

## **1. Call to Order**

Chairperson Stephanie Gandsey convened the inaugural meeting of the Community and Economic Affairs Commission at 6:00 PM on November 10, 2025. This new body marks a strategic transition, replacing the longstanding Economic Development Commission (EDC) with an integrated commission designed to weave together economic vitality and robust community engagement.

Ms. Gandsey's opening remarks established an atmosphere of optimism and teamwork, underscoring the Commission's role in advancing Bartlett's future through collaborative efforts. She expressed genuine appreciation for the attendees' punctuality despite logistical chaos elsewhere in the building and parking lot with other meetings going on.

## **2. Roll Call**

A quorum with ten of the eleven members was present. The attending commissioners were Chairperson Stephanie Gandsey, Kirsten Erickson, Jerry Kubaszko, Bruce Suffern, Mike Densford, Peggy O'Hare, Amy Tolosky, Dave Wetherton, Kinga Szkotak, and Blake Koch.

Commissioner Robert Gorski was absent.

## **3. Public Comment**

Ms. Gandsey then opened the floor for public comment. After a brief pause with no speakers, she acknowledged the sparse audience and moved on, reinforcing the Commission's dedication to transparency and public input by extending the invitation.

## **4. Introductions**

Before delving into introductions, Ms. Gandsey provided a quick technical orientation for first-time commissioners, reminding them to activate their microphones as the meeting is recorded and saved to the village website for public review, promoting both accountability and accessibility.

Village Administrator Paula Schumacher led the staff introductions followed by Economic Development Coordinator Tony Fradin, Community Engagement Coordinator Ricci Lucas, and Assistant Village Administrator Scott Skrycki, each briefly outlining their roles as foundational support for the Commission's work.

The commissioner introductions revealed a deep well of experience and passion for the village.

Dave Wetherton, a resident since 1971, painted a picture of steadfast community service, detailing his work with the Bartlett Lions Club, serving as Santa Claus, and Oktoberfest.

Jerry Kubaszko, a resident since 1972 and a veteran of the former EDC since its inception, provided a valuable historical perspective, musing on the village's evolution from about 5,000 people to today.

Blake Koch, the "newbie" with four years in town, brings contemporary entrepreneurial acumen from his logistics business and service on the 4th of July Commission.

Mike Densford described his prior EDC tenure and deep embedding in youth sports. His small business ownership, he explained, gives him intimate access to residents' opinions.

Amy Tolosky, a Bartlett native and first-time commissioner, expressed a straightforward motivation: to make Bartlett better.

Kinga Szkotak shared her story of arriving from Poland in 2017, opening a beauty salon in Bartlett in 2024, and expressing optimism for what the community could achieve together.

Kirsten Erickson framed herself as a dedicated participant with encyclopedic village knowledge, currently chairing the Chamber of Commerce board and advocating strongly for the TIF district.

Bruce Suffern traced a half-century arc in Bartlett, having founded Banbury Fair and innovated numerous downtown events. His advocacy centered on using events to draw people back to a viable downtown business district in the internet age.

Peggy O'Hare's described herself as a former business owner and current Chamber membership coordinator focused on driving active participation.

Chairperson Gandsey concluded the circle, sharing her own 16-year journey in Bartlett from EDC inception to Village Board election. Her professional background in marketing, communications, and now leadership training and consulting, she explained, funds her true passion: public service. She affirmed that love for the community was the common thread uniting everyone appointed by the mayor, a sentiment met with applause.

## **5. Administrator Schumacher remarks**

Paula Schumacher then addressed the commission with sincere gratitude and clear guidance. She personalized her welcome, noting that each member was selected for their unique experiences and perspectives, and that consensus from these viewpoints would form recommendations to the Village Board.

Her guidance delineated three core expectations. First, preparation: members must take their duty seriously and read their meeting packets thoroughly, as staff spend significant time compiling that foundational information. Second, engagement: members should

come ready with questions and feel free to contact staff proactively for clarifications. Third, respect: treating each other and the public with respect, a quality she assumed was inherent in their selection.

Ms. Schumacher clarified her oversight role and that of her staff: managing day-to-day village operations and advancing goals set by the Village Board. She highlighted that a new strategic plan in approval process heavily focuses on economic development and community engagement, meaning the commission would be a big part of enacting it. She outlined that Tony Fradin, Ricci Lucas, and Scott Skrycki would staff the commission based on agenda focus—economic development, community events, or communications.

