

MINUTES
**CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS/
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**
Meeting of Thursday, July 20, 2023 – 12 p.m.
Conference Room A, Gorham Municipal Center

Present: Councilor Suzanne Phillips, Committee Chair, and Councilor and Virginia Wilder Cross.

Also Present: Town Manager Ephrem Paraschak; Director of Community Development Tom Poirier; Public Works Director Terry Deering, and Executive Assistant Jessica Hughes.

Absent: Councilor Phillip Gagnon.

1. Consideration of the minutes of the March 16, 2023 meeting.

A motion was MADE by Councilor Wilder Cross, SECONDED by Councilor Phillips, and VOTED to accept the minutes of the March 16, 2023 meeting. Unanimous vote.

2. Current Business

A. Review status of Capital Part II projects.

Town Manager Ephrem Paraschak said the Town is continuing to move forward with FY 23 capital projects. Regarding FY 24, he said there are not as many road projects. He said the Town is starting two bids, and the Town is trying to get materials on order while working around long lead times.

B. Provide a framework for the review and possible revisions to the Chick Master Plan and report back to the Town Council with a recommendation (referred on December 6, 2022).

Mr. Paraschak said he believed that the map that the committee had in front of them for review encompassed everything to which Director of Community Development Tom Poirier said that there is another, more current map of the Chick Master Plan, but the engineering firm inadvertently provided an older map. He clarified that the map in front of the committee is what is currently built or proposed to be built in the near future.

Mr. Poirier said that the master plan calls for a big parking lot, playground behind the school, a potential recreation building, more parking, and two more ball fields.

Public Works Director Terry Deering asked if the master plan takes into consideration the next rendition of portable classrooms.

Regarding properties that have joint Town and School use, Mr. Poirier said that the committee may want to look to adopt a policy that says before the School department

does anything, they need to come to the Town Council to get permission. With regard to Mr. Deering's question, Mr. Poirier said that the School now has portable classrooms that are staged where a parking lot should be.

Mr. Poirier said he will ask the engineer to update the master plan.

Mr. Paraschak said that the Town Council voted to put the skate park on the master plan, which is how the Town was able to partially fund it through impact fees, but maps were never updated.

Mr. Paraschak said that the money was originally set aside for the ball field on the maps in front of the committee members, and the pricing came in astronomical. Instead, he said that either part of a ball field or part of a parking lot could have been built. Since then, the money sat for a couple of years during the pandemic and was then shifted for the skate park.

Councilor Phillips said that the groups could help provide input as to whether another ball field is still needed.

Mr. Paraschak asked Executive Assistant Jessica Hughes to work with Mrs. Hazelton to get a list of all affected groups and stakeholders that should be invited to attend the meeting in September that will discuss the Little Falls and Chick property master plans.

Mr. Deering asked what the next step is for the Chick Plan to which Councilor Phillips said what this conversation started when she wanted to see a map to understand if it was encroaching on anything, or if anything needed to be moved around. She said she would rather leave it open.

Mr. Poirier commented that it was encroaching on the parking lot.

Mr. Deering said that his recommendation would be for the next meeting to focus on the scenario of the loss of parking lot space in one area, and to make it more convenient for the people using the trail systems, skate park and schools when they are in session.

Councilor Phillips said that when we include groups in these conversations, and they use the fields, they are more inclined to invest their money in those fields. She added that some groups want to maintain the fields.

3. Items Referred for Future Meetings/Action

- A. Review the Little Falls Master Plan, explore current and future capital improvements for the Little Falls Recreation Area and Little Falls Community Center, consult with community groups and stakeholders for input, and take into account grant funding for parking area light improvements, and how best to incorporate them into the site, and make recommendations for changes to the Town Council (referred on February 7, 2023).

Councilor Phillips recommended that this group should look at the item before it is given to the School [Facilities Committee]. She recommended that the Town talk to the groups that use it, and see whether they are using it a lot, and try to plan for a night meeting in September to look at the Little Falls master plan.

Councilor Wilder Cross asked if there was a list somewhere to which Councilor Phillips said that Recreation Director Cindy Hazelton could share her input on this matter as well, but the list would include baseball, basketball, and football, soccer at the Chick property and at Little Falls, cross-country skiing, which would affect those sports participants.

Councilor Phillips suggested holding a meeting in September and opening it to the public if the committee wanted.

Mr. Paraschak said the committee may have a more productive conversation if specific groups were invited or feedback was requested from specific groups.

Councilor Phillips commented that the Town would need to notify abutters of open land. She feels that those efforts may go a long way, because a lot of groups have money they may want to spend. She said she would have heartburn over those groups getting the approval to put something up at Little Falls only for it to be taken down later. She said that she believes right now that they are being told they can't do anything, but she would rather open up the conversation.

Councilor Wilder Cross suggested holding that meeting at the end of the season so that topics would be more relevant.

Regarding Little Falls, Mr. Paraschak said that it has less flexibility since it is more built out, but we can bring those stakeholders into the conversation as well. He added that the conversation will more around improving the spaces that are already there.

Mr. Poirier said that he believes that the Little Falls master plan calls for more parking. He said that we are pushing against stormwater thresholds.

Councilor Phillips said we should revisit the conversation about it since it is not finished yet.

- B. Review and discuss staff recommendations on roadways for discontinuance and send back to the Town Council for action (June 6, 2023).

