

MINUTES for Downtown Improvement Project Meeting, January 19, 2021

The chair called the meeting to order at 8:35 am. Members present included Steve Carhart, Ben Rossi, Gar Morse, and Kurt Svetaka. Also present were Town Planner Sue Brown, Planning Board member Chris Olney, and an unidentified telephone caller.

Minutes from the prior meeting were reviewed and amended to note that in a 40R project housing is allowed to be built but not required.

Organizational issues were discussed. The chair reiterated that DIP as a group has no involvement in the ongoing discussions of the 40B and 40R projects, though members of course have the right to participate as individuals. Our focus as a group needs to be on enhancing downtown and its ability to engage with any development in the LCD

Discussion followed regarding our search for a new member. Ben will be leaving us sometime in June for his new home in Beverly. Several individuals were mentioned, but when contacted most indicated they would not consider an additional commitment before spring, when the post-pandemic environment may be clearer.

There was no report from DPW on Complete Streets or the Town Green. Steve indicated that he would be sure that DPW was represented at the next meeting.

Sue Brown gave an update on LCD planning. 40R still seems likely to be placed before the Town Meeting; initial inquiries are being made regarding potential developments. The 40B project was the topic of workshops which reviewed the peer consultant's discussion of the applicant's impact studies. The peer review did not appear to take radical issue with the applicant's report; however, the greatest concern was about limits on ingress/egress to the proposed development.

Sue also reported that the Town was likely to receive a Rapid Recovery Planning Grant from the state, which would provide professional support to post-pandemic recovery planning. While some items would be rather basic such as planning outside eating areas for restaurants, there would be some potential to explore larger, longer term issues.

The Committee identified five long term priorities to plan for in the event that significant infrastructure spending becomes available from the state or federal governments:

1. Replacing the waste water treatment plant with a pumping station to join the South Essex Sewer District and make possible redevelopment of the current plant site.

2. Phase II of the original DIP, focused on upgraded street lights and sidewalks from School to Pine. Ben reminded the group of the importance of maintaining the high standards of granite curbs and concrete sidewalks in the downtown area.
3. A green shuttle connecting downtown with the LCD.
4. Resilience planning, particularly for low lying areas downtown
5. General repair of sidewalks, as outlined by DPW at the last meeting.

There was discussion of the need to track potential grants as the planning progressed in these areas, and whether a member of the Committee might undertake this role with advice from Rick Gibson.

There was also discussion of the importance of supporting merchants through the current situation. Gar suggested that some sort of inventory and tracking system to stay in touch with merchants would be helpful, and if one has been done it should be accessed.

There was no new business.

The group set the next meeting date as Feb. 9 at 8:30 am via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Carhart