

MINUTES
**CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS/
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**
Meeting of Thursday, January 18, 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; Public Works Director Terry Deering; Director of Community Development Tom Poirier, and Executive Assistant Jessica Hughes.

1. Consideration of the minutes of the November 30, 2023.

A motion was MADE by Councilor Wilder Cross, SECONDED by Councilor Simms, and VOTED to accept the minutes of the November 30, 2023 meeting. Unanimous vote.

2. Current Business

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

Town Manager Ephrem Paraschak shared that staff met with the School department on future facilities. He said a fundamental issue is that they don't know what funding may be available at the state-level, but the elementary school is probably number one and then the high school.

He further said that his understanding is that funding may ultimately dictate the site and size and what that project looks like, which from a planning perspective, puts us in a little bit of limbo. He said if the Town and School endorses a particular model, we will need to look for that funding mechanism in the hopes that the school may get it; we may have to carve out parts of these sites and say no major capital investment going forward and maybe we don't want to dump \$2 million into a project if in five years from now we have to take it down. He further said then there are the CHA plans with certain themes. He said that parts of Narragansett might always be evolving, and we may be able to carve out that area as a future ball field expansion or growth, because there's no plan that shows that as a school. There may be those themes that are universal. He added that while there are no plans to expand public safety right now, 30 years from now there might be and we don't want to have a school right up against the border.

A discussion ensued regarding the skatepark encroaching on the site plan and trying to get ahead of displacing some of the fields in which Councilor Gagnon said we shouldn't be developing or putting additional stuff in that envelope. He said a problem is that the entrance to the high school would come up to the skatepark, so we shouldn't develop anymore stuff in the area. He added that the middle school is similar.

Councilor Gagnon said that the issue would be displacement of most of the recreation programs that utilize that field structure, which is the same site as where the elementary school would be placed per the CHA study. He questioned why the Town would put a half-million- or million-

dollar tennis courts in an area that is going to be decommissioned within a year if we get funding from the state for an elementary school.

Councilor Gagnon suggested putting tennis courts elsewhere on the site by the basketball courts that are already deficient.

Councilor Simms questioned how often the existing basketball courts are used.

A discussion ensued regarding the school space using and displacing recreation programs in which Councilors Gagnon and Simms conveyed their support of the School and Recreation departments sharing the same athletic facilities.

Director of Community Development Tom Poirier said that we must be cautious about the public accessing School athletic fields during school hours.

Mr. Paraschak said this endeavor is showing us that it looks like we have a lot of land, but we really don't have a lot of land for any variety of uses. He said the fields take up a lot of space, and if there are new schools to be built in the next 5, 10, 20, or 30 years, the land we have right now is being used for something; there is some vacant land, but we either need to be more efficient with the land we have, or acquire more land, or both. He further said that acquiring land can be part of a school project that, if that happens, it doesn't mean it must go on these sites.

Mr. Poirier referred to the Chick property and said the study assumes that there's no school there anymore, so there are so many unknowns and so many variables.

Councilor Gagnon said this is also a timing issue; when the school gets funding, it would demo recreation program fields. He said that if we wanted to do something or recommend something as a group, we should bubble the area to prevent further development; he wants the Town to be good stewards of everybody's money and time.

Councilor Simms said it seems like those are all large undertakings and that we should work with what we have unless we get some funding.

A discussion ensued in which Councilor Gagnon said that when the School department applies for funding, the Town will want to move quickly on where we will put existing recreation fields.

A discussion regarding the location of new schools ensued.

Mr. Paraschak asked if it makes sense for staff to bring back some sort of plan for limited growth, expansion areas, potential school, recreation growth, and carve out some area for public safety, if they ever need to do a small addition. He said staff can also take a stab at that for the middle school and put something on paper for the committee to look at.

Councilor Gagnon said it goes back to that other one that we had where you're going to have to formally add the basketball courts and the skate park to the master plan, and then probably a bubble. He said that he thinks a bubble is fine, because then it's ambiguous. He said he wouldn't

put tennis courts where prospectively the School department might want to put the elementary school.

Mr. Paraschak said that we will need a third-party engineer or architect to prepare the plans and would need about two months.

Councilor Wilder Cross said the committee can't do anything until they have plans.

Councilor Gagnon said we are a growing community and still need to build out some of our needs.

Councilor Wilder Cross asked how much of the land is considered wetlands to which staff responded that the green area behind Narragansett cannot be developed.

Councilor Gagnon said that the School will be cannibalizing the tennis courts at some point at the high school and moving them to the middle school, which is why the committee is having this discussion to determine the placement and work on our master plans.

- 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).

A discussion ensued regarding the Chick Master Plan and property in which Councilor Gagnon said he and the council voted to endorse the current plan 10 years ago, and that the council earmarked money for the baseball diamond, which they realized that the cost would be one million or a bit less instead of \$250,000. He said the plan will need to be redone, which could be done more economically through the development of new schools. He further said that with CIP (capital improvement project) money in our budgeting, we would be looking to fulfill this master plan that's already been adopted by the Town. He noted that you can see the road coming from Libby. He added that he believes there is a trail network that runs through there.

Mr. Paraschak said staff will plan on bringing that back to the committee at the March 18th meeting with a dotted line around the areas discussed, which the committee can adjust and go from there.

