

**Village of Bartlett
Community & Economic Affairs Commission Meeting Minutes
December 8, 2025**

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chairperson Stephanie Gandsey called the meeting to order.

Roll call confirmed the following commissioners were present: Stephanie Gandsey (Chair), Kirsten Erickson, Jerry Kubaszko, Bruce Suffern, Mike Densford, Peggy O'Hare, Robert Gorski, Dave Weatherton, Kinga Szkotak, and Blake Koch. Commissioner Amy Tulaski was absent. A quorum was established.

Also present: Tony Fradin, Economic Development Coordinator and Scott Skrycki, Assistant Village Administrator

2. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes (November 10, 2025)

The commission moved to approve the minutes from the November 10, 2025, meeting.

Motion: Commissioner Dave Weatherton moved to approve the minutes.

Second: Commissioner Peggy O'Hare provided the second.

A roll call vote was taken. Commissioner Robert Gorski abstained, stating he was not in attendance at the prior meeting. All other commissioners present voted in favor. The minutes were approved.

Chairperson Gandsey reminded commissioners of the ongoing process, stating, "Just for everyone who is new every time on our agenda we're going to have approval of the prior meeting minutes, so you'll always want to go through that and make sure that what you said is reflected correctly."

3. Public Comment

There was no public comment offered at the opening of the meeting. Staff indicated that public comment would be invited later in conjunction with the civic funding discussion.

4. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Comprehensive Overview

Economic Development staff (Tony) delivered an in-depth presentation on Tax Increment Financing (TIF), emphasizing its role as the village's primary economic development tool, particularly for the newly established Lake Street Corridor.

Tony explained that TIF is designed to cure blight and spur development in stagnant areas. When a TIF district is created, the total property tax base (Equalized Assessed Value - EAV) is frozen. As private investment and development occur, property values rise.

The additional property tax revenue generated from this increase, known as the "increment," is diverted into a special municipal fund for a set period (typically 23 years). This fund is used exclusively to finance public improvements and incentives within the TIF boundaries.

Tony stressed, **“It's not a tax increase... The tax bill will be the same whether it's in a TIF or not. The difference is in where the tax bill gets allocated.”** The increment represents new revenue that would not exist without the catalyzing public investment.

Purpose and Eligible Uses

TIF makes challenging redevelopment sites financially competitive with "greenfield" land. Eligible costs are extensive and primarily focus on public infrastructure and site work, including:

- Road, sewer, and water main construction.
- Land acquisition, grading, and environmental remediation.
- Landscaping and other public improvements.

Tony used the Brewster Creek Business Park TIF as a prime example: “Out of the hundred million-ish that the village spent in TIF funds on that project was mostly for infrastructure... It was for grading and site preparation, it was for soil remediation, it was for roads, it was for landscaping.”

The TIF Establishment Process

The process is rigorous and involves multiple steps:

1. **Study & Plan:** The village hires a consultant to conduct an eligibility study and draft a redevelopment plan. Staff noted that it is a plan. It can be changed. It is not concrete but provides a necessary framework.
2. **Joint Review Board (JRB):** A board comprised of representatives from all affected taxing districts (schools, parks, library, etc.) reviews the plan and makes a recommendation.
3. **Public Hearing:** A mandatory hearing allows residents and property owners to ask questions and provide feedback.
4. **Ordinance Adoption:** The Village Board adopts a series of ordinances to formally create the district.

Bartlett's TIF Portfolio

Staff reviewed the village's history with five TIF districts, illustrating varying outcomes:

- **Downtown TIF (1986-2010):** The village's first TIF, helped spur downtown development including Bartlett Town Center and Bartlett Plaza.
- **Brewster Creek Business Park (Bartlett Quarry) TIF (1999-2022):** Highlighted as a major success story, transforming a depleted gravel pit into a thriving

business park, generating roughly \$100 million in increment from an initial EAV of \$2 million. Over 75 businesses there and thousands of employees.

- **Route 59 & Lake Street TIF:** An example of a TIF with modest returns. Staff reported, “this year was the first year that the value of it ever reached what the original value was... 20 years ago.” Despite this, it played a crucial role in facilitating land deals for auto dealerships.
- **Bluff City TIF (2009-2032):** An industrial area on the west side, nearing build-out.
- **Lake Street Corridor TIF (Adopted Oct. 2024):** The current strategic focus. This ~154-acre district along Lake Street (Route 20) targets an area with longstanding vacancies and blight. The village has already taken proactive steps, purchasing a key 19-acre parcel and the former blighted gas station. Major planned public improvements include the Oak Avenue realignment to improve access and developability.

