

HAMILTON DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
MINUTES OF MEETING &
MEETING WITH DOWNTOWN BUSINESS AND PROPERTY OWNERS
MEMORIAL ROOM, HAMILTON TOWN HALL
January 23, 2019

Members Present: Brian Stein (president), Bill Gisness, Rick Mitchell, and Tom Goodwin.

Members Absent: Anthony Nickas

Coordinator: Dorr Fox

Brian Stein called the Hamilton Development Corporation (HDC) meeting to order at 7:35 a.m. with a quorum present.

Warrant for Bills

Mr. Stein presented a warrant for \$385.19, which included minutes time and a \$240 bill for a heating issue at 59 Willow St.

Tom Goodwin made a motion to approve payment of Warrant HDC-1916. Bill Gisness seconded the motion. The HDC voted unanimously among those present (4-0) to approve the Warrant.

Approve Minutes

A last name was missing from the Jan. 9 minutes. A note was made to fill it in later. [*Steve Boudreault of the Locksmyth.]

Mr. Gisness made a motion to approve the Jan. 9 minutes. Mr. Stein seconded the motion. The HDC voted unanimously among those present (4-0) to approve the minutes.

Downtown Improvements

HDC members reviewed the PowerPoint Dorr Fox had put together. It included some slides from landscape architect Carl Johnson's presentation on proposed downtown improvements. Mr. Fox noted it was modified to only include Scheme A.

Rick Mitchell noted other things the HDC had done over the past five years that should be discussed. Mr. Fox said there were some problems getting pdfs for the presentation. Mr. Mitchell suggested they give a verbal update on things like engaging consultants for studies and analyses on sewer and other issues.

Mr. Stein said he wanted the meeting's focus to be on what business owners want instead of on the HDC; however, he said they will provide give a brief history/overview on the HDC and what's being proposed for downtown.

Mr. Mitchell thought the presentation should include cost estimates. Mr. Gisness said they can verbally give those. He wanted to ask the business owners for their ideas moving forward, such as signage to indicate the Business District and thoughts on whether they'd like to hold a block party. Mr. Mitchell added the idea of providing them with marketing assistance. He said there are four or five new businesses in Town and during the Christmas Stroll he talked with some of them and suggested the businesses get together and meet as a group.

Mr. Mitchell asked Mr. Fox to open a Word doc and write down ideas as they discussed them. These included: What would make the Christmas Stroll more successful? and How can they enhance the marketing of downtown businesses? Other topics were: improved signage; helping the group organize; parking enforcement; traffic "calming" measures; connectivity between both sides of 1A; a visual cue at the crosswalk to make it safer for people to cross; and reducing the speed limit downtown.

Selectman Jeff Hubbard, who was in attendance, said he thought what Hamilton lacked was a Chamber of Commerce-type page for businesses that included things like shopping, recreation, real estate, and things Hamilton has to offer. Mr. Stein said perhaps the HDC could partially fund something like that.

Mr. Mitchell posed the questions: How will they judge if the meeting has been successful and what action steps would they like to see? Mr. Stein said they wanted to gather ideas and see if they can help a business group get started.

Mr. Goodwin asked if it were worth discussing the complexity of getting things done with the Town agenda and the grant process. Mr. Stein said they should touch on that.

Mr. Gisness said he'd like for the businesses to give the HDC their ideas on short- and long-term goals and best uses for the available money, as well as discuss how they might organize as a downtown business owners group.

Mr. Mitchell stressed keeping the meeting short and being respectful of the business owners' time.

59/63 Willow Street

Mr. Gisness asked Mr. Goodwin if he had received any written documents from Salem Five Bank on the appraisal. He said yes, he had. He added that he needs to send the engineering study that was done to Bob Shannon, who is doing the feasibility study.

Mr. Mitchell said he talked with Charlie Wear about getting together a Scope of Services.

