hall, 127 Center
St. South

1 Roll Call

Call to Order: Chairman Jen Morrow called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Members present: Najee Davis; Mark Lander; Tracy McCarty; Bob Marsh; Jen Morrow; Preeti Penati

Members Absent: Brenda Burns

Staff Present: Kelly O'Brien, Acting Director, Ashley Curtis, Marketing and Business Engagement Specialist, Economic Development

Council Member Present: Jessica Ramakis

Chairman Morrow noted the presence of new member Bill Comerford, resident representative.

2. Approval of the Minutes

A motion was made and seconded to accept the regular meeting minutes of September and October 2024 with corrections. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Regular Business

New businesses licensed in October

Attachments: [October 2024 New Businesses](#)

Eight business licenses were issued in the month of October. There were no business closures.

TBLC discusses top priorities

Chairman Morrow reported on Town Councils request in contacting businesses with regard to the meals tax increase. Not having received necessary information on the issue has created a sense of frustration. As a result, Chairman Morrow has directed the Committee to develop a set of priorities. The Committee must be realistic regarding its function, how time can be spent, and what is feasible to accomplish.

Comments from the Committee included the following:

- TBLC must articulate what the business community wants from the Town; must identify a goal; Business owners would feel better about meals tax increase for aquatics center if they knew there was a plan for addressing their ongoing problems;*
- TBLC must convey to Council the urgency felt regarding fixing the parking issues along Church Street Corridor; Council attention will now move to aquatics center, away from these other ongoing problems;*
- Never heard any plans for the Library parking garage; Understand that the Town is providing funds for this effort;*

- Town should do better at structuring delivery times and areas for businesses along Church Street; Monitoring and managing is key;
- Parking study revealed adequate parking across Town but not in the right locations to solve ongoing issues;
- Frustration with Council response to complaints; Presented temporary parking options to Council but never received response;
- Concern that with the parking garage at the new Library, Council will believe the issue is solved.

Kelly O'Brien, Acting Director, Economic Development reminded the Committee that the intention of the Library parking garage is to help the business community. There are NVTAF funds for this project that must be used or they will be lost. She assured the Committee that the project is solid and on schedule for completion by 2027. Earlier parking projects became untenable, so this opportunity was the best available.

Ms. O'Brien shared that Council has a high interest in reassessing the Zoning Code parking standards; Issues such as shared parking, parking demand at various times of day; required parking spaces based on number of seats; all should be evaluated.

Ashley Curtis suggested drafting a memo to Council including support for pursuing the shared parking alternative as well as other areas where businesses agree there is an urgency for action. Ms. O'Brien will share action notes on the Zoning Code Parking Standards prioritized so far by Council. The final items will be prioritized at the February 10, 2025 Town Council Meeting. Recommendations from this Committee should be submitted to Ms. O'Brien in early January. Chairman Morrow called for the formation of a subcommittee to address the topic. The subcommittee will reach out to other committees and commissions to determine if they too are looking into this issue.

It was suggested that TBLC could do a better job at getting in front of the business leaders, prior to these decisions being made. There should be a concerted preemptive action on the part of the Committee, rather than waiting to react to a decision already in the works. Historically, it has been very difficult to get businesses to step forward to discuss issues until they feel threatened. Relationships are equity, businesses must begin to build equitable relationships amongst themselves and Council in order to be better informed.

TBLC is in a position to present ideas/options to Council before the project gets too far along; to get ahead of the issue. They should consider gathering concerns from businesses, developing a list of issues that can potentially be resolved in a timely manner, allowing business owners to consider these and then presenting the finalized package to Council. Outdoor lighting and outdoor seating are both topics slated for consideration by Council in the coming months. Business owners are challenged to preemptively develop ideas and opinions on these matters to be presented to Council sooner rather than later; work to build relationships with decision makers.

A priority for the Committee to consider is to develop a better strategy for distributing information to the business community at large; a regular information flow. It will serve as notice that the TBLC is the resource for information. It helps the Committee develop a strategy and establishes it as a valuable source of information for Council.

