

Economic boost plan is finalized

Selectmen next to get look

By Trevor Jones

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LENOX — A draft plan for using private and public funding to foster year-round economic growth has been completed and will go before the Board of Selectmen next week for possible approval.

The plan, which has been developed through a public/private partnership, calls for spending \$88,500 this fiscal year on improvements to a number of amenities in the downtown area, added events in the non-summer months, and increased marketing and communication efforts.

The plan came about after the Lenox Chamber of Commerce sought to address members' concerns, but eventually grew to include nonmember businesses and town officials. These parties have met several times in the past month, leading to the report which will be reviewed the chamber's board of directors and presented to the Board of Selectmen on Nov. 10.

Ken Fowler, a selectman and president of the chamber, said the best thing to come of the meetings has been an improved dialogue about what should be done moving forward.

"What I'm most impressed by is the unity that is happening with the town and the merchants," said Fowler, adding that businesses from Lenox Dale, Route 7 & 20 and the village have all taken part in the meetings.

Amenity proposals include added public restrooms downtown, a campaign to get business employees not to take up on-street parking, increased signage, free WiFi in the village area, a partnership to reinstate and share the Lee trolley which was shut down this summer, and increased plantings and decor in the village.

Fowler said the plan offers "great potential," adding, "what we've got is a great start; I'm really excited."

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Other proposals include expanding and increasing special events in town, hiring a marketing specialist, and improving communication among townspeople.

Kimberly Reopell Flynn, Board of Selectmen chairwoman, attended the most recent meeting and said one of the best things to come of the sessions is a desire to increase communications within the town.

"It seems like we have public hearings or public forums and we get a very limited attendance until the 11th hour," said Flynn. "[Changing] that is a really high priority, so [residents and business owners] know what's going on and so they are kept in the loop," said Flynn.

Voters at this year's annual town meeting approved \$85,000 from the general fund to be used for economic development. None of those funds have been allocated yet, and Flynn said it could always be carried over to next year, adding that the board won't "jump into anything just to use the money."

And though she doesn't expect the board to simply vote up or down on the proposal, she does see it as part of the broader scope of what to do with the funds.

"I certainly think that we'll try to focus on the things that have been highlighted through these discussions," said Flynn.