

MINUTES
**CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS/
 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**
Meeting of Thursday, February 29, 2024 – 11 a.m.
Conference Room A, Gorham Municipal Center

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

Also Present: Town Manager Ephrem Paraschak; Superintendent Heather Perry; School Committee Member Michelle Littlefield; Public Works Director Terry Deering; Recreation Director Cynthia Hazelton, and Executive Assistant Jessica Hughes.

1. Consideration of the minutes of the January 18, 2024 meeting.

A motion was MADE by Councilor Wilder Cross, SECONDED by Councilor Simms, and VOTED to accept the minutes of the February 18, 2024 meeting. Unanimous vote.

2. Current Business

A. Review of Little Falls light project and all materials to date.

Town Manager Ephrem Paraschak said the next step is that we need an engineer and electrical engineer to give us the specifics on what we need, so the Town will need to get a number from the engineer designs, which he said he suspects we're going to need more money to do it right.

Mr. Paraschak said that the lights itself are within budget, so the next phase is the extension of power into the site.

Councilor Gagnon asked what the time was to which Town Engineer Charles Norton said engineers at Sebago Tech have already reached out to an electrical engineer to get them on board. He said we don't have any timeline on that but he estimates there'll be probably a couple of months of review and design for that, and then once we get to that point, then we can start doing cost estimation. He noted that one thing we didn't specifically talk about was the need for the parking lights to go in concurrently because when you light the ball field, adequate lighting will be needed for people to get to and from their vehicle.

Mr. Paraschak said he believes we did a grant, but it was not awarded.

Councilor Wilder Cross asked if the money that has been put aside would cover the cost of just putting in the lights and power to which Mr. Norton said he hasn't seen a breakdown of the cost of lights and whether or not that included installation. He said he thinks maybe it was procurement of the lights and bases, but not installation. He added that we have to get the power source and the conduits before we can get the bases in the ground. He said we need the engineer to tell us what we need to put in, and if we are going to upgrade anything, we will want to look at future capacity in five years; we don't want to put in the lights and have them powered up and all of a sudden have to go back and dig it up again.

A discussion ensued regarding what the money has been appropriated so far to cover, which is to pay the engineering firm to get the permit and for the electrical engineer to tell us what and where to install power.

Councilor Gagnon asked if part of the grant for the lighting for the parking was going to continue the food trucks to which Mr. Paraschak said – yes, and this project would complement it, but he clarified we were not awarded the grant.

Mr. Paraschak said initially the grant was more focused on providing lighting for the facility and it also would include a design so that food trucks won't have to run generators and things like that, so food trucks could be accessible through September.

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

Mr. Deering said staff haven't done much on this item since the last meeting. He said staff received some legal opinions. He said there are five roads we're looking at, but legal and the surveyor are reaching a lot of dead ends, so we now just need to figure out where to go and what the costs are going to be, and the work of researching roads will entail some costs.

Mr. Paraschak said some of the roads are easier than others to research and come to a determination, while some may require a survey, and some may not, but they may require legal research. He added that some of these roads they go back so far and the history was that a road spanned from one tree to somebody's barn and the barns no longer there, and the tree died 100 years ago.

A discussion ensued regarding the costs for continued work being for legal, detail analysis and surveys.

Mr. Deering said he hired a surveyor to do some research. He said part of the issue is we don't know who has legal ownership of some of the roads, and where a road sits in a property, and what are the Town's rights on those roads.

Councilor Gagnon said he believes that there were some old Town records lost way back when the Old Town Hall burned up, which could be a problem.

3. Items Referred for Future Meetings/Action

- A. Explore current and future economic development programs (referred on February 7, 2023).
 - a. Signage for Town Properties

Mr. Paraschak said that an RFP has been advertised for wayfinding signs.

Councilor Gagnon asked if we want to put signage on the grassy knoll in the center of Town to which Councilor Wilder Cross recommended putting some kind of sign similar to the granite sign at Shaw Park identifying that area as the Preble Street Common.

Mr. Paraschak said that he had previously investigated an estimate for a sign there and it came back at \$4,000. He said the committee or Council will need to determine what they want to put on the sign and what it will look like. He said he previously got estimates to replace the Welcome to Gorham signs since they are wearing down; he recommended considering granite since other materials will wear away over time like the existing Welcome to Gorham signs. He said the cost is between \$4,000 to \$6,000 depending on the size, but a four by three by four-inch-thick nice granite sign back in December 2023 was estimated about \$4,000. He said it could be as simple as having the Town seal and facility, but the committee will need to determine the additional attributes.

