

MINUTES
**CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS/
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**
Meeting of Thursday, November 30, 2023 – 11 a.m.
Conference Room A, Gorham Municipal Center

Present: Councilor Phillip Gagnon – Chairman, and Councilors Lou Simms and Virginia Wilder Cross.

Also Present: Public Works Director Terry Deering; Town Engineer Charles Norton; Superintendent Heather Perry; School Facilities Director Norm Justice; School Committee Chairperson Sarah Perkins, and Executive Assistant Jessica Hughes.

1. Consideration of the minutes of the September 21, 2023 and October 10, 2023 special meeting.

A motion was MADE by Councilor Wilder Cross, SECONDED by Councilor Simms, and VOTED to accept the minutes of the September 21, 2023 meeting and October 10, 2023 special meeting. Unanimous vote.

2. Current Business

A. Discuss where development for a new school would be for existing Town properties.

Councilor Gagnon referred to an older rendering of the Chick Property and existing facilities, and asked where the School representatives in attendance where they envision a new middle school or elementary.

Superintendent Heather Perry said the school is looking at two capital projects: a new high school and to consolidate the Narragansett and Village Elementary School into one elementary school. She said they had been looking at the Chick property. She said that the recent CHA facilities study looked at several different options for potential construction of some of those major capital plans; one was looking at the Chick property and looking at either the elementary school being located there or being built elsewhere. Then perhaps close down Narragansett leaving that space open for other things. That was one location that was looked, while the other major location that was looked at in the CHA study was the middle school property and realizing that in some fashion, depending on whether we were looking at a high school project going on Chick or a high school project going on the middle school property, those were very tight. She said she thinks that was probably something that they described in their renderings. She further said there's been continued movement on the Chick property with the skatepark and with the other courts, which we love, and those have been great; the kids have been really using those very nicely. She said it seems to be a great little spot for the community in that area, but if we were to look at a school being placed on a property of the size that we're talking about, which would probably be something we would want to house between almost 9,000 students in one spot, it would be a sizable project that would eat up a good portion of that site. She said there were several renderings that were done. I'm looking right now at one that was potentially

looking at the high school, which would take up that top left corner, where I think there's a softball field right now.

Councilor Simms asked if the existing middle school would remain and Superintendent Perry said – yes, on the multi-purpose field.

Councilor Gagnon said he would not want to do that and the cost would be a million dollars. He further said that the CHA study proposed concepts only, no changes have actually been made.

A brief discussion ensued regarding the placement of a school.

Councilor Wilder Cross asked if CHA had looked into the Great Falls space to which Superintendent Perry said – no, due to the lack of additional space available.

School Facilities and Transportation Director Norm Justice said that Great Falls has 24 acres whereas the Department of Education's new space standard is 65 acres.

Councilor Simms asked if you must indicate the location on an application to the state to which Mr. Justice said – no, they look at the criteria as being a certain number of acres depending on the size of the school.

Councilor Gagnon asked if we need to purchase land to which Superintendent Perry said – yes.

Councilor Gagnon asked since we encroached on the parking and the access points with the additional tennis courts in the skating area, can that be moved up, or back, or up to the east.

Mr. Justice said – yes, up to the wetlands.

Councilor Gagnon said that would make a great trail system behind it; a lot of people in the neighboring communities would use it for a trail system. He further said this parcel goes all the way to Libby. He asked if we would want to do an egress road to which Mr. Justice said – yes.

Councilor Gagnon asked if we could add some fields for recreation to which Mr. Justice said – as they were developing the school they were looking for school needs.

School Committee Chairperson Sarah Perkins said the current high school could become community fields.

Councilor Gagnon said regarding master planning, we should start removing things from Narragansett, and that egress would need to move from Chick Road.

A discussion ensued regarding the football field having been moved.

Councilor Wilder Cross said it will be most important to make sure we have room for school.

Councilor Gagnon asked which is a higher priority – a high school or consolidated elementary school to which Mr. Justice said – whichever the state will fund.

A discussion ensued regarding moving the tennis courts in which Superintendent Perry said they would want to leave them on the same property, because the maintenance facility is within the middle school, although that will be a problem as the middle school grows.

A discussion ensued regarding apple trees being removed if a consolidated elementary school went there.

