

▪ **Oct 12, 2023, 7:00 p.m. EDC Meeting Minutes – Town Hall Conference Room**

▪ Attendees:

- Margaret Eklind, Jodi Harris, Town Administrator Brendhan Zubricki, Donna Roy, Tina Lane, Stacey Clarimundo, Ryan Madrigal, Town Planner Dana Menon, BOS Chair Ruth Pereen, Resident Tom Barrieau

▪ Meeting called to order at 7:05 pm by Chairman Harris.

▪ Public Comment: None

▪ Minutes from the 9/18/23 meeting were approved with edits.

▪ Brainstorming on potential, new revenue opportunities for the town

- Jodi encouraged the committee to offer all ideas, big or small. We will flush out which projects to pursue later.
- Tina questioned the value of the town's CPA participation and asked to discuss revoking CPA. Currently, tax dollars are taken but their use is restricted, and the fund balance is significant. She presented a list of projects approved for funding since 2007.
  - Brendhan will seek advice to see if lightposts funding can come from the CPA recreation category as did the benches on the causeway.
  - Donna asked how does revoking CPA bring revenue to the town? Tina's idea is that it does not generate revenue but does provide tax relief.
  - Dana explained the breakdown of required CPA contributions: 10% each into open space, housing and historic projects and the 70% balance is available for uncategorized. Brendhan provided reports showing \$83K state match against town contribution of \$271K from the surcharge on tax bills.
  - Jodi said we need to determine the legal use of funds rather than revoke CPA.
  - Community Preservation Committee, CPC, needs to meet in order to present projects to FTM. Approval does not require a 2/3 vote at FTM.
  - Ryan asked if the Boardwalk Project mentioned in the 2013 Essex River study qualified for CPA recreation funding.
    - Brendhan explained that project required an easement from the property owner who owns part of the seabed behind the restaurant. Owner was concerned that it would hinder maintenance of the building and did not want an easement.
    - Ryan asked, with dredging that will take place next year, does the town have transient moorings? Jodi said we do, but not in the river basin. With dredging, will there be an opportunity to bring boaters on the river into town? A boardwalk was planned to have public tie ins. The restaurant owner was in favor of the project but the building owner was not. Donna suggested we ask the building owner again citing impact similar projects have had on other towns. The cost was 1M at the time of the 2013 study.
    - Jodi said we would need to review the numbers and consider what happens in 30 years with sea level rise. Donna offered that it was the waves, not sea level rise that flooded the restaurants on the river side. Woodman's was flooded from waters from the other side.
    - Jodi asked how much meals tax would be generated from an investment of 400 feet of boardwalk factoring the number of boats and the time spent at the boardwalk. Ryan pointed out that at Cape Ann Marina & Newburyport, boaters radio in and the harbor master manages the dock usage and there is a charge for docking.
    - Ryan added that if feasible, the boardwalk would be nice to tie into a boardwalk near town parking lot where the railroad track was. An easement would be needed. Brendhan reported that the owners have stated they will never agree to an easement for anything associated with that property.
    - Margaret mentioned ERBA and if we should consider tax breaks for industries that bring "busloads" of tourists to town. Jodi pointed out the per the Economic Development Plan, residents are not in favor of that.
      - Currently Cape Ann SUP provides a service similar to ERBA. Jodi said our zoning currently allows businesses in neighborhoods which is why a moratorium is in place. Brendhan said the Boardwalk report would be a good template to refer to should we want to consider projects along the river.