A motion was MADE by Councilor Simms, SECONDED by Councilor Wilder Cross, and VOTED to ask the Town Manager to bring back a proposed design for the Preble Street Common sign at the next meeting. Unanimous vote.

b. Business Exchange

Councilor Wilder Cross said she feels it's time to figure out a way to work cooperatively with the former guard Business Exchange, to make sure that we have opportunities for our businesses to get together and know what is going on in terms of the Town.

Councilor Wilder Cross said that meetings were canceled because of COVID so it didn't seem fair to charge dues. She said she has talked with David Willis about this, and he agrees this would be a great idea. She said she's not sure that this is something that this committee needs to do.

Councilor Gagnon said he missed having the marketplace in March to which Councilor Wilder Cross said it was hard work, but it was fun and would be a shame to let it go; she recommends the Town and Business Exchange working together again.

Councilor Simms said he thinks the Town could organize a marketplace event and not put the burden solely on the businesses as opposed to the Businesses Exchange.

Councilor Gagnon asked if any of the American Rescue Plan Act money could be used for economic development to try to get things going to which Mr. Paraschak said the funding was gone and has been allocated.

Mr. Paraschak suggested rather than promise bringing back Business Exchange in this same exact format that it used to be, a good rule for the Town and Town staff with the GEDC, GVA, or any other organization that wants to be part of it, is can we facilitate helping these organizations get to a point where they can do something like that or take that amount to another event where we can help boost the event.

Councilor Gagnon said that Council Chairperson Phillips could assist in these efforts since she is the designated USM liaison.

Councilor Simms said that there are opportunities to work constructively with USM, including developing a business incubator space to which Superintendent Heather Perry said that her staff have had conversations with USM.

Superintendent Perry said, as the committee may know, the School department is pursuing a possible Department of Education application for a construction project in the high school. She said one of the application possibilities for this is that we can go for one as a general construction project, and the other is specifically for the creation of a nine through 16 system, which would be a collaboration with the University and with the CTE center and doing more in that area. She added that she has received USM President Jackie Edmunson's support with the idea of an incubator concept, and Peter is on board from the PRVC to have that conversation. She said once we have our architects aligned and we start meeting, all those things are going to bring people together to have that conversation about building something like that into our plan for the construction.

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

Councilor Gagnon said the committee asked staff to come back at the March meeting with Town properties and where to put things. He said he was talking with Superintendent Perry about the tennis courts. He said the committee was looking at places to put the schools and that we were going to bubble out at Narragansett in the northeast corner to preserve that space so that we don't encroach on that area as an option, and at the middle school where the rec fields were down to the parking area and softball fields, so an elementary school could potentially put there. He said we're leaving options available so that any future developments don't become conflicting. He said the example we gave two meetings ago was the skate park and how the skate park has come right up to that bubble where the egress would be for any potential development per the CHA study. He further said the tennis courts were the other place where they were going to be potentially placed where the current recreational multipurpose fields would be.

Regarding rec fields, Councilor Gagnon said where the soccer and lacrosse is and varsity sports play, the committee was talking about the Middle School and we were looking at potentially other locations on the site, so that we could keep that area free.

Superintendent Perry said the School department will be requesting a referendum in November as part of a series of capital projects that we need to have done. She said they will be requesting to move the tennis courts from their current location because they have reached their useful life and then some and moving them to the middle school location per the maps, she referred the committee to. She added that these changes were discussed back when the middle school was first constructed so they're permitted. She said the changes mentioned would not necessarily infringe on any future potential site for a school.

Mr. Paraschak said that the town back in the 70s took tiny amounts of money to build a lot of these facilities and that there is a perpetual federal expense attached, so they must be open to the public, and we're not compliant with half of them. To check grants for them, you would have to transfer that amount and no recreational facilities have the same equal value.

A discussion ensued regarding the Gorham Sports Complex in which Superintendent Perry said that a lot of times, the School department needs alternative spaces for teams to practice so they use that site a lot.

Councilor Gagnon said that the tennis courts don't appear to be referenced so the Town or committee will have to look at how we got to deal with that in the master planning of that area.

Superintendent Perry said she doesn't know that we need to because it's already on the approval plan. She asked if Councilor Gagnon was talking about the Middle School to which Councilor Gagnon said – yes.

Superintendent Perry said the CHA study puts a school right there as a potential so we could shift the tennis courts a little bit.

- C. 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).

Councilor Gagnon said there could be a high school or an elementary school there. He asked if we were to put something there, how would we accommodate other activities that are there. He said this discussion would continue after we get more information, but he wanted to give context of why the Narragansett piece.