Superintendent Perry said the tennis courts would be part of the 10-year capital plan, and we are getting prepared to come to the Town Council with a request for a referendum, likely in November of this coming fall.

A discussion ensued regarding the 10-year capital plan.

Mr. Justice said we have two phases of modulars to expand our plan.

Councilor Simms commented that the modulars would buy a little bit more space for the existing high school.

Superintendent Perry said the idea is that this is probably 10, 15, 20 years in the future. In the meantime, we're going to have issues with space at the high school, we're in a bit of a downturn, which we had anticipated right now at the high school, but it's going to jump back up again. She said we have 900 students in a 750-student capacity building with additional special needs for which that building was never built for. We are trying to keep it viable as a location to operate schools. While we're looking at these capital plans, we're going to need to invest in modular expansion, just like we have at Narragansett in order to keep it moving, so that we can get to the larger capital. In the short term, we can expand.

Councilor Gagnon said we're going to have to make money. He said the committee can give the information to the Town Manager and have him and Superintendent Perry rework it so that it will accommodate these things, and so that we don't accidentally encroach on that area any more than we have. He said that if the committee and School representatives are in agreement, the information will be recirculated via email to the group and then we'll have another meeting after that. He further said we'll leave it up to the stakeholders to hammer it out, remove what's there and then just note not to develop.

Councilor Gagnon asked what the square footage was for schools now to which Mr. Justice said - \$650 per square foot. He said that the Windham Middle School is a \$171.5 million project with 250,000 square feet.

Superintendent Perry said she was blown away at the cost, and she remembers being shot down with a proposed high school project at \$370 per square foot.

Councilor Gagnon asked if Public Works Director Terry Deering foresees any issues with the Chick property site regarding drainage, electrical utility, or anything else that might get in the way to which Mr. Deering said he thinks that everything is readily available, and it has a good access point in and out.

Councilor Gagnon said that we should not sell that rear parcel. He said some people have expressed interest in partitioning and selling off some parts.

Mr. Justice said that he thinks there was an earlier master plan that showed a road connecting.

- B. Discuss current Public Works projects and where they are in the planning to completion phase, and work-in-process for Public Works.

Councilor Gagnon said he thought this would be a good time for Mr. Deering to go over Public Works activities for the new committee member Councilor Simms.

Mr. Deering said the big thing that the department is working through is the contract and project with the South Street pedestrian improvements, along with the pedestrian lighting project that has been incorporated with that. He said it has been logistically challenging layering these two projects and trying to blend them together so that we don't tear up new work when we do the second project. He further said that the project has been prolonged because of the lack of availability of curbing, but the project is moving forward with paving happening today and painters coming tonight to restripe South Street, so everything will hopefully be done for the winter, with the possibility of any remaining work for the lighting project.

A discussion regarding lead time on poles and lighting ensued between Mr. Deering and Councilor Wilder Cross.

Mr. Deering said that one thing the department' applauds themselves on is that they do these projects frugally; they work efficiently to find ways to save money and do work in-house whenever to save on costs, and sub-contract when needed, so it's a combination and collaboration of the department working together with contractors.

Councilor Wilder Cross said we appreciate what the department does - it's like magic, all of a sudden, things are better and it's great.

Mr. Deering said that he doesn't live in the world that all of a sudden everything is better because these projects have been logistically very challenging work for the department because of the two projects overlapping; there's been a lot of stuff they've had to incorporate from one job to the other. He said he is grateful that it's coming together now. He wants to get the striping done so people understand what's going on with the diagonal parking; it's a big change. He added that we're actually going to do a more thorough painting/striping job on South Street in the spring time, and try to remove the old striping right now and paint over it.

Mr. Deering said they are happy with Elm Street, which came out good. He said they still have surface paving to do in the spring, and maybe some paving on the sidewalks, but they're happy and residents seem to be happy. He said you can get contractors lined up for work on the curbing and other work, but we're ultimately at the mercy of contractors.

Regarding Railroad Avenue, Councilor Gagnon asked if that would be a good area to target for additional holiday lights to which Mr. Deering said they would do whatever they are asked to do.

Councilor Simms asked who is in charge of positioning the speed trailers on the road to which Mr. Deering said – PD keeps record of those.

Councilor Wilder Cross asked what the flashing sleep limit sign means when you approach a roundabout and it flashes.