Responding to a query from Ms. Gandsey, Ms. Schumacher confirmed Open Meetings Act (OMA) training would be provided via a link from the Attorney General's office. She unpacked key essentials: restrictions on communications (no discussing village business in groups larger than three outside a meeting), logistical requirements for posting agendas and minutes, and a crucial warning against using "reply all" on email strings about commission business, as it constitutes a violation. This foresight was aimed at empowering members for compliant and effective service.

## **6. Chairperson Gandsey Presentation**

Chairperson Gandsey delivered a comprehensive overview, distributing a handout as a visual anchor. She began by directly linking the commission's creation to the strategic plan referenced by Schumacher. The goal was to formally combine the focuses of economic development and community engagement, ensuring they work in concert.

The handout diagrammed the interconnection. Ms. Gandsey used the "We Belong in Bartlett" branding campaign as a prime example. This initiative was spawned from EDC-facilitated focus groups, demonstrating how community input (community affairs) leads to a unified message. That message, in turn, supports economic development as staff use it to attract businesses at trade shows and conferences, and to promote local events.

This holistic framework defined the Commission's scope. She explained it's not just bringing business in, it's not just working with business owners, and it's not just making sure our residents have the lifestyle that they expect and enjoy here. It's putting all of those things together and building that brand of Bartlett to make sure that we are moving forward. She introduced the guiding mantra, "Progress with Pride," as a response to those resistant to change. It represents a desire to move forward while preserving the cherished feeling of Bartlett, acknowledging that without positive change, stagnation or regression is a risk.

She highlighted the village's robust event calendar, communication tools like the newsletter and app, and then turned to a flagship initiative: the Lake Street Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District.

Ms. Gandsey noted the village has purchased 19 acres along Lake Street and is beginning the process of developing concepts for that property. The plan involves hiring planning consultants to draft mixed-use schemes based on Board input, followed by significant community outreach to gather public opinion. The selected concept will then inform marketing and development efforts. Gandsey told the commission they will play a role in this, indicating this would be a recurring focus.

To ensure strong governance ties, Ms. Gandsey stressed the importance of streamlined channels of information to the Village Board. She then flipped the handout to outline commissioner responsibilities: serving in an advisory capacity to the Board, acting as community advocates and ambassadors, being accessible to listen to residents, reviewing reports and RFPs, and staying updated on trends in other communities. She concluded by inviting questions, opening the floor to a dynamic discussion.

At Ms. Gandsey's prompting, the staff provided expanded backgrounds to balance the detailed commissioner introductions.

Paula Schumacher traced her 32-year village career, starting as an intern staffing the EDC and working in nearly every department before becoming Village Administrator eight years ago. Tony Fradin highlighted his 20+ years with the village and prior economic development experience, describing himself as a "stats nerd" who tracks indicators and works hands-on with businesses from large industrial firms to one-person operations. Ricci Lucas shared her six-year village tenure, starting in IT and GIS, and her passion for using her technical skills to bring community engagement to a "new age." Scott Skrycki, a longtime resident who grew up in Bartlett, noted his 17 years with the village starting as an intern and his involvement across countless projects and civic groups.

Ms. Gandsey pointed out the staff's advanced degrees in Public Administration and their deep institutional knowledge. She added that when the CEAC is bringing ideas, staff can describe what's worked. "Here's the research. Here's what's been done before and how we can make this happen," she said, describing the staff as essential co-architects of the commission's future ideas.

#### Q&A and General Discussion

Commissioner Szkotak launched with a real-world anecdote: a client interested in opening a coffee and cocktail bar had asked if the village was "nice to work with." Ms. Gandsey routed the question to Tony, who explained his role as the "small business concierge." He detailed the process of assisting with licenses, permits, zoning, and

location scouting, emphasizing that information is available on the website or simply by walking into Village Hall. This example shows the seamless business onboarding the commission aims to promote.

Ms. Szkotak circled back to a perennial question from residents: attracting specific retailers like Trader Joe's.

Commissioner Erickson provided a nuanced explanation of business recruitment. Chairperson Gandsey further explained that franchises have strict demographic and site criteria—average income, traffic counts, location specifics—that a community must meet. The village does not choose which businesses come in; it can market available sites, but the business's model dictates the fit.