Mrs. Hazelton said that she read in the minutes the committee talked about a trail from the Libby Avenue entrance. She noted there is a nondescript trail. She said kids and adults access the trail from Wagner. She said staff talked many years ago about a Portland Water District easement out there as well in that same area, which was noted in the original master plan, and a third exit was to connect to Greg Road, Libby, and Main Street. She said room for expansion in the upper side of the Chick property.

Councilor Gagnon said he thinks that part of the conversation for this committee was highlighting areas that we're going to bring back to the March meeting that could accommodate the concepts for the schools, and what areas we want to bubble out to avoid encroachment by schools. He said we'll bring this item back at the March meeting.

- 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 said that they are working on plans for expansion and staff have talked with Sebago Technics; they are trying to identify if there are any wetlands, and if not – if it could be used for a bus expansion.

Councilor Gagnon asked what the timeline might be for the acquisition of the 30 acres to which Mr. Deering said it depends on whether we hear back.

A discussion ensued regarding future opportunities for expansion and the need to buffer.

Mr. Paraschik said we're investigating the ability for us to do simple expansions to accommodate the school facilities, then if that can happen, have a conversation with Transportation Director Norm Justice on what that might look like and how it might affect the bond package; then incrementally the other projects to expand or replace at Public Works, and then the bigger projects to potentially acquire some land around the facility. For the long term,

Mr. Deering said it will be a huge undertaking to move the bus facility.

A discussion ensued between Councilor Gagnon and Mr. Paraschak regarding space and an expansion for fire trucks and ambulances.

Mr. Norton shared his screen with attendees of a plan in progress.

A discussion ensued regarding the bonding package and bus facility.

Councilor Gagnon said this will be a recurring item that will stay on this committee's agenda.

- E. 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 Wilder Cross said that she does not want to sell the Little Falls Recreation building. She asked staff how often the building is used to which Mrs. Hazelton shared the history of the building being there since 1898, and the PTA took ownership, rebuilt it and the Town then took ownership. She said one division of school age childcare was operated there daily during the week during COVID. She said the Recreation department's teen extreme camp is ran there over 10 weeks, which is our middle school camp in the summer. She added that there are always weddings, showers, and funerals happening there. She further said knitting groups and other public events happen there. She said the cost to the Town is pennies. She further said that a natural disaster would mean that a serious decision would need to be made. Until then, she said selling the building would displace the teen extreme camp.

Mr. Paraschak said another consideration is what is the cost to replace a building elsewhere, so in terms of economic development, some might say that bringing a business into that building is better, but it isn't necessarily better than what we're doing. He said he thinks that what goes on in that building is much more valuable to

Councilor Wilder Cross said she is opposed to renting the building to a business since it would hinder other uses.

Councilor Gagnon said that parking is tight and he sees some merits to Councilor Lavoie's points.

Mrs. Hazelton said she believes parking at Little Falls is more of a parking management issue.

A brief discussion ensued in which Mr. Paraschak pointed out via Mr. Norton's screenshare the street view at Little Falls, and Mr. Norton explained that a challenge is the surge parking issue due to multiple events and games.

Councilor Gagnon said he thinks it is noble of Councilor Lavoie to want to help people, but he thinks this is a little too complex, and it would helpful for him to see a cost benefit analysis.

Mrs. Hazelton said she worries about the supposition that it is not being used. She although it is not being used enough to cover the costs, the costs are very minimal.

Councilor Gagnon said the Finance Committee looked at different pieces, because we were trying to find ways to reduce our economic footprint to reduce costs. He said a problem is the Finance Committee only meets quarterly and really should be meeting monthly and maybe more frequently. He said we'll have to find out because he thinks it's part of our council rules. He said the Finance Committee is supposed to work with the Town Manager about budgeting and where things are and it's kind of moved away from that. He said we still have some COVID things that we've migrated away from, and it's not nefarious as you're correct that a \$30,000 expense for oil isn't really anything, but when you're putting it together with a bunch of other things, it could amount to something.

The committee discussed and agreed to have a further discussion about this item at the next meeting.

F. Other Business

No items were discussed.

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

The next regular meeting will take place on March 28, 2024 at 11am. The items for discussion on the agenda will be as follows:

- A. Review and discuss staff recommendations on roadways for discontinuance and send back to the Town Council for action (referred on June 6, 2023).
- B. 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).
- C. 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).
- D. Explore current and future economic development programs (referred on February 7, 2023).
- E. Business Exchange

4. Adjourn.

There being no further business, a motion was MADE by Councilor Wilder Cross and SECONDED by Councilor Simms and VOTED to adjourn. Time of adjournment: 12:19pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Hughes, Executive Assistant