Mr. Paraschak said that when the conversation started, we had varying levels of presumably Town-owned and maintained roads. Questions surrounding the roads include "why are we still maintaining them," and "does it makes sense to discontinue them."

Mr. Deering said that a consideration when reviewing how to proceed with questionable roads is that when the properties go, the Town is assuming a lot of rebuildable road frontage, and are then responsible for making sure the roads are maintained.

Mr. Deering recommended staff researching the status of roads to make better determinations.

Mr. Paraschak said staff needs to bring in a list for the committee to review conditions, which will provide an opportunity for the Town to look at roads before there are problems.

A discussion ensued regarding various roads in which Mr. Deering said Public Works is maintaining roads that are actually discontinued. He recommended getting a better defined list of older roads.

Councilor Wilder Cross asked what kind of argument would land and property owners have that were used to having their roads maintained by the Town to which Mr. Deering said that he believes the state of Maine has a statute that requires the Town to maintain a road for four years.

Mr. Paraschak said the Town may have a respective easement based on the Town using the road for so long. He added that when towns in the past would discontinue a road, they may compensate somebody a dollar for loss, for example. He said that a lot of this would be a conversation with property owners. He said the Town Council could choose to discontinue a road anywhere, but in a lot of circumstances, he suspects that the Town would want to keep an easement so as to access something beyond it at some point.

Councilor Phillips said she wants to revisit the content and materials that were discussed at a previous Town Council workshop on this topic a few years ago.

Mr. Paraschak said that the Town has pretty comprehensive records on road files, but the records do not include registry of deeds. He said that staff will need to do some leg work to bring back data to the committee, and it would not be an immediate thing, unless there is a problematic thing with a road that we know the history of and it is causing an undue burden on Public Works with maintenance.

Councilor Phillips said it could be painstaking to contact landowners to advise on the road status.

Mr. Poirier said he would recommend staff looking at the road, the benefit, legal status, and what you want to do with it, then go out and have a public hearing.

A discussion ensued regarding dead end roads in subdivisions, including a road that Public Work maintains 1000 feet of frontage on a driveway on which there is an issue with turning around.

Mr. Poirier said that setbacks can become problematic and that there are pros and cons to everything.

Mr. Paraschak said that if a landowner has a conversation like this in which they tell the Town they don't want people near their land or to turn around near their driveway,

then that the department could make a recommendation for the Town Council's review to discontinue that road.

Councilor Wilder Cross shared a concern with the younger members of families that own land on roads that the Town may choose to discontinue. She would be concerned if those people become inclined to come after the Town.

Mr. Paraschak said he didn't think those people would come after the Town, but it would be a legal question.

Mr. Poirier said it would still be considered a private way, and they can upgrade it to road frontage standards, but it would be responsibility of the landowners.

Mr. Deering clarified that he is not advocating to discontinue a bunch of roads. He shared an example of a challenge Public Works has with plowing snow on Pine Cone Lane. He said that if the Town doesn't own a road, the Town should have no interest in maintaining it. He said that if the Town is going to own a road and have interest in it, we need to make it so Public Works can properly get in and out of it without risk of damaging property.

A discussion ensued regarding a challenge Public Works has with snow removal on Fort Hill Road as well as public easements.

Mr. Poirier suggested installing a pole or sign with a different color to delineate a public easement.

Mr. Poirier said that ultimately we should pay someone to enter this information into our GIS system to have all easements logged.

A discussion ensued regarding challenges with Smith Road and Walnut Cressey.

Mr. Paraschak said that Mr. Deering can bring a list of roads for the committee to look at referencing the roads with the most concerns and their status.

Councilor Phillips said that the committee could evaluate how important the road and concerns are, and then contact the land owners.

Councilor Wilder Cross asked if there are any roads that connect, but in the middle are not classified as a Town road to which Mr. Deering said Buck Street and Wescott Road would fall in that category. Mr. Deering said that Public Works does not maintain that section. He added that if the Town desired, the Town could go work on Queen Street and small roads.

Mr. Deering said he could do research on five roads to review and discuss at the next meeting.

Mr. Paraschak asked if Mr. Deering could get three to five roads, classified by how easily they can be resolved and/or their priority.

Councilor Wilder Cross asked how many roads would be on the list to which Mr. Deering said about 20.

Mr. Deering said that the Town may need to hire a surveyor to redefine roadways, such as Middle Jam Road. In that situation, he doesn't want to encroach on private property.

Mr. Paraschak said that the Town could look to do that in a future budget, although a problem will be with whether or not that would be a worthwhile investment.

A discussion ensued regarding turnarounds and searching property pins.

Councilor Wilder Cross said a truck got stuck at the end of Bramble Woods. A discussion ensued regarding how Public Works maneuvers plow trucks through residential streets.

Mr. Paraschak said that it was more problematic prior the 1990's after which time the Town started getting more formal with easements and turnarounds.

Councilor Wilder Cross recommended holding another workshop.

Mr. Paraschak said that roads are a town's biggest liability.

Mr. Deering said he will put together the list.

4. Other Business

No items were discussed.

5. Schedule next meeting and discuss agenda items for next meeting.

The next meeting will take place on August 17, 2023. The following agenda items will discussed:

- A. Review and discuss staff recommendations on roadways for discontinuance and send back to the Town Council for action (June 6, 2023).

6. Adjourn.

There being no further business, a motion was MADE by Councilor Wilder Cross and SECONDED by Councilor Phillips and VOTED to adjourn. Time of adjournment: 1:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Hughes, Executive Assistant