- Margaret suggested we continue to sell more lots as we did on Gregory Island. Brendhan reported the revenue from that effort was \$21K for lots with restrictions.
- Donna shared information about parking pass machines and suggested their use at the town ramp for boaters.
  - The machines can be programmed: Users can reserve a date and time. The town could restrict the quantity of users, establish blackout times or restricted hours. The machine provides a coupon that allows users to park in a designated area.
  - Another option is programming for daily/weekly/monthly reservations for a designated time of day. The town collects fee in advance, so it benefits whether the user shows up or not.
  - Price range to purchase a machine is \$3,500 to \$6,300. An app is downloadable for users.
  - Donna suggested we develop a plan as we wait for dredging to be completed and thinks boat owners would be willing to pay to get their boat in the water. Conomo Point could be considered as another site for a parking machine.
  - Changes to “residents only” policy may be considered.
- Donna suggested allowing tiny houses for older residents to stay in town or downsize, younger residents to live in and then move to a larger home and hospitality workers to rent and be able to live and work in town. Zoning changes would be needed to allow smaller homes on small parcels.
  - Donna pointed out that we are currently landlords on the Point. The town can hire property management for tiny house rentals.
  - The rentals are seasonal, and the town would collect a rental fee and a short-term rental fee (28 day). She observed that tenants are willing to pay \$5K/week, plus septic and other fees at the Point.
  - There are 2 scenarios: have tiny house seasonal rentals on municipal lots at Conomo or sell smaller pieces of (currently untaxed) town property and allow tiny houses. Only municipalities can use tight tanks for construction. Septic would be an issue those purchasing lots for a tiny house.
  - The size of the prefab tiny house is approximately 870sf. It would not be suitable for a family dwelling, but for 2 people max.
  - Brendhan offered that if we had the money to buy tiny homes and tight tanks, right now the option would be on the existing town owned lots at Conomo because they are preexisting and fit under the zoning districts. The lot sizes are grandfathered. There are 6 lots. You can show historic use for installing tight tanks.
  - Donna tied together the management of tiny house rentals with the management of the Centennial Grove & ball fields to justify looking at a Parks and Rec Department.
  - Dana added that we can strategically select which lots to use for parking vs tiny houses.
- Stacey’s suggestions for revenue
  - Parking fees are common in many towns she visits and are a source of revenue.
  - The town’s current business permit fee is \$25/4 yr. She suggests we review our fees to be comparable to nearby communities or change to a yearly fee.
  - Stacy asked if there was a signage fee along with the approval process. Brendhan there is only a fee if a building permit is required. The business needs to follow the sign bylaw.
  - Fee to rent fields for adult leagues. Brendhan shared that currently at Centennial Grove, leagues pay \$10/participant. The DPW manages the fields at Memorial Park and does not charge fees but requires leagues to maintain the fields for their use. Jodi pointed out that the DPW still mows/maintains the fields there so that is a cost to the town.
  - Traffic islands can be opportunities for businesses to sponsor and advertise. The same opportunity will be for the lampposts along the causeway to sponsor flowers, banners.
- Ryan suggested electric charging stations in town.
  - Brendhan said grants were considered and Board of Public Works opted not to pursue. After installation the management of the stations involves money transactions, maintenance of station after warranty and the cost of cell dialer. The BPW said the DPW has too many tasks to take on another.
  - Ryan reported that charger locations are on EV owners’ app.
  - Dana added that there is funding for it now, which we could miss out on if we delay.
- Dana, referencing Stacy’s points on fees, suggested we calculate cost per transaction and adjust fees accordingly. Brendhan cautioned that it may reveal that we could be charging too much. Per

