

Capital Planning and Investment Committee

*** DRAFT Minutes ***

December 3, 2021

Members Present: SusanMary Redinger, Nate Finch, Jeffrey Lin, Rich Maiore, Dick Fellows, Tim Bragan, Linda Dwight, Jared Mullane.

Also Present: Chris Ryan, Dan Daly, Justin Brown, Staci Donahue, Keith Bilafer, James Lee

The meeting was called to order at 10:02 am by Chair Nate Finch.

No public commentary was provided.

Commercial District Vision Plan, Phases 2/3, \$265,000:

Justin Brown, Chair of the Planning Board, reviewed the status of the project noting that the original request of \$300,000 for the project failed at ATM but funding was subsequently approved by the Select Board funded phase 1 through the Rantoul trust. Mr. Brown indicated that one of the aims of this project is to reduce the tax pressure on the residents. Phase One is expected to be completed in time for ATM in the spring.

Vice Chair Staci Donahue provided information on the planning board's continued efforts to secure grant funds through the MRPC (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission) as well as other sources.

Chris Ryan, Town Planner, commented on the desire of the project to improve the aesthetics and components of the commercial district in addition to making the area fiscally productive for the town. This process will give residents a voice/say in the vision for the commercial district. He informed the committee that the town had received a \$45k grant from state for district planning, which can be applied to this project. Another grant in the amount of \$260,000 called One Stop For Growth was not awarded to the town, but Mr. Ryan is working with Senator Eldridge and Representative Sena who would like to tour the district and hopes to apply for that grant again.

The use of the \$45k grant money is to be decided as it could go back to the general fund, or it could be used for the project. The state is flexible on its use.

CPIC members suggested that visuals be present to the public, and to ask for public input before asking for money at town meeting. Mr. Ryan said efforts to produce those documents and get input will be happening over the next few months and reminded members that the real visualization work will be done in Phase 2. Mr. Brown responded to questions about the cost of the study and explained that the cost included all the

visioning work through to actual planning/zoning changes needed. The work will include a specialized and detailed analysis which will be implementable upon completion.

Mr. Maiore added that the Select Board views this as one way to increase revenues for the town and explained that they see this as a priority which is why they approved funds out of the RanToul trust for it.

Athletic Field Complex; \$4,500,000

Dan Daly provided an overview of the project. He said the effort is to solve a long standing problem going back to a 2002 Master Plan which cited the lack of municipal/school land for recreational/athletic activities. The Open Space Plan of 2016 included public engagement that discerned community needs. The 2006 Master Plan cited need for more playing fields. The new HES put a few fields out of usage and heightened the need for more fields. Since then a softball field has been renovated to replace the field lost by HES.

In 2018 the Select Board created a study group which Parks & Rec then took over and it became known as the Athletic Field Planning sub-committee (chaired by Mr. Daly) and was made up of members from many other boards. Two reports in 2019 and They created a report with recommendations and presented it to SB which created a charge for athletic recreation for the Open Space Committee. They have worked to identify developable property which were included in the report presented to CPIC.

Dr. Dwight indicated that there is a request of \$800,000 for the potential purchase of property, and then there is a second phase for the development of that property, the cost of which will depend on the actual property acquired.

This request has been endorsed by the School Committee, Parks and Recreation and the Open Space Committee. As the town has grown we have not added new fields. There are not enough fields and the ones we have are in poor shape due to overuse. Groups need to use fields in other towns to accommodate the demand for both school teams and recreational leagues. Mr. Daly acknowledged that this is a large request, but reminded members that this is a 5-year plan and the first phase is for \$800k to purchase land. The actual development cost is highly variable and ranges from \$1.2M to \$3.5M. The plan is for a natural turf field with standard amenities.

Keith Bilafer added that the three sports that take up the majority of the field use are soccer, lacrosse and field hockey and confirmed that Harvard's fields are inferior to those in other towns. Upper Depot field was rested and renovated this fall which required soccer teams to travel to Devens to use for practice and games. Lower Depot was simultaneously more heavily used which degraded the field. More fields are needed in order to maintain/improve their condition.

Mr. Daly reviewed parcels that could potentially work based on size and slope which ranged from personal homes to undeveloped lots. He underscored the need to be able to move on a property when it comes on the market. The desire is to gain status as a prospective buyer. There could also be revenue-generating possibilities depending on how the facility is built-developed through both ticket sales and vending.

Mr. Daly clarified that the request is to establish a fund with an \$800k allocation from CPIC in the first year similar to a conservation fund. Having monies in that fund will allow the group to be taken seriously by buyers. A vote at town meeting would still be needed to approve the purchase of the land. Unused funds after purchase could be returned to the town, or could be used in Phase two of development. There is broad support across multiple boards for this purpose.

Mr. Daly confirmed that there will eventually be a need to increase in DPW's operating budget to care for additional fields.

The committee is being asked to approve the \$800k now, with the understanding that a future request for field development will be coming.

Some of the fields at Rogers Park in Devens could come to be under Harvard's jurisdiction when disposition is decided in 2033. They are in constant use during the weekends and the town can't wait another ten years. They also rest the fields during the week in order to maintain condition.

Mr. Lin inquired as to the feasibility of raising public funds and depositing them into the Recreation Field Stabilization Fund. Dr. Dwight agreed that would be a good option to pursue.

Minutes will be approved at our next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:25am.

Respectfully submitted,

SusanMary Redinger