

Borough Council

Bedford Borough Council Members Sharon Turkovich, Kenny Fetterman, Jeff Rinscheid, Patrick Neff, Bill Blackburn, and Matthew Bullington along with Borough Manager Barbara Diehl, Borough Secretary Beverly Geller, Mayor William Leibfreid and Police Chief Craig Bowman met with the DBI Board on the above date at 5:00 pm in The Borough Municipal Building.

Present for the Downtown Bedford Inc. (DBI) Board were Vicki Foor, Shaun Styer, Sherri Growden, Katie Fink, Michael Meehan, Shelley Wertz, Meghan Bardell, Brian Jeffries, Maura Cruse, Joe Black, and Allen Harr along with DBI employees, Lindsay Salas and Lorelle Steach. Council Member Rinscheid is also as a Board Member of DBI.

Council Member and DBI Board Member Tim Weaverling was absent.

Council Member Turkovich opened the discussion regarding the DBI staff becoming employees of Bedford Borough. Council Member Turkovich shared that the Borough is considering the move to provide sustainability and financial support for DBI while the organization remains a 501c(3) to take advantage of grants and funding from outside sources. Council Member Turkovich shared that there were concerns for the employees coming under the umbrella of the Borough.

Michael Meehan noted that DBI is one of the few freestanding Downtown organizations. Mr. Meehan noted that the turnover of management is a challenge. Managers have been concentrating on fundraising to afford their salaries when filling storefronts and supporting business owners should be the focus. Mr. Meehan stressed that fundraising should cease and getting people downtown and getting Bedford to grow is vital.

Council and DBI Board Member Rinscheid shared that the financials are currently wonderful where five years ago they were alarming. Mr. Rinscheid noted a concern of how the transition from DBI to Borough employees would work and preserving the structure of DBI. As an example, Mr. Rinscheid mentioned volunteers. Council is concerned that volunteers will not step up to assist with events after employees are moved under the Borough umbrella.

Council Member Turkovich noted that a concern is keeping DBI as a separate operating entity. A second concern is if DBI is being run as it should and if there is a five-year plan in place.

Mr. Meehan shared that DBI received word that the organization was approved for the Keystone Main Street Designation by Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development (PCED). Mr. Meehan shared that expansion to the North side is planned. The growth plan includes moving some events to the river area. Filling storefronts and expanding areas are one of the priorities. Mr. Meehan shared that the move of employees under the Borough would allow DBI to place priority on bringing business to downtown and still have the separate DBI Committees. The main reason DBI is needed is to allow businesses to open and be profitable.

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Mr. Meehan noted that Lindsay Salas can find volunteers for events/functions. The recent removal of Christmas lights had six lift trucks onsite. Mr. Meehan shared that Mrs. Salas successfully builds relationships with the community.

Mayor Leibfreid thanked the volunteers at DBI and shared that the health of the business district depends on DBI. Mayor Leibfreid shared that for DBI to thrive we should take the financial burden away. This will bring “feet on the street” and make Bedford better.

Council Member Neff shared concerns that a tax increase would be required in 2024 and that exact costs are unknown. Council Member Neff stated it would make more sense to hire a grant writer. Mrs. Salas noted that as a Pennsylvania Downtown Center member, DBI has priority for grants.

Sheri Growden asked the question that if there was no DBI what the cost would be to the Borough. Mrs. Growden also asked who would put up the Christmas lights, hold events, and find volunteers.

Council Member Turkovich shared that residents have shared that they live two blocks from downtown but do not visit the stores. Council Member Bullington noted that a vibrant downtown increases property values for the town.

Council Member Neff asked that since costs are unknown, how can the move be quantified. Council Member Neff added that a decision like this is permanent. Mr. Meehan shared that we are never going to get exact numbers. A focus will be on marketing and helping current businesses.

Brian Jeffries stated that Borough Council is looking at what is good for the Borough and DBI is looking at the best interest of the Borough. Mr. Jeffries noted that everyone wants a thriving downtown.

Mr. Meehan shared that the borough benefit package is important to attract and keep quality personnel. Mrs. Salas noted that without the administrative costs, funds could be used to advertise outside the area.

Current vendors do events for free but in other towns vendors receive payment for attending. Events pull people from other areas/states. The Chocolate and Wine Walk events have lots of individuals coming into stores, but few sales. People do return to shop at future dates.

Funds could also be used as stipends. For DBI fundraisers, storefronts are asked to donate. Stipends were discussed by DBI to allow storefronts to participate in an event without spending large sums of money. The Chocolate Walk was used as an example.

Mayor Leibfreid noted that a survey of Omni Bedford Springs guests noted they were attracted to Bedford by 1) architecture - facades, 2) safety – police presence, 3) restaurants, and 4) small businesses. Mayor Leibfreid shared that DBI is important and a prudent investment for not much money.

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Manager Diehl shared that the Borough would take over the administrative side of payroll and purchasing supplies. DBI would remain their own entity. The board would remain to oversee events, money reserves and the budget.

Council Member Neff asked that the subject be tabled until all Council Members are in attendance at a Workshop or Council Meeting. Council Members shared that all their questions were answered.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:34 pm.

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Borough Secretary