Commission Discussion and Future Focus

Staff emphasized that the Lake Street TIF will be a recurring topic. “We’ll be talking about the Lake Street TIF quite a bit over the coming months and years,” and commissioners will see regular reports. Scott added, “You’re going to help guide us and make decisions. We have a lot of exciting updates for you.”

Commissioner Bruce Suffern connected the tool to community goals, stating that this is the best tool that we have for economic development, especially for this Lake Street area that wasn’t developing on its own. He recalled the “empty hot dog stand there for 25 years” and the “abandoned gas station for at least ten years” as examples of the blight the TIF aims to address.

Chairperson Gandsey concluded the segment by acknowledging the complexity, noting that even after 25 years, she still has questions, and encouraged commissioners to become familiar with the concept as they will be deeply involved in its application.

5. Civic Funding Requests and Deliberations

Scott presented applications for direct financial support from civic organizations for the FY 2026-2027 budget. A new funding matrix, considering total event cost, history, and indirect village service costs (e.g., Public Works, Police), was used to suggest maximum funding levels. Scott clarified these were suggested caps and not intended as recommended funding amounts.

Arts in Bartlett

Request: \$11,900 (equal to FY2025). **Matrix Suggestion:** \$7,500.

Purpose: To launch a new summer series: a Rhythm & Roots farmers market and concert series in Downtown Bartlett’s Town Center parking lot, aiming to drive foot traffic.

Dale Kasuba’s Pitch: Ms. Kasuba, representing Arts in Bartlett, detailed plans for ten events, with music themes tied to global cultures. She emphasized the organization’s

self-sufficiency in other events and the strategic choice of downtown to leverage existing restaurants and parking. She noted the new fountain and park area enhanced the location's appeal. Ms. Kasuba noted that they will be hosting a farmers' market and concert series together called the Rhythm & Roots market. Ms. Kasuba was asked about parking issues, which she addressed, adding that there is ample parking in the rear of Bartlett Town Center.

Commission Discussion: Commissioner Gorski questioned staff if funds have been set aside for these requests. Scott explained the village's budget cycle and civic funding process, verifying that funds for civic groups will be budgeted accordingly. Commissioner Suffern expressed strong support, motioning for the full request. He praised the organization's management and stated, "one of their objectives... is to drive residents and visitors to downtown Bartlett... I'm all for it."

Commissioner Weatherton reminisced about past downtown events, saying, "When I first moved to Bartlett, there were downtown events... it was so nice to be in the downtown area." Chairperson Gandsey mentioned the bike rally and street dance as other successful past events that drew many people downtown.

Action: Motion by Weatherton, second by Erickson, to recommend the full \$11,900. Passed unanimously (10-0).

Bartlett Lions Club (4th of July Parade)

Request: \$5,625. **Matrix Suggestion:** \$5,700.

Purpose: For the first time, the Lions Club is requesting direct funding to fully cover parade performers and act costs, which were previously under the 4th of July Festival budget.

John Sias's Pitch: John Sias, representing the Lions Club, called the parade and festival "woven into the fabric of this town" and explained the change in financial responsibility.

Commission Discussion: Commissioner Suffern raised a question about event insurance. Mr. Sias responded the club's international affiliation provided coverage, which Commissioner Weatherton affirmed. Chairperson Gandsey noted the Lions had historically requested only \$500, contextualizing the larger ask.

Action: Motion by Erickson, second by O'Hare, to recommend \$5,700. Passed unanimously (9-0). Weatherton abstained.

Ignite the Courage

Request: \$10,000. **Matrix Suggestion:** \$10,000.

Purpose: To support their annual fundraising events (e.g., Smoke and Iron Music Fest), which benefit cancer-focused charities.

Discussion: No representative was present. Scott detailed their request, including raising money for cancer and other fundraisers. Their request is the same as last year, and the matrix suggests \$10,000 in funding. Chairperson Gandsey asked if staff had attendance figures, noting the event seemed to be "gaining momentum." Staff agreed to follow up.

Action: Motion by Gorski, second by O'Hare, to recommend \$10,000. Passed unanimously (10-0).

Bartlett Chamber of Commerce

Request: \$7,500. **Matrix Suggestion:** \$7,500.

Purpose: For general operational support to maintain services for local businesses and the community, not a specific event.

Nan Gudenkauf's Pitch: The Chamber President explained the wide variety of services the Chamber provides and that membership dues alone don't cover expenses and outlined their role in business support, referrals, and community events like the Cocoa Crawl.

Commission Discussion: Chairperson Gandsey asked about the Chamber's strategic marketing plan, which Ms. Gudenkauf explained is a work in progress along with some other projects, like improving the website. Commissioner Suffern inquired if membership fees covered costs, to which the answer was no, requiring supplemental fundraising.