Chairman Morrow stated that the function of the Committee is to serve as a liaison.

This is impossible to achieve if the Committee is unaware of the issues. She stated that through the meals tax increase, she felt disrespected by certain elected officials who never attempted to work in partnership with the TBLC. The VBA was also a source of frustration. The TBLC worked to both gather information and to push out information yet it was never the first source sought by elected officials. If this Committee plans to move forward as discussed, there must be a mechanism in place through Economic Development and Council to know what is under discussion at the earliest possible stage.

Chairman Morrow concluded the discussion, indicating that the Committee will revisit the priority list at the meeting in December.

Updates on proposed meals tax increase

A public hearing is scheduled for the Town Council meeting on Monday, November 18, 2024 at 7:00 PM to discuss the meals tax. Najee Davis and Bob Marsh will draft a statement for presentation by Mr. Marsh at that hearing. The spreadsheet of all Town restaurants, those contacted and comments provided should be included as an attachment.

Additional Comments included the following:

- *Committee is under impression that the aquatics center is an undeniable fact and that the only question is that of timing and funding;*
- *Passage of the meals tax increase would allow completion in the near future;*
- *Committee was assured that the Aquatics Center remains a project of interest and is a long way from shovel ready.*

Parking study: where it stands and next steps

Chairman Morrow reiterated that a subcommittee to address parking will be made up of Mark Lander; Preeti Penati; Jen Morrow and Brenda Burns.

4. Economic Development Department Updates

Department leadership updates

Chairman Morrow called on Acting Director Kelly O'Brien to share information from the Department.

Applications have closed for the position of Director of Economic Development. An announcement should be made in the near future.

Current programs and upcoming events

Ashley Curtis noted that due to insufficient resources, two events will not be held in the month of December; the Shine Bright Vienna Holiday Decorating Contest and the family-friendly Vienna 'Noon Year's Eve' celebration.

Ribbon cuttings continue with two scheduled prior to the end of the year; Call Your Mother Deli on November 20, 2024 and Bella Lashes on December 5, 2024.

Small Business Saturday, November 30, 2024 will carry over through Church Street Stroll on Monday, December 2, 2024. Economic Development has been tasked with energizing the Stroll on the Lawyers Rd end of Church Street.

Culinary Careers Collaborative, the joint Fairfax City pilot workforce development

program will be launching the second course beginning January 6, 2025 with a focus on Beverage Arts (beverage and bar services).

Outdoor lighting standards update

Ms. O'Brien noted that prior to the recent rewrite of the Town Code there were largely no standards for outdoor lighting. The new code made some progress but left significant work to do. Immediately after the Code Create process, the Vienna Town Council directed staff to develop better, clearer rules on outdoor lighting.

November 6, 2024 two zoom/in-person meetings were held with businesses and residents. Clanton and Associates, national light specialists, who are developing the new lighting recommendations and master plan document, provided information on the project. One outcome of the project will be improved lighting efficiency for businesses and residents alike.

Town events and Church Street businesses

The Finance Department is currently working on a program that will allow for payment of meals tax electronically. The system is anticipated to launch in January 2025. Test businesses are being sought.

The on-line business license system has been in place for 5 years and is out for required rebid. The Department is seeking input from TBLC regarding use of the software. A small test group of restaurants is being sought to trial the software.

In response to complaints from Church Street businesses regarding street closures for Town events, a meeting was held to discuss the issue. Business owners concerns were wide ranging. As a result of this, Economic Development has decided to initiate a replication of the Planning and Zoning/Builder Community bi-monthly zoom meetings. Structured as listening sessions, the goal is to provide a platform for presenting issues of concern. The first such session with Church Street businesses is scheduled for December 5, 2024 at 10:00 AM.

5. TBLC Chair's Report

No additional report.

6. Meeting Adjournment

Chairman Morrow called for a motion to adjourn at 9:00 PM.

Motion, Bob Marsh; second, Preeti Penati.

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