



Draft Meeting Notes
March 11, 2020

President Scott Burns called the meeting of the Black Rock NRZ to order at 7:30pm at the Burroughs Community Center.

There was not a quorum for this meeting. Scott asked Joe Ianniello to take notes.

Board Members in Attendance:

Scott Burns
Dave Barbour

Joe Ianniello
John Marshall Lee

Lazaros Papanikolaou
Bruce Williams

Among Others in Attendance

Frank Gyure
Peggy Ianniello, Assisting the Secretary

Vanessa Liles
Val Rossi

Greg Simon
Doran Wright

Scott announced that:

- The Burroughs Community Center Taste of Black Rock fund raiser has been cancelled for this year because of the Coronavirus.
- Joe Larcheveque will be taking over as Head of the Black Rock Community Council (BRCC) Safety Committee.

Old Business

Treasurer's Report John Marshall Lee reported that the People's Bank checking account balance was \$9,651.97.

NRZ Leadership Committee Report: Joe Ianniello

The NRZ Leadership Committee met twice since our last meeting; once in late January and once in late February.

HUD CDBG Application

The Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program that provides annual grants to develop and revitalize urban communities for low and moderate income areas. We are applying for grants for funding from Program Year (PY) 46 (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021).

Bridgeport's Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED) asked all NRZs to submit project ideas. OPED wrote a request for funding projects for all 8 NRZs. The request totaled \$400K. Black Rock requested funding for welcoming signage in the area near I-95 exit 25 and sidewalk improvements along Fairfield Avenue between Ellsworth Street and I-95. HUD funding is restricted to Black Rock Census Tract 702 based on the low income of this area. Census Tract 702 is from Ellsworth Street to I95.

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There will be a meeting on Wednesday, March 18th in the City Council Chambers at 6:00pm to justify the NRZ application. Angie asks that representatives from the NRZs attend the meeting to show support for the application.

NRZ Branding

The NRZ Leadership Committee members feel that most people don't know what an NRZ is. The Committee is beginning an advertising campaign. The first thing being done is to develop a Logo for each NRZ. Frank Borres volunteered his organization to design the logos free of charge. He provided eight preliminary design examples of proposed logos at the February meeting.

The individual NRZ logos must tie all NRZs together as a group. To do this each NRZ logo will all have a common area with "NRZ" on them and then an area that uniquely identifies the particular NRZ and its icon.

For example, the Black Rock NRZ logo will consist of the letters NRZ, Black Rock, and a picture of the lighthouse. The West Side NRZ logo will consist of the letters NRZ, West Side, and the picture of the statue in the fountain at Park and Fairfield Avenues.

Two were selected as candidate designs. Frank is reworking the proposed logos in accordance with comments made at the meeting.

New Business

Standing Committee Reports

- Standing Committee 1 Business & Economic Development: No Report
- Standing Committee 2 Education: No Report.
- Standing Committee 3 Arts, Entertainment, & Culture: Bruce Williams stated that a movie production may be partially filmed in Bridgeport. The movie's heroine Ida Lewis was a lighthouse keeper in Newport, Rhode Island. This is similar to the saga of Kate Moore who was the legendary keeper of Bridgeport's Black Rock Lighthouse. Both Ida and Kate each saved the lives of over 20 sailors shipwrecked by storms.

Bruce Williams reported on the activities of the Black Rock Arts Guild (BRAG):

- Burroughs Community had a holiday show of paintings. The paintings are still hanging and can be viewed.
- A visual art and poetry exhibition by members of BRAG will be held from April 3rd through April 30th in the Fairfield University Book store in Fairfield Center. At the opening reception on April 3rd at the Book Store, there will be an ekphrasis (a description of a visual work of art) where member poets will read their poems inspired by the art work being exhibited.
- There is a show currently being held at City Lights Gallery in downtown Bridgeport by photographer Barbara Loss. At the University of Bridgeport Gallery there is a show of photographic portraits of people in Bridgeport.
- BRAG member Rob Sauerhoff has his own website.

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Bruce also reported on activities at Captains Cove Seaport:

- Captains Cove purchased 18 “420” sailboats from Yale University.
 - The Amistad will visit Captains Cove in April and May for touring by the public on April 27th through May 1st; May 4th to May 8th; and May 18th to May 22nd.
 - On April 5th Captains Cove will host the “Magenta Open” sailing competition for High School females from Maine to Virginia.
 - Captains Cove has been chosen as 1 of 10 National Sailing Venues.
- Standing Committee 4 Zoning, Land Use, Development, & Historic Preservation: Dave Barbour reported the committee had meetings in various venues. They are brainstorming on how to get more people involved. Also see the report by Val Rossi below.
 - Standing Committee 5 Outreach & Communications: No Report.
 - Standing Committee 6 Quality of Life, Environmental, & Public Safety: No Report.

Presentation: Main Street America: Val Rossi made a presentation on business and economic development in the Village District.

Introduction

- Val stated we need someone to work with us on traffic and safety and have a traffic study done.
- We should look at case studies of other towns. Main streets across the nation are looking for new ways to re-invent themselves.
- For example, the top priority of Fairfield business owners is the revitalization of the Town of Fairfield:
 - More businesses
 - Better parking
 - Approximately 1,000 new apartments in Fairfield and adjacent Bridgeport locations in the area near the Fairfield Metro Train Station
- Fairfield Avenue will be repaved in 2021.
- She sees new inventive businesses coming to Black Rock
- The community is excited about Black Rock

Main Street America. Val discussed Main Street America a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Editor’s note: The National Main Street Center leads a movement committed to strengthening communities through preservation-based economic development in older and historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts.

Main Street America has been helping to revitalize older and historic commercial districts for more than 35 years. Made up of small towns, mid-sized communities, and urban commercial districts, Main Street America represents the broad diversity that makes this country so unique.

