

Downtown Improvement Project
Meeting: Tuesday, April 20, 2021

Chairperson Steve Carhart called the meeting to order at 8:33 am.

In attendance were members Steve Carhart, Gar Morse, Linda Crosby, Ben Rossi, Kurt Svetaka and Gordon Brewster. Also present were Erika Brown, The Manchester Cricket, Chris Olney, the Planning Board and Nate Desrosiers, DPW.

Minutes for March were approved.

Steve indicated that we continue to look for new members. Gar has talked again with Allan Houle from ACE Hardware; he may join later.

The Town has established a link to Beach street from the lot behind Town Hall. The First Parish Church has provided an easement across its property, and the path will go into the Cape Ann Savings parking lot approved by the Browns. Nate said it has to be surveyed first; we need a three-week lead time. There was a delay due to Covid. He will meet with John Round this week to establish the exact path. A few trees and telephone poles are in the way right now. The goal is to get it done for this summer. Gar asked who the key person in charge was. Nate replied that the Selectmen and property owners must approve. Steve said there should be good lighting at both ends with signage.

Nate reported that we are into spring cleanup with street cleaning, parks and grounds. We have wrapped up a lot of larger projects, including the Town Green. DPW is looking at projects for Town meeting in June: Tappan Street and draining project.... emergency repairs on Forest Street, Seaside One painting (getting bids now). We are also continuing with Central street project. Steve said the Veteran's memorial came out very well.

Ben asked for something more permanent: where are we on streetlights in front of Browns? Nate said they are in shipment to be replaced in front of the Post Office and coming out of Brown's parking lot. Do we have replacement for orange paint and sidewalk cones? Shawn Johnson is finalizing plans to replace them.

Linda shared Local Rapid Recovery Plan progress. Representatives from Essex and Manchester had an initial Zoom meeting with our grant facilitators, Dillon Sussman and Peter Flinker, on March 24th. The 3 steps of Project were outlined. Phase 1 is diagnostic...involved an email survey sent to local businesses that was due April 16th. As of the 14th 47 responses were received. She and Gar will share the summary when they receive it. On April 2nd Sue Brown and Gar hosted the facilitators on a walk-through town, with highlights of some pressing issues. Phase 2 will outline a plan based on the survey's results that will be presented to Essex and Manchester residents on the evening of May 11th. The end of August is the intended time for completion of the plan.

Linda also reported that Amy Lage, owner of Style Snoops and a member of our working committee, is part of the Manchester Merchants' plan to have a Sidewalk Sale on Saturday, May 1st from 9:00 – 2:00 pm. Erika said this group was formed in the fall of 2019 and had organized some successful events prior to Covid. It is hoped that this group will be active again moving forward. Linda suggested that it will be important to open as many lines of communication possible with this group, in coordination with Town Hall, the DIP and the Rapid Recovery participants.

Erika added that retailers' only overall goal when you do something is 90% effort to get 10% recognition. It is important to train people to expect things...such as staying open every Friday night, etc. and working with Chamber. There are quarterly division meetings for the Cape communities. The next meeting is in June...where businesses meet with town officials and public safety officials....police chief, Greg, etc. They are at 8:30 in the morning as retail owners are more available then than later in the day. She encouraged us to attend. There is a \$180,000 grant for the four towns...designed to support local businesses this summer....but not promoting outsiders to come: intra promotion. The goal is to attract key people in Cape Ann to support Cape Ann businesses. The grant will include funding for a major business online directory and other areas of promotion.

Linda said we need more communication with merchants– Erika agreed: they need to be “done for not done to.”

Ben asked about Reed Park; it is his understanding that our harbor master wants his office there – along with a tourist information center. Steve had suggested it could also be used for outside seating for local restaurants. Maybe with some compensation we could open up green area in front of Richdale's. Since we can't use public bathroom at Town Hall it would be great to create one somewhere. We are trying to attract visiting boaters. Nate said DPW has done a study on adding a harbor master's office and public bath, but the project was deferred due to COVID.

Steve is interested in exploring where can we get new grants. He made contact with Ted Taylor in Senator Tarr's office. The Town will get covid relief bills that will provide modest funding for Covid related expenses, also the American Recovery Act – more extensive, helping people get back to work. Legislature has created a trust fund for state allocation. We can't go directly to the federal government. Senator Tarr's office invited us to submit projects for that pot of money. Steve will talk to Greg...is there an official liason between the Town and the state? Steve asked Gordon if he is still willing to work on these projects – can we collect an outline of possibilities. Gordon is happy to help. Steve will connect with Greg; we need to dust off some already considered – such as the Harbormaster's office, sidewalks, and in the very long run, the replacement of sewage treatment plant with pumping station. Steve will work with Gordon and the Town in next month to see if we can get our share of the funding. Gordon will assemble a package of plans to share with Senator Tarr. Remaining Complete Streets projects are pending – including sidewalk improvements – and could be appropriate for this new funding.

There was no new business. Our next meeting will be on May 18th at 8:30 am.

The meeting was adjourned 9:24.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Carhart and Linda Crosby