New/Old Business

Mr. Mitchell inquired about the Complete Streets program. Mr. Hubbard said the Board of Selectmen voted last night to adopt the Complete Streets policy. Mr. Fox said they've gone through Tier 1 and are now in Tier 2 of the program. The Town received a \$30K grant. Mr. Mitchell commented it was unusual to receive the money prior to having adopted the policy. Mr. Fox said the \$30K went to DPW Director Tim Olson. The consultants are now putting together a report. Railroad Ave. will be prioritized as part of the project. Mr. Fox said he, Director of Planning & Inspections Patrick Reffett, and Mr. Olson are working together. He isn't sure who is on the Complete Streets Committee yet but expects Town Manager Joe Domelowicz will be heavily involved. He said he can ask if a member of the HDC can serve on the Committee. Mr. Gisness asked Mr. Fox to first find out who is on the Committee and email them the info.

Mr. Mitchell said he looked at the Complete Streets grant application process and what the HDC is proposing seems perfect for it. Many of the projects get a higher rating if there is a local match. Mr. Mitchell was concerned about the HDC's interests being represented. They talked about the Chebacco Road project and how it compared to the Railroad Ave. project in terms of being appropriate for Complete Streets.

Mary Alice Cookson brought up that the owner of the new spa downtown said she needs a handicapped parking spot at the bottom of the ramp outside her business because currently people are parking there and taking that spot away from her clients who need it. Mr. Stein said they can look into it. The HDC discussed the parallel parking spaces in Town marked as handicapped parking.

Mr. Mitchell asked Mr. Fox to print out some of the flyers pertaining to the forums coming up regarding the housing element of the Master Plan. He thought it would be good to distribute them to the business owners/guests when they arrive.

MEETING WITH DOWNTOWN BUSINESS AND PROPERTY OWNERS

Overview of the HDC

- Efforts to date
- How the HDC is funded
- Plans for the future

Potential Railroad Avenue Improvements

At approximately 8:35 a.m., Mr. Stein introduced himself and welcomed the business owners and managers explaining the HDC is a publicly chartered organization formed in 2011-12 to promote the Business District in Hamilton. He listed some of the things being considered to promote economic development downtown. For example, everyone is on septic and they've done numerous studies about getting a sewer system. He explained that the HDC also owns property downtown (59 and 63 Willow St.) He said one of the thoughts of the HDC is to get a group of business owners together (or to work with the group that used to be active in the past if it were reactivated) for the purpose of identifying how the HDC can help them grow their businesses using meals tax money. He had Mr. Fox show the slides and the potential plans, including addressing connectivity issues, safer crosswalks, better sidewalks, period lighting, plantings, etc. He said he wanted them to brainstorm on what ideas would be most important to them and whether the ideas are worth it to explore.

Mr. Mitchell asked what some of the impediments to their businesses are that the HDC can help them overcome, for example, parking issues. He noted that Hamilton basically has two commercial districts on either side of 1A.

Listening to business owners' ideas to promote/help downtown businesses

Martha Gardner, owner of Timeless Interiors, 52 Railroad Ave., said she thought signage was a huge issue. She said she liked the idea of making the area cohesive. She said she worked with Don Robinson on the Christmas Stroll and wants to make that successful. She'd like to see how they can tie the area together, including the part that extends down Bay Road to where the Locksmyth is located. She doesn't like the corner where Cumberland Farms is. Perhaps a sign that lists what businesses are down the street might be helpful. She suggested they could all buy their own plaque to put on the sign.

Paul Thober, owner of the Weathervane Tavern, 85 Railroad Ave., said he thinks framing the area with sidewalks and lighting would be good, as they've had the same sidewalk and curbing for 39 years. He said in Salem they have colorful crosswalks. He thought some secondary lighting that's lower and something with a cast iron, antique look would be nice.

Linda Mieggs of the Shoppes at Hamilton Crossing, 15 Walnut Rd., who drove from Rhode Island to attend, said they've been talking about signage for years. She thought something as simple as a welcome sign at the train station would help.

Mr. Thober said his restaurant, the Weathervane Tavern, alone has contributed \$85K in meals tax money.

Mr. Stein said part of the process is getting everything in the right sequence. What are the priorities? What is appropriate to tackle now?