Their very informative website is at: <https://www.mainstreet.org/mainstreetamerica/themovement>

Val stated that Main Street is all about redoing old buildings and that the public square is the heart of the community.

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She then gave a PowerPoint presentation. This presentation was very well done, motivating, and with pictures of buildings in the Black Rock Village District. Below is a brief summary of some interesting items in the presentation.

The Situation

- Main Streets are under economic pressure to “re-invent” themselves
- Long-term shift away from traditional bricks-and-mortar retail
- Main Streets need to find new ways to draw people to “downtown.”
- Black Rock is no different from many other towns

Our “Main Street” (Fairfield Avenue)

Four-lane state highway	Road surface in poor condition
Used as an expressway during commuter hours	Poorly lit in sections
Dangerous for pedestrians and bikers	Broken sidewalks
Parking that impinges on the thoroughfare	

What does our community think?

Black Rock residents and business owners’ top priority is the revitalization of Fairfield Avenue. (Based on 2019 outreach by the Black Rock NRZ.)

What can we build on? The Main Street America Organization

- Significant number of additional apartments being built between Fairfield Metro and Fairfield Avenue
- Fairfield Avenue is on CT DOT’s schedule to be repaved in 2021
- Low commercial rents
- New and inventive businesses coming here
- Black Rockers are enthusiastic as evident in the 375th Black Rock Day, Porchfest and more

How do we get started? Is there a blueprint?

- A subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation
- For 40 years they have helped revitalize over 2000 older and historic commercial districts
- Committed to “place” and to building stronger communities
- Preservation-based economic development

What’s to like about the Main Street Approach?

- **Time-tested framework** for community-driven, comprehensive revitalization.
- Incremental **small steps**
- Build on the **assets** of a neighborhood.
- It is a way to **harness the talents and interests** of a diverse group of people
- Main Street America supplies tremendous **resources** for support

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What assets can we take advantage of now?

New and Unique Restaurants	(Low cost?) Commercial Vacancies
Proximity to two universities	Density of residents within walking distance and more on the way
Access to Public Transportation	Business Friendly (?)
Ethnic Specialty Foods & Restaurants	History
Diverse population	Access to Seaport & Harbor
Other?	

How do we leverage those assets?

Choose a market position(s) that Fairfield Avenue can fulfill... build on an inherent strength or characteristic that can be nurtured and grown.

The Main Street approach calls for a number of transformation strategies. Val highlighted the following:

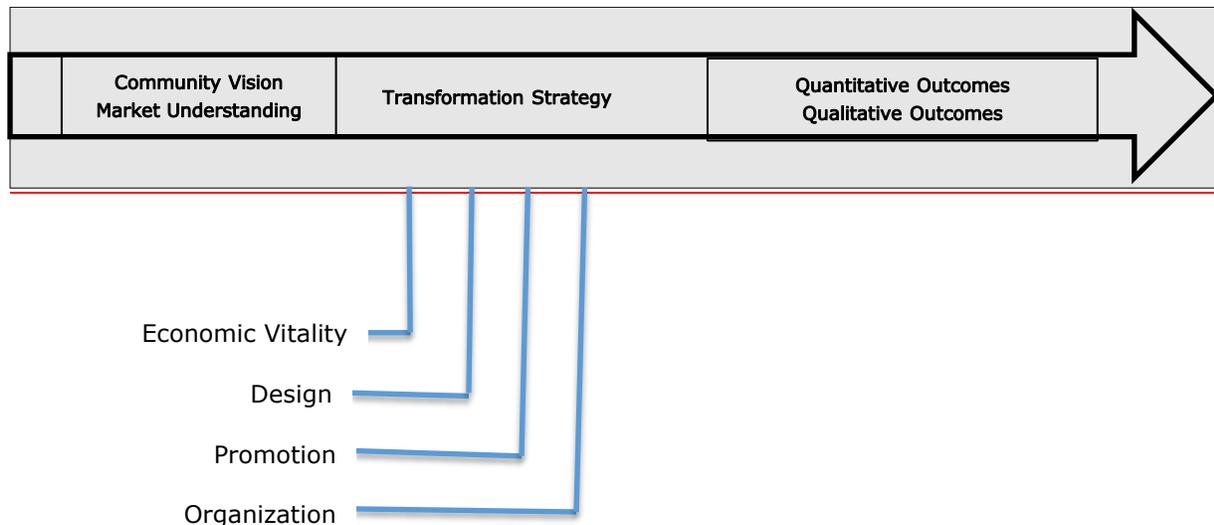
Workers and Residents	Millennials, Hipsters and Young Adults
Entertainment and Nightlife	Ethnic Specialties
College Town (UB, HCC, SHU)	

First Next Steps.

Choose a transformation strategy(s) for Black Rock's Fairfield Avenue

1. Conduct Outreach
2. Initial Screening with NRZ leadership
3. Light Market Analysis –Business Inventory Assessment
4. Confirm Selected Strategies with Community

Putting it together



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Working Together: In four broad areas.

- Economic Vitality
- Design
- Promotion
- Organization

Next Steps or "It Takes a Village..."

1. Organize around the Four Points: Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization
2. Map out the activities of the chosen strategy along committee lines
3. Get Started

Val suggested the Black Rock NRZ take out a membership in the Main Street organization. According to the website the advantages of membership are:

- Discounts on conferences, workshops, and webinars;
- Members-only printed and digital communications;
- 1000s of industry-specific resources, publications, and templates;
- Access to grants and special programs;
- And so much more!

In closing Scott said he and Representative Steve Stafstrom and the City administration will meet with DOT Metro to discuss what is happening on Fairfield Avenue regarding safety and development.

The meeting ended at 8:37pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph Ianniello
Acting Secretary