Ms. Erickson steered the conversation toward commissioner preparation, strongly advocating that new members educate themselves using the village website, particularly on the TIF district. She stressed the importance of reading packets early and reaching out to staff with questions beforehand to make meetings more productive.

Administrator Schumacher further detailed the long process undertaken to attract Aldi to the village and we have also reached out to others including Trader Joe's over the years.

She noted that Culver's once requested a map of churches as part of their site criteria, and despite years of outreach, Aldi and Trader Joe's only come when the location and market conditions aligned perfectly with their models. She added that "Development as you will learn, is not as easy as, hey, come on in and open, flip your shingle out," he noted, highlighting complications from Bartlett's location across three counties and overlapping jurisdictions.

The discussion returned to the Open Meetings Act. Ms. Gandsey elaborated on communication protocols, a point of practical importance. She instructed members to send ideas or questions directly to her, not via "reply all" on group emails, to avoid violations. She outlined the process: items can be emailed to her for inclusion on a future agenda under "New Business," mirroring how the Village Board operates. She reiterated the rule against serial one-on-one conversations that effectively constitute a meeting of a majority, clarifying that while bilateral calls are permissible, coordinated discussions among small groups are not.

A question about connecting residents with social services for those in need was directed to external organizations. Ms. Schumacher and Ms. Erickson pointed to Hanover Township and Wayne Township as the primary providers of food banks, senior services, and holiday toy drives, highlighting the commission's role in being aware of and directing residents to these critical external partnerships.

Chairperson Gandsey championed ideation, urging members: “if you think of something that we could be doing, I want you to bring it up.” She framed the commission as fundamentally collaborative, where ideas would be tested for fit and the collective goal was to keep moving forward.

## **7. New Business**

Tony detailed Small Business Saturday (November 29). He framed it within Bartlett’s economic fabric, noting the village’s roughly 500 licensed businesses are overwhelmingly small, local operations. Citing the widely shared statistic that 68 cents of every dollar spent at a local business recirculates locally (compared to 43 cents for chain stores), he outlined the village’s promotional plan: social media promotion and an interactive GIS map of participating retailers. He asked commissioners to act as ambassadors, promoting the day through their own networks and businesses. Ms. Erickson requested that the map highlight Chamber of Commerce members, which Tony confirmed was part of the plan.

Ricci Lucas then transitioned to previewing the Merry and Bright holiday event. She detailed the schedule for the Saturday tree lighting, including a new “mini stroll” walking parade stepping off at 4:45 PM. She confirmed a list of food truck vendors and promoted the Cocoa Crawl event the following Saturday, with a clickable map on the chamber’s website. The marketing strategy, she explained, includes social media teasers (like a clip of Santa preparing), traditional guide placements, and work with the “We Belong” branding consultants, a5, to leverage local influencers.

This preview elicited immediate feedback from commissioners, exemplifying the interactive culture Chairperson Gandsey seeks. Bruce Sufferin applauded the event but suggested a greater emphasis on daytime components to benefit businesses that operate primarily during daylight hours, similar to the successful Halloween parade. Ms. Lucas appreciated the feedback, noting that the laser show was itself an addition born from survey requests for more adult-focused activities.

Ms. Szkotak proposed an idea for future years: a concurrent downtown sidewalk sale during the Merry and Bright festivities, allowing local shops to set up tables and engage directly with the community. Mr. Sufferin amplified the idea, envisioning a vibrant street scene. Ms. Gandsey stated these suggestions as the great kind of ideas that come out from your experiences that we’re going to want to hear over time.

Ms. Szkotak also asked about using archival footage from previous years for pre-event social media promotion. Ms. Lucas confirmed such footage exists and is used in evaluations by the Merry and Bright committee, inviting commissioners to be part of that review process.

Paula Schumacher introduced a key upcoming duty: the commission will be tasked with reviewing Civic Funding Requests.

Civic organizations apply for village funds for specific programs, and while the current year's timing didn't align perfectly, the commission would provide input on funding recommendations at the December meeting, one of their first substantive actions.

### **8. Adjournment**

With no further business, a motion to adjourn was made, seconded, and unanimously approved. The meeting concluded at 7:00 PM.