

Bedford Depot Park Advisory Committee

Meeting of August 18, 2004

MINUTES

Committee members in attendance: Joseph Piantedosi (JP); Jim Shea (JS)

Ex-officio committee members in attendance: Richard Jones (RJ), Facilities Director; Angelo Colao (AC), Selectman liaison to Depot Park; Rick Reed (RR), Town Administrator; Richard Warrington (RW), DPW Director

JP initiated the meeting at 3:39 P.M. in the Town Hall lower-level conference room.

JP nominated JS to be **clerk**. The motion was seconded by JS. The motion was carried by unanimous vote.

JS nominated JP to be **chair** of the committee. The motion was seconded by JP. The motion was carried by unanimous vote.

JP asked whether Wednesdays at 3:30 P.M. are generally a good time to have future meetings. All members answered that the proposed day and time are good.

JP reviewed the Selectmen's **charge of the committee:**

The Committee's primary focus is to advise the Selectmen on matters concerning Depot Park. To this end, the committee will:

- 1. Provide oversight on the completion of the project;*
- 2. Seek funding (such as from grants) for the project's completion and other enhancements;*
- 3. Oversee the Depot Park Revolving Fund and assist with developing financial reports for the Selectmen that show current and forecasted revenue and expenses;*
- 4. Recommend policies for use of the Revolving Fund;*
- 5. Recommend policies for the rent and other uses of Depot Park's buildings and properties;*
- 6. Provide coordination with Friends of Bedford Depot Park.*

The committee discussed the **current rental situation at the Depot.**

RR reported that Don Varney & Associates is the only Depot tenant. Friends of Bedford Depot Park is the sole Freight House tenant. Don Varney's arrangement with the Depot's former owner, James Stander, gave him the right to use two rooms. Sometime after the Town bought the property, however, he expanded into other space without permission. Don Varney has expressed interest in renting additional space. RR said he's considering an alternate tenant-at-will agreement with Don Varney while the Town goes through a formal RFP process for renting the Depot. RR suggested to Don Varney that he make a proposal to him. Don Varney informed him of his willingness to make

a proposal for renting additional space—but he hasn't followed through yet, RR explained.

RJ reported that Don Varney & Associates is currently one month in arrears on its rent.

RJ suggested that the Town lease out two of the empty Depot units as soon as it's practical to do so. He said that there are three office units and one warehouse unit inside the building.

JP agreed that the unused Depot space should be rented out as soon as possible to maximize income for the Revolving Fund.

RW proposed that an RFP be issued for rental of the entire Depot, and that rehabilitation of the building by the tenant be part of their rental agreement. RR asked whether we would get any serious response to such an RFP without a long-term commitment. RR said that the Legislature would have to take a vote to give Bedford a waiver on state procurement regulations before a long-term (i.e., 20 year) lease could be executed. First, Town Meeting would have to give its approval. RR estimated that the process could take a year.

RW said the Depot has many options for restoration. One of them is to restore the Depot to its original appearance with high ceilings.

JP said that his main concern with making building rehabilitation part of a tenant's lease agreement is that the tenant would need to factor in high costs when determining the rent they could afford to pay. Under this scenario, the Town might receive a relatively small amount of rent.

JP said we need to think of what we want to see done with the Depot's exterior because this will impact what can be done on the inside.

RW commented that if the Town were to spend a quarter million dollars to restore the Depot, it would take a long time to get back this investment through rental income.

Is selling the Depot with a preservation covenant an option, RW asked? JS said he doesn't think the Transportation Enhancement Program, which provided the funding to buy the property, would allow the Town to sell the Depot.

RJ said there are maintenance issues at the Depot that need attention. He will make a list of these for the next meeting.

JP said the Depot is a complex issue and that many good ideas have been suggested. JP proposed that the committee tour the building at its next meeting.

JS suggested that the committee focus on exterior restoration of the Depot because that is the part of the building that is visible to the public. If the Depot is going to be rented to private parties, inside historic restoration probably doesn't make sense at this time, JS said.

RR suggested that the RFP used for the Old Town Hall might be a good starting point in developing one for the Depot. He said he will get copies of it for JP and JS.

JP ask whether the committee could get schematic drawings of the Depot. RJ and RW said they do not have interior drawings. RW suggested that we could get room dimensions by using a tape

measure.

RJ said that at the next meeting he will bring a budget summary of Depot-related costs and rental income.

RR said that the Facilities Department has been authorized to make certain charges to the **Revolving Fund** for Depot maintenance and utilities. RR said he might use the Revolving Fund to hire a custodian to clean the Depot.

JP requested to RR that the committee be given a Revolving Fund financial report each month. It will help forecast future income and expenses, he said.

