

1 **Improvements Committee Meeting**

2 **Wednesday, April 9, 2014**

3 **6:30 p.m.**

4 **Municipal Building Community Room**

5
6 **MINUTES**

- 7
8 **Present:** Bill Kaigle, Chair (Historical Society); Amy Cook (At-Large); Lori Donna (Economic
9 Development Commission); Gisela Alpert (Artists' Guild); Pilar Paulsen (Artists'
10 Guild Alternate); Henry Bonges (Planning Commission)
11 **Absent:** Julie Rutz (Planning Commission Alternate)
12 **Others:** None
13 **Staff:** Brian Palaia, Town Manager; Jacob Hemmerick, Town Planner
14

15 **I. Call to Order**

16 The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.
17

18 **II. Approval of Minutes of March 19, 2014**

19 Cook stated that she is not recorded as being in attendance. Palaia noted that Rutz is listed twice.
20 Alpert said that the railroad suggestion should be credited to Cook. Donna MOVED to approve the
21 Minutes as amended, SECOND by Alpert. Unanimously APPROVED.
22

23 **III. New Business:**

24
25 **A. Continued Discussion of Projects and Priorities**

26 The Committee opened by discussing the Stannard house as a top-10 priority. Kaigle is working with
27 Palaia to pursue a grant to fund an assessment of the building to see if preservation is structurally
28 possible; Alpert offered assistance, if needed.
29

30 There was discussion as to whether the corridor improvements should be considered as a whole or
31 separate items. Items discussed were: lighting, a multi-use path, placing utility lines underground,
32 landscaping, community art, and design guidelines to promote a cohesive image of town. There was
33 concern about the sequencing of corridor improvements that would result in duplications of effort and
34 expense. The Committee also discussed the target scope of the US 7 corridor. Consensus was that
35 efforts should include the southern town line to the dam. Cook requested that a map of US7 be brought
36 to the next meeting. Donna inquired if the TIF boundaries might lead funding opportunities, such as the
37 proposed hourglass intersection at Railroad, US 7, and Middle. The Committee saw the hourglass as an
38 opportunity to realize some of these corridor improvements. Palaia gave an overview of the State
39 hourglass funding and potential local opportunities for the project. The following summarizes the
40 corridor ideas discussed:

41 *Lighting:*

42 Cook said that lighting should be designed and timed in ways that are sensitive to adjacent
43 dwellings. Bonges said that he recently went to an energy conference, where he learned that
44 other towns considering lighting changes have found that there were calls to reduce the number
45 of streetlights. The Committee discussed the good and the bad of lighting design and scale in
46 Essex, but were favorable to lighting improvements.
47

48 *Utility Lines:*
49 Alpert displayed four photographs of US 7 displayed with and without power lines to
50 demonstrate the aesthetic impact. Palaia suggested that Green Mountain Power come to speak
51 to the group, but Alpert concluded this was a later step. Palaia shared that he awaits a response
52 from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns as to how other municipalities have undertaken
53 buried utility lines.

54 *Landscaping:*
55 Alpert suggested adding more verticality to the corridor through landscaping, and the
56 Committee had questions about planting within the US7 right of way or to what extent
57 cooperating with private property owners along the corridor should be considered.

58 *Public Art:*
59 Public art placed along corridor focal points was viewed favorably. The National Arts Council
60 Grant was mentioned as a possible funding mechanism.

61 *Multi-Use Path:*
62 The concept of separated multi-use path (instead of a sidewalk running adjacent US7) was well-
63 received by the Committee. The Committee also thought that it be a powerful economic driver
64 that business could get behind. The Committee inquired about funding opportunities, such as
65 the byways program. They also mentioned revisiting the Town's mobility plan.

66 *Design Guidelines:*
67 Bonges and Donna mentioned the possibility of some voluntary design guidelines for the
68 corridor that would encourage a cohesive image.

69
70 **B. Review of Existing Materials**

71 The Committee briefly discussed a document highlighting outreach feedback from nine local business
72 owners. The Committee discussed the value of business community members who recognize that
73 improved maintenance, access, and corridor aesthetic can drive profits.

74
75 **C. Citizens Institute on Rural Design Grant**

76 The Committee shifted to discuss the Citizens Institute on Rural Design Grant Opportunity, which would
77 fund a planning design workshop. Donna said one aspect that the town hasn't fully considered in its
78 planning is local food systems: such as community gardens, farmers' markets, community supported
79 agriculture, slow food, food hub, etc. Cook, while in favor of community gardens, questioned whether
80 more planning was needed, and spoke in favor of more action-oriented efforts. Donna said she is
81 working with Sonnicks, Planning Director, to explore a possible application. Alpert said that the *Town*
82 *Core Streetscape and Accessibility Design Study* provides a solid aesthetic plan.

83
84 **A. Priorities (Continued)**

85 The conversation shifted back to the priority list, and the dilapidated Creamery was mentioned as a
86 problem at one a highly trafficked gateway. Cook was in favor of this being a creator space or railway
87 stop. Hemmerick and Palaia cautioned that the creamery building's condition is beyond restoration and
88 site control for demolition requires cooperation to those holding claim. There was some discussion of
89 ownership, and Kaigle offered to reach out the owner, if and when appropriate. The Committee asked
90 about the measures that might address vacant buildings or general property maintenance. They also
91 inquired about opportunities for a new civic space if the Highway Garage if it is relocated. In sum, the
92 following ideas were discussed or mentioned:

- 93
94 1. Stannard House
95 2. US 7 Corridor Improvements

- 96 a. Decorative Lighting
97 b. Multi-use Pathway
98 c. Landscaping
99 d. Public Art
100 e. Underground Utilities
101 3. Local Food Initiatives: Community Gardens, Farmers' Market & CSA
102 4. Sensory Gardens
103 5. Voluntary Aesthetic Guidelines
104 6. Town Green/Performance Space
105 7. Creamery Property
106 8. Visual/Performing Arts Center
107 9. Creator/Innovation Space
108 10. Railway Station/Stop
109 11. Property Maintenance/Vacant Building Measure
110 12. Contest Incentives for Property Maintenance
111 13. Improvement to Triangle at Bartlett & US 7
112 14. Civic Space to Replace Town Garage
113 15. Stabilized Assessments to Incentivize Property Improvements
114 16. Creating an Attractor that Would Draw Visitors to Bombardier Park Events
115 17. Creating an indoor and/or outdoor municipal pool
116

117 **IV. Items for Future Agendas**

118 The Committee asked if they should do any homework.

- 119 • Kaigle will work on the Stannard grant and will send Hemmerick his recorded priority list.
- 120 • Donna will identify some possible aesthetic guidelines.
- 121 • Alpert will investigate how other towns have approached buried utility lines.
- 122 • Hemmerick will provide a TIF District Map and bring a map of US 7 to the next meeting.

123
124 Discussing how to proceed, Palaia suggested they begin prioritizing the list to address Alpert's
125 suggestion on focusing on one or two projects annually to complete. The next meeting will be held on
126 May 14.
127

128 **V. Adjournment**

129 Donna MOVED to adjourn at 8:25 p.m., SECOND by Alpert. Unanimously APPROVED.
130

131 Respectfully Submitted,

132 
133

134
135 Jacob Hemmerick, Town Planner