

**Downtown TIF Advisory Committee
153 Farmington Falls Road
March 11, 2015 4:30 p.m.**

Minutes

TIF Committee members present were Richard Davis, Byron Davis, Alison Hagerstrom, Drew Hufnagel, John Moore, Mike Mansir, Mary Lello, Joshua Bell and Cindy Gelinas. Also present was Selectman, Andrew Buckland. Ron Gelinas, Gary Edwards, Cindi Ferguson, Kevin Madore, and Tom Saviello were unable to attend.

ITEM 1: To Approve the Minutes of the January 7, 2015 Meeting

Mr. Moore made the motion to accept the minutes as written.

Mr. Mansir seconded the motion.

VOTE: 9 – Affirmative 5 – Absent

Motion carried.

ITEM 2: To Review the Quotes for Engineering Services for the Proposed Downtown TIF Projects

Mr. R. Davis said six engineering firms submitted five copies of their proposals for the “Streetscape Project”: CES, Inc.; Dirigo Engineering; WBRC Architects-Engineers; Main-Land Development Consultants, Inc.; BH2M, Inc.; and A.E. Hodson Consulting Engineers. He said he had copied just the fee compensation section because there weren’t enough sets for all of the members. Mr. R. Davis suggested forming a subcommittee of three to four members along with the Town’s Code Enforcement Officer/Planner, Steve Kaiser, to review the proposals and discuss their findings at the next meeting.

Mr. Moore said the committee attendance at the last two meetings is running approximately 50%, and he suggested going over the proposals with all of the members at a regular meeting.

Mr. Hufnagel said he understood both positions but he agreed that the proposals should be reviewed with all available committee members at a regular meeting in order to report to the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Mansir confirmed that there weren’t enough TIF funds available at this time to complete the streetscape project.

Mr. R. Davis suggested we approach the project in segments as the funding becomes available, and this year the Board authorized to capture 40% for the TIF fund. He said the engineering Request For Proposal (RFP) contained the project specifications, which had been emailed to the members for their review and recommendations, and the engineering designs will still be valid a few years down the road. Mr. R. Davis said the RFP included a feasibility proposal for attaching the outrigger to Center Bridge, and parking next to the VIS

Park and the Whistle Stop Trail. He said the engineers have taken different approaches and levels of service for the project, and it will take time to review each proposal objectively to determine which is the best fit.

Discussion followed regarding the engineering proposals.

Mrs. Hagerstrom suggested asking Mr. Kaiser go over the bid packages and give a presentation at the next meeting.

Mr. Bell asked if we needed an engineer for the sidewalks on Front Street, and whether we could use the Town's Public Works Department or a design/build contractor for parts of the project.

Discussion followed regarding hiring a design/build contractor for some of the work to save money on engineering.

Mr. R. Davis said the Town is required by law to use an engineer on any project over \$100,000, and the engineering proposals were designed to develop a master plan for the TIF funds. He said the project includes street improvements, lighting analysis, existing underground utility lines and poles, and all of these elements will require a level of expertise along with coordinating approval from DOT and various entities. Mr. R. Davis said some expenses are an investment so it is done right and lasts forever.

Mr. Hufnagel suggested we could use a design/build bridge contractor to attach the bridge to Center Bridge.

Mr. Moore said not everything needs a professional engineer and using one doesn't guarantee it will be built correctly nor will it last forever.

Mrs. Hagerstrom made the motion to have Steve Kaiser meet with the Committee and conduct a workshop on the engineering proposals.

Mr. Bell seconded the motion.

VOTE: 9 – Affirmative 5 – Absent

Motion carried.

ITEM 3: To Review the RFP for Electrical Outlets

Mr. R. Davis said he had drafted the RFP with the assistance of Mike Carleton, the owner of IEC, Inc. He said Mr. Carleton recommended one pedestal with two receptacles at each location (Bridge Street traffic island and VIS Park) and nearest the most desirable trees for the LED Christmas lights. Mr. R. Davis said the "Welcome to Farmington" sign is lighted at the new Bjorn Park, thanks to the Bjorn donation, and looks very nice.

Mr. Mansir said that may be an insufficient amount to light the trees because we can only attach so many lines to each receptacle.

Mr. R. Davis said we won't know the cost until we send the RFP out to bid.