JS asked whether there's an accounting for overall Revolving Fund income and expenses? RR said that there hasn't been much activity with the account so far. RJ said he believes Marcia Sternberg is working to improve the reporting system. He will talk with Marcia about it. RR asked RJ to generate a Revolving Fund report for FY 2004 and year-to-date FY 2005.

JS reported that as of July 31, 2004, there were approximately \$3,223 in gross profit from food sales at the Freight House. RR asked JS which period the Freight House follows for its fiscal year. JS answered that the Freight House fiscal year is January 1 through December 31.

RJ asked JS whether the Friends has had to perform much Freight House maintenance. JS reported that the group has handled small items—such as cleaning, replacing light bulbs and interior painting—on its own. He estimated these maintenance expenses to be about \$100 so far this year.

RJ left the meeting to attend to other business.

RW reported on the status of the **Depot Park site work**. He said that the DPW has been trying to work with the Massachusetts Highway Department (MHD) on remaining “punch list” and warranty issues. It has been a frustrating experience, he said. He said that MHD doesn't inform the DPW when they're coming to town. Often, the DPW receives information directly from the contractor rather than through MHD.

RW said that one incorrect light fixture is being changed by the electrical sub-contractor. The nursery sub-contractor has replaced an undetermined number of dead shrubs. There is no warranty on the replacement shrubs, RW understands. The DPW has been busy responding to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) on some of its requests. The DPW is fixing a cut power line to one of the VFW's outside lights, and is repairing a water line to their sprinkler system.

RW said there's a drain problem with the Depot Park water fountain that has not been addressed by MHD. The fountain remains shut off since last fall. Since the fountain was not repaired before the winter, RW thinks the underground plumbing may now be damaged. To repair it may require cutting into the concrete sidewalk.

JP asked whether the general contractor has reached “substantial completion” on the site work. RW said that MHD has not communicated any information to him on this subject.

RW said he's waiting for MHD to transfer responsibility for Depot Park to the Town before he sends in the DPW grounds crew to do fine maintenance, such as weeding and pruning, at the site.

JP inquired whether MHD has an official punch list for the site work. RW said he doubts that they do.

JP asked whether it would help to send a letter to MHD asking whether the Town is now officially responsible for Depot Park maintenance. This might prompt MHD to finish up any outstanding issues, JP suggested. RW said it may be easier to accomplish some of the remaining site work issues "in house" rather than trying to work with MHD on them.

RW reported on the status of the **intersection improvement project**. The project should be ready to go to bid in about a month, he said. All the conduit for the underground utilities has been installed. N-Star Electric is going to abandon its earlier proposal to replace one of its main feed lines beneath South Road. Verizon is going to fix a crushed conduit, and then the Town can pull its fire alarm cable through the intersection. RW hopes that the traffic signal equipment will be ordered this fall, and that actual construction will begin in the spring.

RW reported on the status of the **Freight House restoration project** that is being carried out by MHD. After six months of design review, MHD has provided feedback to Vanasse Hangen Bruslin (VHB). VHB is now revising its plans based on MHD's comments. RW hopes that the next phase of this project is the PS&E.

JP asked about the status of the **rail car rehabilitation project**. RW said he had been waiting until the intersection project is underway before launching into the rail car work. RW proposed having a kick-off meeting for the rail car project after Labor Day.

AC asked how much money is earmarked for the rail car project. JS answered that \$125,000 was appropriated by Town Meeting last fall.

RW left to attend another meeting.

JP returned to the subject of the **Depot rental**. He suggested that the committee look at permitted uses for the building under the current zoning regulations. JP said his opinion is to not rent to a business that has usage requirements that are at odds with Depot Park, its parking, and the bikeway.

JP presented a Massachusetts Historic Preservation Commission grant brochure that was given to him by Bob Slechta. Mr. Slechta suggested that this state grant program might be a funding source for the Depot. RR said that these state grant programs often come with conditions that make them unattractive to the Town. The Community Preservation Act might be a better funding source for Depot restoration, RR said, because the Town would be in full control of the project.

JS asked what the phasing and funding source would be for **interior rehabilitation of the Freight House**. JS said he understands that MHD's Freight House work will include interior demolition of the structure. This would make the Freight House unusable until a separate project

went forward to rehab the inside. RR said he would check with RW to find out the scope of MHD's work.

JP set the **next meeting** for Tuesday, August 31, at 3:30 P.M., at the Freight House.

At 5:24 P.M., JS made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by JP. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by

Jim Shea, Clerk

These minutes were approved by unanimous vote of the committee at its meeting of September 22, 2004.