

**Downtown TIF Advisory Committee
153 Farmington Falls Road
March 10, 2021 6:00 P.M.**

Minutes

TIF Committee members present were Richard Davis, Byron Davis, John Moore, Paul Mills, Jennifer Bjorn, and Laurie Gardner. Also in attendance were Brent West, Executive Director of the High Peaks Alliance.

Joshua Bell, Derek Hayes, and Peter Roberts were unable to attend.

ITEM 1: To Approve the Minutes of the June 12, 2019 Meeting

Ms. Gardner made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 12, 2019 meeting.
Mr. Moore seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

ITEM 2: To Review the Status of the Downtown TIF Reserve Account

Mr. R. Davis said last year the Selectmen approved \$50,000 to the TIF Reserve Account and they authorized expending \$733 to replace some security cameras in the downtown, leaving a current balance of \$49,267. He said the tax commitment is usually in late August and it is up to the Selectmen how much they will decide to appropriate, which in prior years has been \$100,000-\$125,000.

Mr. Moore said when it was set up, we didn't include a minimum amount, and this should be amended so it could never be \$0 funded. He said the fund was set up as an economic engine for the downtown.

ITEM 3: To Discuss and make a Recommendation on the use of TIF funds for Engineering for the Sandy River Multi-Use Bridge

Mr. R. Davis said in 2007 there was a fund-raising effort resulting in \$12,000 of local money being matched with \$48,000 from MaineDOT to fund a preliminary engineering study and cost estimate. He said the cost estimates were \$1,675,000/\$1,765,000/\$2,100,000. Mr. R. Davis said the design required a center pier because of the 330-foot span across the Sandy River, and the project cost is why the project has not moved forward. He said Mr. West approached him with another design and cost study using a cable-stayed bridge like the Leonard P. Zakim Bridge in Boston and the Penobscot Narrows Bridge in Bucksport.

Mr. West said a suspension bridge is anchored at both ends and continues up over the towers, and the cable-stayed bridge is a series of cables coming down from the towers to the deck, and this design doesn't require as much counterbalancing. He said he is the Executive Director of the High Peaks Alliance, which is a nonprofit that works on public access issues to

conserve land in the western mountains area. Mr. West said he has met with many organizations and people who are interested in this project, and he is willing to put the staff-time towards moving this project forward. He said we have secured some funding and are starting the permitting process to build an accessible trail from the old Farmington “snow dump” up to the south side of the abutment. Mr. West said their engineer thought the cable-stayed bridge would cost approximately the same as the 2007 estimates using current price estimates. He said developing recreational commerce is our future to sustain community growth. Mr. West said there are several funding sources available, and if the Town is serious about planning this project, the Downtown TIF will help with the required matching funds. He said Eric Calderwood designed the bridge near Grand Falls for the Maine Huts and Trails and others. Mr. West said we could organize a committee to work on putting the pieces together to raise funds for the project, and he thought it would have support from the State and federal level.

Ms. Gardner asked if he was looking at other alternatives to crossing the river.

Mr. West said this is a direct extension from the railway bed to the open spaces and gets the snowmobilers out of the congested downtown.

Ms. Gardner said we as a campus have not looked at the ramifications of this project such as damage to the playing fields, and she asked Mr. West to look at other options.

Mr. Mills said the owners of the “old Creamery Building” may have a deed restriction against ATVs accessing their property. He said there are other projects with a higher priority.

Discussion followed regarding snowmobile and ATV access, the accessible trail, the abutments, connecting to trails farther north, developing the waterfront, and easements.

Mr. West asked the Committee’s opinion on how to move the project forward with the towns people.

Mr. R. Davis said the town would be very supportive of it if they didn’t have to put any money into it. He said if your organization or a consortium were willing to put in the effort, we would be all for it, but we don’t have the staff or expertise to chase down the funding sources. Mr. R. Davis said we contacted MaineDOT about attaching a counter-levered bridge onto Center Bridge and they said no.

Mr. West suggested securing the easements for a bridge so that if, in the future, there is interest and funding for the project those would be in place.

ITEM 4: To Discuss and make a Recommendation on the use of TIF funds to help Support a Part-time Contracted Digital Marketing Assistant for the Farmington Downtown Association

Mr. R. Davis said this proposal fits with the purpose of the Downtown TIF.

Mr. Moore said it would be better to have a professional social media presence for the Downtown Association instead of the current ad hoc way of doing. He gave examples of the

news postings to YouTube. Mr. Moore said having a consistent presence with photos and videos promoting the downtown would provide organizations and businesses a valuable tool. He said the position is advertised and they have budgeted \$30 per hour.

Ms. Bjorn said we want to find someone who is invested and knows about Farmington, and not someone who will leave in a year or two. She said if businesses see the benefit of belonging to the Downtown Association, then maybe more of them would join.

Mr. B. Davis said it's not a lot of money to invest and it seems like it is worth a try, depending on the person.

Ms. Gardner made a motion to approve the Farmington Downtown Association's request of \$2,500. Mr. Moore seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

ITEM 5: To Discuss and make a Recommendation on the Installation of Decorative Streetlighting in the TIF District Section of High Street

Mr. R. Davis said we are looking at a two-year program for improving High Street with Phase 1 going from Broadway to South Street and Phase 2 would be from South Street to Route 2. He said the TIF area would have sidewalks with granite curbing, and the project is funded 50% by the MaineDOT with a cost of \$1.8 million total over two years - \$450,000 each year for the Town. Mr. R. Davis said this would be the appropriate time to install decorative lighting in the TIF district because the sidewalks would be torn up, and he distributed an estimate from Dirigo Engineering for \$93,100. He said he has marked the three lights that are not in the TIF district. Mr. R. Davis said if this project were to move forward, the Selectmen would have to appropriate more to the TIF account than the \$50,000 from last year and at least \$100,000-\$125,000 as in previous years.

Ms. Bjorn asked about the spacing of the lights.

Mr. R. Davis said he thinks they are 90 feet apart because this isn't as dark an area. He said if a decorative light was located under one of the current streetlights on the CMP poles, the pole light might be removed, but he hoped they would work in concert with each other.

Ms. Gardner asked if we could get a schematic of the CMP lights and proposed decorative light locations.

Mr. R. Davis said that would be an additional fee and he didn't know where the funds would come from. Also, the proposal didn't include engineering. He said this project, which isn't in the Town's budget, is an enhancement to the street project, and the only other source is the TIF funds.

Mr. Moore suggested redefining the TIF district and asking the Selectmen to appropriate more funds to the TIF account.

Discussion followed regarding the TIF district funding, improving the side streets,

discontinuing a side street, and lighting in front of UMF.

Mr. R. Davis suggested putting the underground conduit and light bases in the TIF district this year with a cost of \$41,100, which is something the TIF funds could support. He said the cost in the non-TIF area would be \$46,770. Mr. R. Davis asked Ms. Gardner if UMF could pay that, and she said no.

Discussion followed regarding extending TIF district boundaries.

Mr. R. Davis cautioned any changes to the TIF district must be authorized by the Department of Economic and Community Development, and this would take time and would have to go before the voters at a Special Town Meeting.

Mr. Mills made a motion to approve \$41,100 from the TIF funds in 2021 for underground conduit and light bases. Mr. Moore seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Mr. Mills made a motion to recommend the Town pursue the expansion of the Downtown TIF district to include both sides of High Street from Broadway to Lake Avenue to the extent that is not already in the district. Mr. Moore seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

ITEM 6: To Discuss Possible Future Projects

No one had any additional suggestions.

ITEM 7: To Discuss Other Business

No other business to discuss.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 P.M.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Cindy Gelinis.