

Downtown Improvement Project

Meeting: Tuesday, Oct 19, 8:30 am via Zoom

Chairperson Steve Carhart called the meeting to order at 8:34am.

In attendance: Steve Carhart, Marlene Dolan, Gar Morse, Linda Crosby, Carley Cook, Sue Brown, Chris Olney, Nathan Desrosiers, Kurt Svetaka and Gordon Brewster. Also in attendance was Erika Brown.

Minutes from the 9/21/2021 and 8/18/2021 meetings were approved.

Organizational Matters (Steve Carhart): Steve reminded the committee that new member, Marlene Dolan, will take minutes for DIP meetings and that Ben Rossi, who has transitioned off the committee, may join from time-to-time in an advisory capacity.

DPW Update: Gordon Brewster informed the committee that he anticipates having the VHB proposal in the next few days.

Gordon updated the committee on a traffic calming method that Chuck Dam presented to BOS at their October 18 meeting. The presentation was well received by the BOS. The traffic calming method is meant to be a citizen initiative which allows citizens who have met established baseline criteria, to request a study of areas in town they believe need better traffic safety measures. Once a study is initiated, the PD and DPW would work with citizens to collect data and based on findings, measures would put in place if the data supported the need (e.g., signage).

Gordon informed the committee that the town is still waiting the grant proposal for the Central Street Culvert. The town is short-listed, and the expected timing is mid-Spring, 2022 with work getting underway by Labor Day, 2022. All work must be completed by March 1, 2023. Steve mentioned that the DIP interests are primarily to understand the timing to make informed decisions relative to other work that will need to be staged as a result of DIP Phase 2.

Gordon provided an update on a productive meeting with Bion Pike regarding a prospective harbor master's office (as had been agreed at the Sept. 2021 meeting). Gordon and Bion discussed the building and walked the site. Steve reminded the group that we have no oversight or decision-making authority on the matter of the harbor master's office. Having said that, Steve also mentioned that it could be seen as an oversight not to have public restrooms w/the train shed or for visitors to the town. In terms of where the process proceeds from here, Bion will be placing a submission for a grant in the Spring.

Town Planning Update (Rapid Recovery Planning Grant, LCD status, etc.): Sue Brown provided an update.

The local rapid recovery plan is complete and on the MBTS website, under "Downtown Initiative". The plan highlights opportunities for working with the town of Essex. Sue mentioned that Essex is interested in lighting, so there may be an opportunity to dovetail with the lighting initiative of the DIP. Initiatives that may be under consideration include way finding, lighting, a business ombudsman, restrooms and marketing (particularly off-season). The next step will be to prioritize areas of focus.

40B has received technical assistance and has been matched with a consultant who will help the ZBA with the comprehensive permitting process. Sue informed the committee that the town does not have safe harbor yet. Once the hearing begins, the town has 14-15 days to claim safe harbor and the applicant has another 15 days to respond. 40R is now called a smart growth overlay district. The project will come together after the holidays.

DIP Engagement with Downtown Business (Gar Morse, Linda Crosby). The continued focus of this effort will be restrooms, outdoor dining and opportunities to obtain alternative parking for town and merchant employees (to free up space for visitors and patrons). BOS Chair Jeffrey Bodmer-Turner would like to have a sense of how many people are currently using public parking areas for him to make an informed decision on renting space for employee parking.

Gar reported on a recent trip to Seattle, which has done a tremendous amount of work to create outdoor dining-it has been very successful. Gar suggested initiating a research group of 2-3 restaurateurs, someone from DIP, and another town committee to look at and propose options for MBTS. Outdoor dining is not going away.

Steve mentioned the idea of approaching businesses as a consortium regarding public restrooms. The Manchester section of the chamber of commerce is meeting this week at the Cricket office. Steve will attend.

Planning for DIP Phase 2 (Steve Carhart, Gordon Brewster): Steve provided a progress update on the drafting of the DIP Phase 2 write up. The purpose of Phase 2 will be to continue work on updating and improving the physical infrastructure of the downtown business district in a manner maximally supportive of local businesses and their patrons, with emphasis on creating a safe and welcoming environment for pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles alike. Overseeing the management of the project will be the Manchester Department of Public Works and Downtown Improvement Project Committee (citizen volunteers) under the direction of the Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator. Kurt volunteered to participate with Gordon and the team with a focus on ensuring that the project is favorable to pedestrians and bikers.

Steve reinforced the learnings from Phase 1 stating that having abutters and local businesses involved in the process will be key to success. Toward this end, once the conceptual work matures, Steve imagines a role for Gar, Carley and Linda to share the plan with the businesses and get their input. The goal will be to present a plan to the town and BOS that is reflective of local citizens desires. Gar suggested we add the importance of maintaining the historical nature of the community be added into the proposal. All agreed with this suggestion.

New Business-None

The next meeting was scheduled for November 16, 2021 at 8:30 am

The meeting adjourned at 9:33 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Carhart and Marlene Dolan