- the Emerson College test, if a charge is above the cost, it could be considered an illegal tax. The Building Permit cost is expensive with all the hands that have to touch the application.
- Margaret suggested concessions at Memorial Park. Donna asked if that meant having vendors bid on running the concession? Yes, per Margaret.
    - Margaret asked about funding through donations. Brendhan said that all gifts to the town need to be received by a vote of the BOS.
    - Margaret considered establishing a “Friends of” as an option for people to donate to support the town. Brendhan shared that the recent effort to seek Affordable Housing Trust donations via an insert in the tax bill received \$1000. The effort cost \$300 for the insert plus the cost of his time and advise from Town Counsel
    - Researching the unknown parcels off Southern Ave could lead to increased revenue.
  - Jodi agreed re: Unknown parcels effort and added there is also an opportunity at 30 Apple St. She outlined the challenge: We have a housing crunch. We have an expense problem with the cost per student vs the avg tax bill which creates the optics of a revenue problem.
    - Would like to look at over 55 housing development at 30 Apple St. Ryan has a layout for over 55 housing if that is decided.
    - Brendhan clarified that only new or substantial addition is new growth. Selling a home for substantially more than the assessed value is not new growth but falls under Prop 2.5%. Re: homes designated as affordable; the availability is not limited to Essex residents per Fair Housing Laws.
    - ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units) is an option for seniors to stay in town (granny pods) and is being considered. If attached to a house a connection to the sewer is allowed for the ADU. A separate structure cannot be attached to the sewer. The sewer development was about pollution abatement not about growth.
      - Adding a unit to a 3BR house with 5BR septic capacity is ok if owned by the same owner. A condo is an option, but 2 separate owners cannot use the same septic system.
  - Donna asked about parcels for a solar panel farm. The town would not make revenue, but it would defray the town’s energy cost.
    - Brendhan reviewed available town properties: The old landfill was never properly closed and is not buildable. Large town parcels are: Conomo, Memorial & Centennial Grove,
    - The option of rooftop solar on town buildings ie pavilion, new school etc. was suggested.
    - Brendhan advised that we need to consider the cost/ benefit. Towns can get funding for panels with grants to install but can’t insure/maintain or maintain with grants.
  - Jodi suggested a river usage fee. Brendhan said the harbormaster is working on a proposal. Jodi questioned, besides the sticker, what else would be proposed? A discussion followed about enforcement and town personnel:
    - Personnel needed for facilities director. Currently Brendhan performs those tasks
    - False alarms fees are in the bylaws, but we do not charge.
      - An admin manages the fees for the Harbormaster, Police & Fire.
      - Security alarms responses are increasing.
  - Jodi suggested considering a split tax rate & split water, sewer & seasonal rates.
    - Brendhan pointed out that with 10% commercial, a split rate would burden them significantly with little relief to residents. This is considered every year. To do so would need the approval of the Assessors and then the BOS.
  - Brendhan is compiling all our ideas and can come back with research for the next meeting
  - Ryan asked about timeline of 30 Apple St
    - Brendhan reported that the BOS will not move on 30 Apple until they know direction of School Building Authority (SBA) regarding Essex Elementary. If we wish to seek 30% reimbursement from state (for a ~\$40M project) we will need to learn their requirements.
  - Downtown lighting subsurface preparation project update and Discuss need for seeking funding for remainder of lighting project at Fall Town Meeting - Brendhan
    - We have \$260K remaining in lighting budget. We hired a contractor for subsurface prep at \$212K. Factoring in possible change orders and police detail cost will zero out the \$260K.
      - Work will start in winter unless we can get a Time Only change order to do the work in the spring. This will avoid having cones bolted to the light bases on sidewalk during the winter.
    - We need to hire a separate group to put light poles up at \$180K per state contract pricing and

\$80K to run wires so \$260K will be required from Town meeting.

- The EDC ask for 23 light posts will explain the one-time cost for a 50 year investment bringing a permanent look and feel along the causeway with banners, plantings and outlets for seasonal lighting.
- A fire truck ask of \$1.5M is also on the warrant. With ~2.2M free cash, we will try to access CPA funds. Brendhan will ask the CPA advisor.
- Plaques for lighting project were presented.
  - Jodi announced that Shelly resigned from EDC as Planning Board rep and appreciated her time on the committee especially her work on the plaques for the lighting project. The patinaed plaques look historic. There are 23 in basement of Town Hall which will be installed during subsurface prep.
- Folsom Pavilion replacement project update - Brendhan
  - The volunteers need \$75K for to shingle the roof. The committee discussed using CPA recreation funds. The CPA committee (CPC) needs to meet and approve the project before we can ask at FTM
- Paglia Park update - Brendhan
  - A rock was placed at the park and plaque was installed by Andrew Spinney
  - The DOT contractor still needs to work on grass seeding before we can add benches and tables
- Discussion of Selectmen's final mobile vendor policy - Brendhan
  - BOS agreed that only food trucks allowed are those with invitation of organizer for town events.
- Discussion of Selectmen's final take on resident parking sticker policy and fee.
  - The BOS was not inclined to raise fees or change regulations to allow more than 1 sticker per person.
- Update on owner unknown parcel title research - Brendhan
  - \$1K was spent for a contractor to research. The BOS agreed to another \$1K. The contractor, Brian, feels he will have enough information to come up with the long view to solution for the unknown owner parcels.
- The committee inquired about the status of the \$500K Grant for the bathrooms at the grove and improvements at the cottage. Brendhan is expecting to know soon and will email the committee. He said he is looking at the Town Technology fund to fund a node at the cottage & concession stand for cameras and wifi.
- There will be an insert in December tax bill notify the public of a "Finance 101" public forum
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- The next EDC meeting will be held at town hall on Thursday, 11/2/23 at 7:00
- Meeting Adjourned 9:14
  
- Respectfully submitted,
- Tina Lane