Councilor Simms said it is tough to predict demographic changes.

- 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 August 1, 2023).

Public Works Director Terry Deering said that staff met with Owens McCullough of Sebago Technics and he shared a plan from the School department reflecting some upgrades, one of which was the bus parking facility. He said staff made some recommendations on what they would like to see, including the bus parking facility. He said the bus parking needs to be addressed; a consideration is making sure the bus parking goes in a direction that doesn't squeeze in one direction. He said it is currently squeezing a lot, which can be redirected. He added that staff put some long-term ideas on the plan, so they are optimistic that Sebago Technics will have an updated presentation to present to the committee in two months by the March meeting.

Mr. Deering said 30 acres could be for sale in the future near the back property. He added that the property across from Public Works drive is in a trust.

Mr. Paraschak said staff can contact the property owners to inquire about the 30 acres.

Councilor Gagnon asked if “potential expansion area” can be noted on the site plan. He also said that he wants more concrete information regarding where we are heading with the parcel and how it will be developed as he doesn’t want to be forced or driven into a split decision with a potentially downward impact.

A discussion ensued regarding school bus parking at the Public Works property.

Mr. Paraschak said he met with Superintendent Heather Perry regarding addressing the School and Town’s mutual needs.

Councilor Wilder Cross said she worries about providing better parking and long-term planning.

A discussion ensued regarding long-term planning in the brush collection area and potential impacts on land use changes.

3. Items Referred for Future Meetings/Action

- A. 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).

Mr. Poirier advised that staff are expecting plans anytime now from Sebago Technics.

- B. Explore current and future economic development programs (referred on February 7, 2023).

Councilor Simms said there is a potential opportunity for incubator spaces for a business founder or an early-stage business. He said it would be worth some conversation with USM as to what kind of plans they have for business incubator spaces, which could be used for a large manufacturing space and equipment that can be shared amongst a startup that can’t afford that kind of investment upfront, or a coworking space with internet access and open space for laptops and a couple of meeting rooms.

Councilor Wilder Cross said it would be a good idea to talk with USM on a plan for the Gorham campus.

Mr. Paraschak said he believes the plan is to take down the round buildings. He said it would be worth having a conversation at the chair- and staff-level. He said that in prior leadership at the university, it was made very clear to us that the investment at the university would be for first - year students, athletics, and everything else would be important.

Councilor Gagnon said there may be restrictions on the university land itself.

Mr. Poirier said staff have had talks regarding this topic. He said we identify that zone as urban residential although the comprehensive plan identifies that being a university district to better identify the use that's currently going on that site. He said we would take their master plan, incorporate it into the zoning district. He said that staff have had multiple discussions with many people at USM about this zoning, and we want to move forward with this university zone. He added that this has not gotten traction so far and staff are awaiting a response from them.

Councilor Gagnon said that he would like to ask Council Chairperson Phillips reach out to the USM President and maybe have them come and talk to us at a workshop; maybe have a discussion with her in addition to a workshop. He said USM has done a press tour where they've been in the paper saying how USM is a great part of Gorham and Gorham treats USM well; the one thing that was absent from it that he noticed is what does USM does for Gorham. He said if you reread the article, it's gorgeous and wonderful to Gorham; that they we've done all these things like the Husky program where you can get a discount if you're a student, but we used to have a marketplace there and all other things. Councilor Gagnon further said they're not saying we instituted them, but it was part of our town, and is not part of our Town currently and he would like to reestablish it with the Town.

Councilor Wilder Cross said she thinks that a lot of that was the result of two people working together and we need to have the same kind of cooperation going on. She added that it's unbelievable to think that two people can make that kind of thing happen, but that's the way it works.

Councilor Simms asked what we can do to get USM students to work and live in Gorham when they graduate as that is a great population pool and talent pool to be pulling from and presumably attracting businesses to come here to take advantage of that pool of talent. He said that we have a uniqueness that other communities don't have.

A discussion ensued between Councilor Gagnon and Simms regarding coordinating with Council Chairperson Phillips regarding inviting USM President Edmonston to future discussions on the Town and USM relationship.

Councilor Gagnon said he would reach out to Council Chairperson Phillips to request her assistance.

- C. 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 advised that staff and the surveyor are running into dead-ends and they will need to get a legal opinion to which Mr. Paraschak said staff can proceed in working with the Town's legal counsel.

Mr. Paraschak asked the committee if they are okay with the investment to do further research.

Councilor Gagnon said he wants a legal opinion on what options there are on the top roads for discontinuance.

A motion was MADE by Councilor Wilder Cross, SECONDED by Councilor Simms, and VOTED to ask staff to report back with an update at the next meeting. Unanimous.

4. Other Business

No items were discussed.

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

The next regular meeting will take place on February 29, 2024 at 11am. The items for discussion on the agenda will be as follows:

- A. Review of Little Falls light project and all materials to date.
- B. Review and discuss staff recommendations on roadways for discontinuance and send back to the Town Council for action (referred on June 6, 2023).

The following meeting will take place on March 28, 2024 at 11am with those agenda items to be set at the February 29, 2024 meeting.

6. 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: 12:16pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Hughes, Executive Assistant