

Minutes of 2/11/22
Revenue Ideation Committee

Members Present: Paul Green, Kara Minar, Charles Oliver, Bob O'Shea, SusanMary Redinger

Absent: Dan Daly, Jane Biering

Meeting was called to order at 4:00pm by the chair, Kara Minar

SusanMary Redinger reached out to David Fay of HEAC who reported that wind power is not viable but solar energy is promising but need interconnectivity with Ayer station from National Grid, which currently has limited capacity to add additional sources of solar power. Without the assurance of connectivity, it may not be worth pursuing at the current time. Fay also noted that the Town of Lincoln did a solar assessment and identified municipal sites and installation costs for solar at a cost of around \$10k. Harvard could pursue this from revenue ideation and greening of energy in line with climate resolution. Charles Oliver spoke with Tim Bragan about how to go about costing out solar installations. Bragan recommended going out to installers to like resident Roy Van Cleef to do assessment for Harvard. Charles has asked him to put together proposal for purchase or lease-to-own for an array and will hope to report back at next meeting.

Re potential costs of water and sewer buildout from Devens to service Ayer Road commercial district, Paul Green said the DEAT did preliminary research on this and he recalls that cost of that buildout would be roughly \$1M. There was plenty of capacity but it's not clear if BMS has released the excess capacity it originally had requested. Paul Green mentioned that there was a possibility that Mass Development might underwrite the connection to Devens to support economic development or at least provide some low-cost loans to build it. Paul Green said we may want to consider building a new access road to Devens that would have water, sewer and utilities as well as provide a pathway to Ayer Road commercial district for water and sewer.

Kara Minar reported that the Town has roughly 12-15 properties that were out of tax compliance for a total of approximately \$1.1m. Some of the properties had been out of compliance since the 1990s. One property owed the town roughly \$200k. The properties are being charged at a rate of 14% but at some point, the tax liabilities will outweigh the value of the property itself. The town has not taken action like placing a lien on a property nor has it taken any properties into tax title. Kara wondered if some of these properties which are either land-locked or do not meet basic lot size and are unable to come into tax compliance, whether or not these sites could be repurposed by the town to be used for solar arrays. Paul Green noted that the moral hazard is that residents may get the idea that it is okay not to pay property taxes and since this committee is looking at bigger ticket ways to increase revenues, leaving this tax uncollected is not right. Bob O' Shea noted that when he started on P&R there was \$7k was outstanding where people had not paid for activities but new software eliminated the option to pay later. In a previous meeting, Jane Biering asked what are the buckets in to which the town gets revenue ie. impact fees. Kara was looking into that review.

Kara called Tony Shaw about timber harvesting who estimated that 4-5 acres would generate roughly \$3k in revenues.

Kara called into the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank and their regulations. Some have done an "Ag Land Bank Commission" which can assist the preservation of farm land as well as open space. In Martha's Vineyard, the fee was exempted for first-time home buyers and from the first \$400k of sale price. Harvard's current price is \$714k in Harvard so if we applied a .05%, the town could generate roughly \$2k per household. Selling the property to a family member is also exempt. There is a Senate bill moving through the legislature, S. B 1833 to exempt farm buildings to be from being taxed to help those entities engaged in agriculture. If the town could find a way to exempt farm buildings from taxation, it would enable the town to move to a split rate of residential and commercial, which may increase revenues overall. Historically, the town has maintained a single residential rate to not place the burden of a commercial rate on farms, which may lead to more farms not being able to be viable.

Paul Green noted that outside of the RIC charge, the report should mention areas the committee uncovered that don't fit squarely into the charge but that we would be remiss if we didn't call them out. Paul Green also noted that the charge of RIC is to also look at the sale of excess buildings and equipment. Paul would like to suggest selling the Still River Fire Station. Paul also wondered if we needed the breadth of equipment that we had. SusanMary noted that she raised this issue at a CPIC meeting with the fire chief.

Regionalization of fire equipment is something that should be considered because it would save the town money in the long run. It was agreed that selling the fire station should be part of the RIC final report and looking into finalizing the status of the broken fire truck i.e either selling it or coming to closure on legal case should be considered by SB asap.

Charles Oliver researched looking into restructuring excise tax where above a certain valuation amount, vehicles could be taxed at a higher rate. Electric vehicles could be exempted but targeting luxury vehicles would also help meet Harvard climate initiative goals.

Kara would look into the number of Airbnbs in town and whether it would be feasible to charge a lodging tax. Bob O'Shea mentioned it would be subject to commercial rate if we had one in the town.

Kara said she would contact town hall about greater rental of properties like upstairs at the Town Hall.

The meeting minutes were approved unanimously. SusanMary wanted to know if we could find what other town's revenue sheets looked like. Charles Oliver said it was publicly available and noted that we would need to increase the town's commercial tax base by about \$100m to make the residential portion go down to 90% of revenues. Charles noted that taking our portion of Devens back is the most viable way of altering the tax base. Paul Green noted that BMS has invested \$2bn into its facility at Devens. SusanMary asked if we need to devise 10 years' worth of ideas to bridge the gap before taking back the jurisdiction of Harvard's historic lands at Devens. Bob O'Shea asked if we should review ways to save municipal expenditures through streamlining, reducing waste etc. In addition to fulfilling RIC charge, the committee could write an addenda to cover other ideas outside of the charge.

Reaching out to MassDev to investigate whether they would support helping to offset Harvard's COA and library costs was discussed by members. It would be up to SB to reach out to MassDev to seek funding.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:13pm.

