

**4 TOWN REGIONAL ECONOMIC VITALITY PLAN
STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING**

AGENDA

FEBRUARY 17, 2022, 2PM – 3PM

VIA ZOOM

Meeting Notes

- Discussion with Diane Nadeau, President and CEO of the Windham Region Chamber of Commerce – how to expand the partnership between the Chamber and the 4 Town Economic Vitality effort
- Group did introductions
- Cover general Mansfield/Windham region but open to all areas for membership
- Demographics are small businesses
- Networking is key – referrals, business open houses
- Electronic newsletter every week and highlight a business
- Post on social media about members
- Can do live interviews with businesses and recorded videos too
- Partners with CT SBDC and Women’s Business Development Council. Pre-COVID, they would have office hours at their office with these groups.
- Put on start your own business classes, one on one mentoring, human resource assistance etc.
- Have networking groups – women, construction, etc.
- Do a visitor directory, student directory
- Do business and health expos yearly
- Run Hebron Maple Festival
- Member to member discounts

- Work to support initiatives in the CT State Legislature. Legislative Breakfast. Strong focus on legislative initiatives
- Business support for municipalities – including helping them develop business lists
- Business visitations
- Veteran support services (including regional meetings once a month)
- Regional tourism events – four itinerary videos were completed
- Created a non-profit foundation as was an interest from their members
- Opened veteran’s center but had to move out when rent increased. Need a large space with parking if anyone has space. Ran 22 programs when center was open.
- Created art gallery at East Brook Mall – each month have a different theme
- One full time staff, four part-time staff, usually five interns from ECSU (usually from business and marketing departments)
- Eric- what are needs now coming out of pandemic –
 - o Diane – interest in more events
 - o Many members are looking to replace staff that have left as part of pandemic. Staff need effective training.
 - o Next biggest challenge is understanding CT Paid Family Leave
- Eric asked more about the gallery space as it may align with Four-Town initiative.
 - o Diane said have monthly shows, classes at the gallery
 - o Part of gallery is book signings and speakers
- Diane – hard to get focus on regional tourism. Funding for tourism entities is always an issue including rent, utilities
- Fiscal agent for Windham Arts.
- Eric sees alignment with Chamber on arts, education, regional tourism, work with CT SBDC

- UCONN – local business connections – intern assistance with 4 Town effort
- potential projects – status
- Cara – will need to move date of the webinars. Looking at week of March 23 for first one. Had drafted an ad for Career Services to review.
- She reached out to Pamir Alpay at Innovation Partnership Building (IPB) re: CT Manufacturing Simulation Center and Proof of Concept Center. Their work is very specific. They are to help existing businesses or businesses with challenges. Purpose is not to tell people how to run a business. IPB folks are open to an in-person session. Value in thinking about an in person meeting.
- Need a better breakdown of the manufacturing companies in the Four-Town region. Cynthia working to get from AdvanceCT. Staff to identify as well.
- CT Next does one on one training at the IPB for businesses
- Request for Proposals (RFP) preparation to obtain marketing consultant services
- Eric - staff team is working on an RFP
- 4 Town Plan sponsored business workshops with Tim Liptrap and Tolland County Chamber of Commerce – planning underway
- In conjunction with the Tolland Chamber of Commerce, Tim will do on April 12 or April 14 on building Facebook business pages. Bring your own laptop. They will build their page on site.
- Then will do website search engine optimization class.
- Invite will come through Tolland County Chamber of Commerce
- Tim will do other classes in May-June
- Other
- Eric – Coventry had 8 application for their 1 percent for arts funding through ARPA

- Ryan – his recommendation for ARPA is to use \$370,000 for local business. \$30,000 for Downtown Storrs and Four-Town. \$75,000 for arts including public art. Wendy very happy to hear this!
- Expanding partnerships – collaborations – invitations for future discussions UCONN Cooperative Extension Service (March meeting), other ideas?
- Jiff Martin from UConn Extension is scheduled to attend at the March meeting
- Review and consideration of next steps to be taken in 2022
- Next meeting set for March 16 at 2 pm