

Downtown Improvement Committee
Minutes: Tuesday, March 16, 2021

The meeting was called to order at 8:35 am by Steve Carhart. In attendance were committee members: Steve Carhart, Linda Crosby, Gar Morse, and Kurt Svetaka.

Also in attendance were Town Planner Sue Brown, Erika Brown from the Cricket, Nate Desrosiers from the DPW, and Chris Olney from the Manchester Planning Board.

Minutes of our February meeting were approved.

Steve began the meeting with a reminder that we need to recruit new members. We will reach out to Andrew Crocker and Allan Houle and to Glen and Allie Vargas at the Beach Street Café before our next meeting.

Sue Brown was moved up on the agenda. She reported that there is no update on the Limited Commercial District. The Planning Board will meet on the 22nd to discuss input from other boards with a decision to follow shortly after. Regarding the Rapid Recovery Grant: Sue spoke with our facilitator, Mr. Flinker, who is still getting information from the state. The phases will include data collection and creation of a final plan to identify funding objects for the projects we decide on. The survey will start the process. We can do other outreach on our own as well. Today there will be a quick webinar on the data gathering for the facilitators. Next week Sue will arrange a small meeting with the Mr. Flinker to decide on the framework and then a larger meeting to go from there.

Linda reported that she had talked with Gar, Susan Beckmann, Erika Brown, Amy Lage and Sonja at Town Hall about forming a small committee to work with Mr. Flinker and address the issues that are specific to our town. We expect that it would be beneficial to reconvene the Manchester Merchants group that had formed and organized events in the months leading up to the pandemic. It is hoped that they can benefit from the state grant and, in addition, formulate their own plans to assist local businesses. Linda will report progress at the next DIP meeting.

Gar talked about the Selectmen's meeting last night that addressed some of the local funding needed for portable barriers to be used in the evening when fewer retail tenants are looking for parking. This is an important priority.

Sue indicated that the state survey covers a lot of the issues that concern us. Kurt asked if this grant would help this year. She replied that we don't have to wait for the plan to start. The Selectmen are already considering other options. We don't have to wait for the grant money. We need to look at phase 2 of Downtown Improvement. Steve asked if there was any other money from the state. The Town should get an excess of 1 million dollars directly for infrastructure. He also asked what order of magnitude the cost might be to replace wastewater plant. Nate offered a rough estimate of \$50 million plus.

Sue added that we will make a connector from behind the town hall over to Beach Street to facilitate more available parking. Kurt said that at the Selectmen's meeting last night it was unclear how the parking issue would be resolved to accommodate the merchants' and restaurants' needs; he recommended that the consultant get involved.

DPW update: Nate reported that the new section of wall on Harbor Street has been completed and we are moving forward with planning for an upcoming project that will involve a new wastewater treatment plant, replacing sludge pumps and grit removal equipment. Otherwise, it has been quiet the last few weeks, looking ahead to a spring cleanup.

Steve asked if there was any availability of funding in addition what we have talked about. We will be looking at annual grants – nothing stimulus related.

Gar suggested a survey of every streetlight – at 8 o'clock at night – to see if they are all working.

Gar added that there are about 30 retail operators in town....from law firms, to retail stores, to restaurants, etc. representing a great diversity with different needs. He has talked to a number of people. All welcome an opportunity to give us input. Gar said that as a committee we need to learn from the research so that we can apply future endeavors. We as a committee should study uses and integrate into our thinking on phase 2 – what do our businesses need - and get something positive out of it.

Steve introduced one new business item: Zoon – silicon start up that is developing a vehicle - an electric driverless shuttle. He is trying to get in touch with someone at the company. We should be thinking of some kind of a shuttle. This vehicle is 6 passenger – and made in the US which would be more appropriate for grant money. He also wants to know what experience the Council on Aging has had with shuttles.

It would cost about \$270,000 a year as part of a Cape Ann initiative for full blown shuttle...some would be deductible from our MBTA assessment. Maybe if we partnered with Cape Ann Transit Authority it might help us get grants, but if we can do it independently it might be better.

Steve then asked if there was any new business. There was none.

Date for next meeting: April 20th at 8:30 am.

Moved to adjourn at 9:18 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Carhart and Linda Crosby