

Downtown Improvement Project
Meeting: Tuesday, July 20, 2021

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

In attendance were members Steve Carhart, Gar Morse, Gordon Brewster, Ben Rossi, and Carley Cook. Also present were Nate Desrosiers and Chuck Dam, DPW, and Chris Olney of the Planning Board.

Minutes for the June 22 meeting were approved.

Organizational matters: There was discussion of membership transition. Carley Cook expressed a desire to continue on the Committee and will work with Gar and Linda on business outreach. She will meet with the Chair next week to discuss this in more detail. The Selectmen will identify a new member to replace Ben when he leaves town..

DPW Report: Nate gave an overview of the long range sewer planning report which the DPW has sponsored and was distributed to the Committee prior to the meeting. Options explored included joining the South Essex Sewer District, either through the Beverly system or directly; joining the Gloucester system after they complete a mandated upgrade; or establishing a new fully local system. All options would require the establishment of a pump station at the current site, which is the low point of the town sewer, but a significant area on the current site would be freed for redevelopment. All options would cost several tens of millions of dollars. The Committee briefly discussed the various options and related matters such as flood protection for the existing plant, and commended DPW for initiating long term planning for this issue.

Town Planner Sue Brown was on vacation so there was no planning report.

Chris Olney reported that Strategic Land Ventures has filed its request for state authorization of its 40B project and the Town has provided comments, but no action has been taken at the state level.

Gar reported on continuing dialog with the Selectmen regarding placement of temporary high quality rest room facilities in downtown. Reed Park, Masconomo, and Harbor's Point parking lot are all possibilities, but each had issues. Steve commented that the discussion seemed to have wandered from its initial purpose of supporting downtown businesses in COVID recovery with prompt, temporary steps which could be ultimately subsumed into permanent improvements such as a permanent welcome center in Reed Park. Chuck reported that as a consequence of these discussions, he had assessed that the most practical short term solution was to place a facility near the sewage treatment plant in the pathway from Town Hall Lot to Beach St., as water and power were easily available there but not in other locations. Steve emphasized that the Committee was not fixated on any particular location, but was primarily concerned that something temporary be done promptly, and that this location was not mutually exclusive to other options as well.

There was also discussion of parking initiatives, such as rental of the Legion parking lot during business hours for employees of the Town and local businesses, so as to keep on street parking available for customers. Gar and Carley will follow up.

Gordon reported that he, Nate, and Chuck have been working with VHB to get a proposal for a conceptual study of Phase II, and hoped to have a proposal in hand shortly. Steve mentioned that the primary audiences for this proposal would be merchants, BOS, and Senator Tarr's staff who will hopefully assist us in making appropriate proposals when state COVID relief funds become available.

There was no new business.

The next meeting was set for Wednesday, Aug. 18.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 am

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Carhart

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