Mr. Bell made the motion to accept the RFP for electrical outlets as written.

Mr. Moore seconded the motion.

VOTE: 9 – Affirmative 5 – Absent

Motion carried.

ITEM 4: To Hear an Update on the Proposed Banners

Mrs. Hagerstrom said the sub-committee met last month with Jennifer Hutchinson to discuss the concepts for the design – “Experience Farmington”; street and area names; using similar colors and templates to make them easily identifiable in different sections of the town. She said the Committee is meeting on Monday, March 16th to review the drafts.

ITEM 5: To Discuss the Granary Property

Mr. R. Davis said there was discussion at the last meeting about purchasing the property and turning it into a municipal parking lot. He said Kelly Dexter has since purchased the property for \$120,000.

Mr. Hufnagel said he inspected the property with Mr. Dexter during the purchase process to determine what renovations would be needed and the associated costs. He said after the purchase, Mr. Dexter authorized him to contact local commercial property owners to buy the property, including the Town, for \$140,000.

Mr. Mansir said this is an opportunity that doesn't come around often and the limited amount of parking in the downtown has always been an issue.

Mr. Moore said he asked Acme Engineering to give him an estimate on how many parking spaces could be accommodated on the site, and he said, they came up with 37 spaces.

Mr. B. Davis said it is a historic landmark and tearing it down would change the look of the downtown. He said keeping it private would be the highest and best use for the property.

Mr. R. Davis said it would be an expensive parking lot to build for 37 spaces because the cost would include the purchase price, demolition, disposal, grading, and drainage. He said the building has served as a beneficial commercial use in the downtown. Mr. R. Davis said the Transportation Advisory Committee conducted a parking survey several years ago, and it was determined that the parking problem is a perception and not a reality because people want to park in front of the store they are visiting.

Mr. Moore said he thinks the downtown is in trouble, and the lack of parking is one of the reasons, and there will be more vacancies over the next few years. He stated this is the first time in twenty years that a strategically located property has come up for foreclosure, and the TIF was designed for just this purpose - to provide parking for the future.

Discussion followed regarding parking in the downtown, and options and renovation costs to the Granary.

Mr. R. Davis said the Town doesn't have a lot of money and it is only going to get worse in the future, and he said, we have to be very careful of our spending and how it impacts the tax base and tax payers.

Mr. Bell said he hears both sides of the issue and the need for strategically located parking, but he doesn't know where the money will come from.

Mr. Mansir made the motion to wait six months to see what happens with the property.

Mr. Bell seconded the motion.

VOTE: 8 – Affirmative 1 – Opposed 5 – Absent

Motion carried.

ITEM 6: To Discuss using TIF Funds to Promote Available Business Spaces

Mr. Hufnagel said several years ago he had reached out to Cindy Robbins, who owns the Poland Springs Resort, and is involved with the Poland TIF Committee. He said the Poland Downtown TIF isn't through the State program, and it has some issues. Mr. Hufnagel said they use some of their TIF funds to conduct a business "after hours" event twice a year to promote the downtown and vacant commercial properties in the area. He said it brings together Town officials, business owners, and residents, which is good for public relations. Mr. Hufnagel said he thought initiating a similar event using TIF funds would be a good idea, and since we are now a member of the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce (FCCC), we could include them to help strengthen our town.

Mr. R. Davis said it is a great idea but he wasn't sure if it fits with the TIF Committee mission of using funds for "bricks and mortar" projects. He suggested inviting the Chamber to hold an event at one of the downtown business locations and join in it together. Mr. R. Davis said Mrs. Hagerstrom promotes vacancies on the Greater Franklin Development Corporation (GFDC) website.

Mrs. Hagerstrom said there will be a Chamber "after hours" event at the GFDC office in September to bring awareness of our services. She suggested making it a different type of event than the FCCC by marketing to a broader audience and get potential investors and businesses to move to Farmington.

Discussion followed regarding promoting the downtown, identifying and encouraging prospective businesses to locate here, commercial rents, and the availability of a qualified and reliable workforce.

Mr. Hufnagel said it is a way to get the word out that we are promoting our downtown and working on the "bricks and mortar".

The Committee agreed to table the item.

ITEM 7: To Discuss Other Business

Mr. R. Davis said he would send out some available dates for a workshop on the engineering proposals.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Cindy Gelinias.