Mr. Boudreault of the Locksmyth, 161 Bay Rd., said when they first had a big event, which was in the fall, they had 43 vendors and a good turnout. However, just to rent a spot the food truck had to spend \$150 on a license—so they were \$150 in the hole before they could even sell one sandwich. He wondered whether the Board of Health could issue a permit that would be for maybe three months so it would be easier for them to afford. The HDC discussed looking into that. One idea was to cover the cost of the licenses or see if they could talk with the Board of Health about making them good for six months.

Mr. Mitchell said he's heard that one thing that deters having the Christmas Stroll and other events is the cost of insurance for the event. Mr. Boudreault said no, that's not an issue. He explained that the first year the business development group had to come up with insurance and after that it was determined the Town would cover it.

Mr. Thober mentioned that Mr. Domelowicz had had a good idea about planning some events around Hamilton's signature aspect that is equestrian and perhaps they could close off downtown streets and bring in horses, which might draw people from outside the community.

Mr. Stein asked for ideas on how to advertise. Mr. Bourdreault suggested a banner across 1A, but Mr. Hubbard said it can't be done because 1A is a State road. Ms. Gardner asked about perhaps having a spot on the Town's website for the businesses, such as a calendar of event. Mr. Stein mentioned the idea of a separate website (as Mr. Hubbard had suggested earlier) that drives people to the businesses and perhaps a link to it on the Town site.

Mr. Mitchell said the HDC wanted to demonstrate progress and asked: If there were five things they would want to see done immediately, what would they be? Ideas presented included: less expensive permitting for events; signage at the municipal parking lot at Accord Food Pantry (since many mistakenly think that is just Accord's lot); enforcing two-hour parking so people don't park there for the train; slowing traffic down in the business district; an electronic board advertising what's going on in Town at the train station and at Patton Park; a control or pedestrian light at the crosswalk in front of Connolly's Pharmacy.

Mr. Thober said he trimmed out a pear tree in front of his tavern with cobblestones around it and thought it softened the street and added character. He suggested more of that. Mr. Mitchell said that would go along with sidewalk improvements. He said the amount of money the meals tax brings in each year is about \$70K.

A woman who works at A Monogram Shop, 56 Railroad Ave., suggested creating a Facebook group to promote local businesses. She said a lot of Hamilton and Wenham residents use the Hamilton Wenham Facebook group, but the businesses aren't allowed to advertise

there. She thought perhaps a Facebook Group where they could promote their businesses might be good.

Mr. Mitchell asked if there were a cohesive group the HDC could be connecting with. Ms. Gardner said the Merchants group Don Robinson started still exists, but has dwindled. Mr. Mitchell said the HDC can assist them in their efforts to have a voice in the Town.

Mr. Thober said he likes the HDC's beatification ideas, such as the flowers and seasonal signs, which aren't big-ticket items.

Mr. Stein asked if they thought there should be more events. Ms. Gardner said it was impossible to get vendors for the events because of all the restrictions. She thought a map or brochure that listed the businesses would be good to have. Mr. Mitchell said maybe the HDC could assist with that. Tim Neill, art conservator of Allied Conservation, 75 Railroad Ave., said he drew a map and has digitized it. They discussed having maps of the area printed up, such as Gloucester has, which list retail shops, restaurants, and walking trails.

Another idea that came up was having a farmer's market or a shared farmers markets with other towns that could bring in some foot traffic. Mr. Thober noted Danvers does this so it must be possible.

Mr. Neil said clients from out of town have told him Hamilton isn't what they expected. They are expecting more brick, lanterns, etc.

A woman who works at the restaurant 15 Walnut said she thought lighting was a big issue. At night it creates a glow or warmth that draws people in. They discussed needing something visual that draws people from Patton Park along Bay Road leading down to Railroad Ave. Mr. Thober mentioned flags are nice.


Mr. Fox supplied his email address as a contact.

Mr. Mitchell asked what would be a good meeting time. Most thought 8:30 a.m. was good. He said he wanted accountability and asked for ideas on whether it had been a good forum and how they might do it better. Mr. Thober said if the HDC gave progress reports and the business owners saw accomplishments it would fuel their motivation.

Adjournment

The HDC voted unanimously among those present (4-0) to adjourn the meeting at approximately 9:25 a.m.

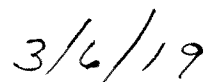
Prepared by:



Mary Alice Cookson



Attest



Date