



Falmouth Economic Improvement Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 19, 2017

Attendance

Chair Lunt called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

MEMBERS

William Lunt, Chair ✓
Dimitri Balatsos
Pam DiPietro-Hale ✓
Ethan Gamage ✓
Sandra Lipsey ✓
Mindy Schwartz ✓
Chris Wasileski ✓

COUNCIL LIAISONS

Karen Farber ✓
Charlie McBrady

STAFF

Nathan Poore ✓
Theo Holtwijk ✓
Andrew Clark ✓

1. Review of draft minutes from the March 15, 2017 meeting

Draft minutes from the March 15 meeting were approved as written.

2. Other business

To avoid delaying a meeting immediately following this one, Bill suggested to hear "Other business" sooner.

Nathan announced that there will be a public hearing on May 8 to discuss impending changes to the Town's sign ordinance. These changes are being made in response to a 2015 US Supreme Court decision that prohibits regulating the content of signs. Staff is working to get the word out to the business community and the members of the committee are encouraged to do the same. A link with relevant information will be sent to the members of the committee.

3. Review of Town utility plans

Theo recalled that the last meeting focused on the financing of infrastructure and projects through tax increment financing and the Town's Capital Improvement Plan. This meeting would focus on the Town's utility plans; namely, public water, sewer, and broadband. Together these meetings review the financial picture of the Town's major capital projects and planning.

WATER Theo led the committee through a July 2016 presentation on the Town's public water system. Within the Growth Area, there are three areas without public water. In both the Mountain Rd area and Brookside Dr area, higher elevations would require booster systems to ensure adequate water pressure. Coupled with the fact that there is little vacant land available for further development, there is little Town interest in expanding public water to these areas. In the Middle Rd/Longwoods Rd area, there is potential for expansion if efforts were coordinated with the Town of Cumberland, and if there was interest from the Portland Water District in sharing the cost of the upgrades. Bill pointed out that "interest" from PWD is immaterial: They are constrained by limitations in their charter regarding upgrades. There was some discussion of the results of water quality tests in the Middle Rd/Longwoods Rd area. Karen noted one property of concern, but the issue was not endemic to the area.

Nathan pointed out that since it can be expensive for a property owner to connect to the water line, they may invest in individual treatment solutions. This can put the Town in a difficult position if no one (or a number fewer than anticipated) elects to connect to the line after it has been installed.

Bill commented that there have been issues in that area related to too many individual wells and septic systems, which was a short-sighted approach to take in the Growth Area. Nathan suggested there may be a need to amend the ordinance. He believes that the remaining areas will be challenges.

SEWER Theo led the committee through a March 2016 presentation on sewer planning in the west part of Falmouth. Within the Growth Area west of I-295, there are areas where sewer expansion will not be feasible: It is prohibitively expensive to construct under I-95 to access the Brook Rd area, and the area north of Libby's Bridge and the Stapleford development are fairly built-out. These areas were excluded from the study.

The presentation details various components of the sewer system to identify potential bottleneck points, capacity issues, and cost estimates to upgrade. It recommends \$4 million worth of near-term improvements and a \$1.5 million extension into the Rt 100 corridor.

Nathan stated his intent to bring a long-range Capital Improvement Plan to the Council that details this work. He estimates it will lead to a 3% annual rate increase, which is natural after eight or nine years without any increase. He also mentioned moving away from connection fees and towards equity buy-ins. The ultimate goal is for the Council to adopt a resolution outlining and supporting the Town's plan in this area.

Pam asked whether there was any look into equity in the fees. She provided an example where a 1-bedroom home and a 5-bedroom home may end up paying the same amount, despite the differing burden to the system. Nathan answered that there had been, and that both systems have benefits and drawbacks. He noted there is a difference between residential and commercial fees in general.

Theo summarized that planning efforts have identified the development capacity of every parcel in Falmouth to see what maximum development would look like and what requirements it would place on the system. Nathan cautioned that there are some things we cannot plan for, for example new State or Federal regulations, a need to extend the outfall further into Casco Bay, etc.

BROADBAND Nathan presented a map of fiber coaxial cables in Falmouth. He noted that the Growth Area has both great coverage and competition. He has contacted two major data centers on either side of town and both have been satisfied with their service. He supposed that if these two "data hungry" locations were satisfied, then the average business and home user would be as well. He does not recommend the Town pursue its own broadband network.

Karen wondered whether there was a greater role to play in residential areas. Nathan shared that from comments he had received, residents were turned off by the higher costs, and that some private developers may desire to build their own networks. He did agree that given the rise of home offices, the growing data needs of multiple devices in home, and the trend of households forgoing cable service, it was something to consider.

Theo mentioned that one utility missing from the assessment was natural gas. Nathan pointed out that there may be a possibility of installation during the Rt 100 project. Chris noted a need for incentives to get property owners to switch; the costs make it hard to justify in the short term.

4. Next meeting

The next meeting of the committee will be May 17. The focus will be updating the committee on development projects, including the one in the Rt 100 and Mountain Rd area.

Theo invited committee members to the upcoming public forum on the Route 1 North planning effort, scheduled for April 25, 7 pm at the Lunt Auditorium.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 pm.

Draft minutes prepared by Andrew Clark on April 20, 2017.