Mr. Deering said that it means a driver is going too fast when it flashes, and when it is solid, you're driving within the speed limit and you are not likely to tip over in the roundabout. Mr. Deering said they have plans to put more of those signs up in a couple of areas in Town to try to help with some of the speeding issues.

Councilor Wilder Cross said she likes the blinking stop lights to which Mr. Deering said they are costly.

Mr. Deering said they have looked at installing one on Libby Avenue, but it is also a matter of whether it is really going to change the habits of traffic.

Councilor Gagnon said that he would support a roundabout going there. He said that people treat Gray Road more like a highway and a roundabout there would force them to slow down to a certain extent.

Mr. Deering concurred with Councilor Gagnon that a roundabout would serve as an effective traffic calming method.

Town Engineer Charles Norton said that another effective measure would be a tee'd up intersection. He said the big problem there is that it's an oblique angle. A similar scenario is when you come onto route 25 from Gray Road, where you have a bad sight distance. It feels very comfortable to go 35 miles an hour on Libby Avenue around that curve and keep going. Same for people coming off route 202. They can come over very quickly, but if you tee that up, it becomes more uncomfortable to make those turns, naturally slowing down traffic.

Councilor Gagnon asked if would make sense to dead-end Libby. He shared that he's had a number of complaints on Queen as well. He said that if you make it more difficult by teeing up the intersection, people coming up Libby have to turn left and stop, then people won't be pulling out in front of people. And then once you're once you're at a 90 degree angle, your sight distance becomes that much better.

Councilor Gagnon suggested that a workshop be held to discuss installing a dead-end on the Libby extension or a roundabout at Queen as opposed to Libby Avenue.

Mr. Deering said the department will be going to be down to Weeks Road next week to do some work on the parking lot and they have enough spring work ahead.

Regarding the weather forecast, Mr. Deering said they look at weather on a daily basis. He said the forecast for December changed from what was predicted back in November. He said there's potential to have a really serious winter, but I also think there's kind of potential there to have a serious winter in a different way weather-wise.

He added that the department would rather have snow and ice. He said last winter with the freeze/thaw, freeze/thaw pattern was bad for our roads. A lot of damage to equipment was sustained, and the department inadvertently damaged a lot of the dirt roads that they are still repairing. He said he hopes it stays cold, keeping frost in the ground until springtime and then be done with a freeze/thaw. It's just it's not good for any infrastructure that we own.

3. Items Referred for Future Meetings/Action

- A. 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).
- B. 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 Gagnon asked what Mr. Deering needed from the council to get the item on staff's docket to do some drainage in the area.

Mr. Deering responded to just refer an item that the council wants to see drainage work done and the department will come up with a plan. He said he doesn't believe they would need to hire out any of the work. Regarding cost, he said it would probably be mostly time and materials.

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

Mr. Deering updated the committee and advise that staff gave a list of proposed roads for discontinuance, discussed at a previous meeting, to Surveyor Steve Martin and he's been working on it. He added that Mr. Martin has determined some dead-ends and that there's a lot of roads with no information or status, which is frustrating. He said the plan is do some more work on those as the weather turned a little bit different as he hasn't been working outside so much.

Mr. Deering said he is hopeful we'll get some more information, but the surveyor is looking into the information, and the committee will then have to decide how you want to proceed.

- D. Work with staff to evaluate options for a site planning study of 80 Huston Road and bring back recommendations to the Town Council for review (referred August 1, 2023).

Mr. Deering advised the committee that a piece of land on the left near the back of the property at Huston Road may be for sale soon.

4. Other Business

- A. Capital expenditures

- i. Councilor Gagnon suggested that we may need a new fire engine soon.
- ii. Mr. Deering said that Public Works needs a sand shed and to expand the Public Works garage.

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

The next regular meeting will take place on January 18, 2024 at 11am. The items for discussion on the agenda will be as follows:

- A. Discuss where development for a new school would be for existing Town properties.
- 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).
- C. Work with staff to evaluate options for a site planning study of 80 Huston Road and bring back recommendations to the Town Council for review (referred on August 1, 2023).

6. Adjourn.

There being no further business, a motion was MADE by Councilor Simms and SECONDED by Councilor Wilder Cross and VOTED to adjourn. Time of adjournment: 12:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Hughes, Executive Assistant