

Minutes for Downtown Improvement Project Meeting February 9, 2021

The chair called the meeting to order at 8:35 am.

Members present: Kurt Svetaka, Carley Cook, Gar Morse, Gordon Brewster, Linda Crosby, Steve Carhart. Also present: Nate Desrosiers and Chuck Dam from the DPW, Town Planner Sue Brown, Planning Board member Chris Olney, and Erika Brown of The Manchester Cricket.

Steve began the meeting by saying that we are continuing with our review of organizational items on the agenda. While as a group we have no direct interest in 40B, we want to constructively participate in its potential impact on our downtown. We hope to complement short-term steps with longer-term implications. Steve reminded us of possible conflict of interest issues and our need to disclose if applicable. Also on our organization agenda: new members. As we consider possible candidates, it is our goal to deepen connections to downtown. Some people have been approached, but are waiting until we know the “new normal” by spring. Steve does have a list of people we can consider. There is no statutory regulation regarding the number of committee members, but it is at least our goal to replace Ben Rossi by the time he leaves in June.

Complete Street update: Nate indicated there was one complaint that flag pole was too small. Steve complimented the Town on the end result of the green. Everyone agrees that it is a beautiful addition to our downtown. Nate, focusing on sea walls: just completed work at Singing Beach started two years ago all the way down the beach and back to the circle. Boardman Ave. seawall is another focus; there is an open hole now in progress for a new section of the wall. The Town is looking for new money from FEMA – 75% for next section of this wall. More work will be done there in the future. Steve asked if there are clear plans to stop flooding behind Town Hall. Nate replied that we requested a grant for movable flood stop barriers that self fill with water and act as barriers. FEMA denied it, as they only like to invest in hard structures (concrete walls). That doesn't work for us. Green Mountain is continuing to line the sewer – trying to seal up sewer drains. Nate is looking for a FEMA grant and others to work on seawall - up to 3 million dollars – looking for all funding possibilities. We hope to have permitting by fall of 2021 and go out to bidding spring of 2022. Complete Streets is dormant right now – bike and ped projects may be in the future. Nate – we can fact check things in the plans. He indicated that we got sidetracked when things go from his office to the Selectmen. The DIP can help with outlining what people want. Steve asked if funding is limited. Nate replied that we will have to reapply but the state is still likely to be doing projects.

Gar – believes if we can improve our sidewalks our streets will improve and asked that we please emphasize the importance of having walk able sidewalks.

Sue then gave an update on LCD....can't add anything to 40B. Re 40R (110 acres)...there was a public forum a few weeks ago – with focus on creating too much

residential given 40B numbers. Original intent was to create a mixed-use district with a lot of commercial elements – to produce revenue for the town. Another meeting is coming up – February 22nd - with many people invited, in particular the owner of the MAC who has extensive plans for mixed uses. Mr. Taylor who owns dog park has some ideas, and Mr. Gourdeau has been working with a bio med facility looking at the possibilities there – researching what is needed for zoning to support new uses. Town is working with Assessors to see how revenue will be impacted. We can put a cap on residential development – 255 units total in both projects. Assisted living may take a large number of those. We want to increase revenue and provide needed services. Gar added that the storage units are not an attractive part of the area.

Sue has also been working on a rapid recovery-planning grant that would enable us to hire a professional planner. If we get money, we have priorities...last month we talked about what would be best for downtown – referred to prior minutes' list. Sue indicated that we were successful in getting a professional consultant – shared with Essex – to help downtown recovery as a business community. We have short term goals – what specifically can the businesses do right away and then we will look at as longer term brick and mortar ideas. She hopes they will align with the DIP goals, emphasizing that we want to align more closely with business needs and priorities; we want to work together more coherently. This is an important piece of our local identity. Steve asked how we can engage with this process. Sue responded that there will be some webinars...we should be involved. She encouraged us to take a lead role and will let us know when they occur. Gordon Brewster was then asked and agreed to take a lead role.

Gar added that we lost some businesses downtown – should we reach out to them or to the owners of the buildings where they were – what is missing, how could they be helped. He suggested that we reach out to other landlords. Gar and Linda will get together and contact them. Sue will stay in touch and let them know about relevant grant proposals in the works.

New business: Gar asked if there has been any follow up on street lights that are damaged – should we look for those that are less maintenance intensive. Nate responded that he is working with Manchester Electric to replace them, along with some glass chimneys that are broken.

Steve then asked if there were any additional agenda items for today. There were none.

Our next meeting will be on Tuesday, March 16th at 8:30 am.

Motion to adjourn: 9:25 am

Respectfully Submitted,
Steve Carhart and Linda Crosby