Action: Motion by Weatherton, second by Koch, to recommend \$7,500. Several commissioners affiliated with the Chamber abstained. The motion passed 4-0 with six abstentions (Szkotak, Densford, Erickson, O'Hare, Suffern, Gandsey).

Bartlett Oktoberfest Foundation

Request: \$12,000 (equal to FY2025). **Matrix Suggestion:** \$10,000.

Purpose: Primarily for sound/stage equipment for the two-day festival, a joint venture of the Lions, Rotary, and Chamber, with net proceeds distributed to each for charitable work.

Dave Barry's Pitch: Mr. Barry highlighted the event's success, drawing over 5,000 people, and the hundreds of volunteer hours involved. He mentioned that the sound stage alone cost \$11,000.

Commission Discussion: Chairperson Gandsey sought clarity on the discrepancy between the request and the matrix. Staff explained the matrix was a guideline, and the commission had latitude. Commissioner Suffern suggested, "It'd be nice to headline some charities that are benefiting at these events." Mr. Barry welcomed the feedback for future planning.

Action: Motion by Gorski, second by O'Hare, to recommend the matrix amount of \$10,000. Passed 7-0 with three abstentions (Densford, Erickson, Weatherton).

Bartlett 4th of July Committee

Request: \$15,000. **Matrix Suggestion:** \$15,000.

Purpose: To help offset the cost of the community fireworks display, a major expense within their ~\$218,000 festival budget.

Austin Hopkins's Pitch: The Chair estimated attendance in the tens of thousands and explained their reliance on carnival, beer, and vendor revenue, which can be jeopardized by weather. He stated that the Fourth of July committee has been around since 1993. Their request goes towards the expense of fireworks, which is currently around \$50,000.

Commission Discussion: Chairperson Gandsey asked for an attendance estimate during the festival. Mr. Hopkins replied there may not be an accurate count, but it must be at least 25,000. He estimated around 10,000 during fireworks. Commissioner Gorski asked where the \$200,000-plus in funding comes from. Mr. Hopkins responded that the carnival, food vendors, and beer sales generate most of the funding, along with the village funding. They typically break-even but have lost money for the past few years due to rainy weather.

Commissioner Kinga Szkotak voiced a concern shared by some residents: “I see all the time on Facebook that the dogs are disappearing from the houses. Can we add something, maybe lights show instead of fireworks?” Mr. Hopkins acknowledged the comment without commitment.

Action: Motion by Erickson, second by Suffern, to recommend \$15,000. Passed 9-0 with one abstention (Koch).

Chairperson Gandsey thanked everyone who came before the commission tonight to detail their events and requests and then stated that all recommendations will be forwarded to the Village Board for final approval and budget allocation.

6. Community Events Updates

Merry and Bright Recap

Chair Gandsey and staff celebrated the success of the December 6th event, thanking volunteers and particularly “our very own Santa Claus,” Commissioner Dave Weatherton. Positive social media feedback, including a comparison to “Stars Hollow” from Gilmore Girls, was noted.

New Elements: A parade of decorated vehicles from village departments and a laser light show were popular additions. The new downtown holiday tree was a centerpiece.

Constructive Feedback: Commissioners offered suggestions for improvement:

- Commissioner Szkotak suggested better lighting in the adjacent park for child safety.
- Commissioner Suffern proposed adding a roving announcer/DJ to guide attendees and make announcements, similar to Fire Department events.
- Commissioner Erickson suggested scheduling the laser show right after the tree-lighting to maintain momentum.
- Commissioner Gorski noted the parade’s fire truck horns drowned out the following choir, a logistics issue to review.

Staff thanked commissioners for the feedback, confirming it would be evaluated in a post-event recap.

Upcoming Cocoa Crawl

Staff reported exceptionally high advance registration, indicating a likely record turnout for the event the following Saturday.

7. New Business / Staff Report

Belong in Bartlett Business Grant Program:

Scott introduced revised guidelines for the village's business incentive grant program, now going to be renamed. The draft document was in commissioners' packets for review.

The update aims to refine focus, with potential new emphasis on exterior improvements and a structured process for both business recruitment and retention.

Commissioners were asked to review the guidelines before the January meeting, where a detailed presentation and discussion are scheduled. "We really want all of you to take a look at that document... so when we come back next time... there's some input that you can give," Scott stated.

The annual allocation for the grant program is expected to remain consistent with prior years (\$250,000 per fiscal year).

8. Adjournment

With no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Peggy O'Hare and seconded by Commissioner Mike Densford. The meeting was adjourned.