

HAMILTON DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

MINUTES OF MEETING

January 18, 2018

Members Present: Tom Goodwin, Rick Mitchell, Anthony Nickas, and President, Brian Stein
Coordinator: Dorr Fox
Others Present: Michael Lombardo (Town Manager), Bill Olson (DPW Superintendent),
Jeff Hubbard (Selectmen), Joe Muraco and Faith Hassell (National Grid).

This meeting was called to order by Brian Stein at 7:30 am with a quorum established

Warrant

Tom Goodwin made motion to approve Warrant HDC-1813 in the amount of \$2,439.85 for real estate taxes.

Anthony Nickas seconded.

Vote: Unanimous in favor.

Minutes

Brian Stein made motion to approve the minutes of January 3, 2018.

Tom Goodwin seconded.

Vote: Unanimous in favor.

Discussion with National Grid regarding underground utilities.

Members of the Corporation discussed the feasibility of burying power lines in the downtown area. Brian Stein explained that the Hamilton Development Corporation had been tasked with economic development downtown and had worked with MAPC regarding sidewalks, lighting, trees, and powerlines. The Corporation wanted to get a sense of what it would take, including costs to accomplish the goal. The DPW was currently doing water line projects and would repave the Railroad Ave. in the near future. The hope was to coordinate all the work together.

Joe Muraco said he was the National Grid Community and Customer Manager for most of the North Shore and for Hamilton during the previous year. The position would be transitioned to Faith Hassell. Mr. Muraco indicated that there were many different factors involved in the Railroad Avenue (from Bay Road to Willow St) area. Mr. Muraco warned the Corporation that it would take more time and expense than they had imagined.

A map featured circles with S's and Y's, which indicated transformers that would need easements from property owners to move the utilities underground. Joe Muraco said there were 16 individual services feeding businesses and residences in the area. Along with National Grid, Verizon, Comcast, and any fiber optic service would need to be relocated underground as well.

Joe Muraco said there were two options for billing. National Grid could send a bill up front with the latest estimate being \$6M per mile. Mr. Muraco calculated Railroad Ave. to be approximately 550', costing about \$.5M. It would take several years at a minimum to complete. Six to eight months would be needed for the design and another year for construction process. The second option would be to pass a By-law allowing for a surcharge to be placed upon residents' bills. The surcharge would be 2 to 2.5% and would be collected until the total cost of the project was paid. As the change was considered a luxury, 100% of the cost would be passed onto the town, according to Mr. Muraco.

While the construction would take a few months, the issue was the coordination with other utilities involved. Easements might be difficult to work out. If the project was funded via a surcharge, National Grid would be responsible for the electrician to connect the utility to individual services. If a surcharge was not used, the individual business would need to contract their own electrician. North Andover had recently undergone such an endeavor.

According to Joe Muraco, if the town was interested, National Grid would charge a fee up front to do an engineering study, determine what would be needed to do the undergrounding, and give an actual price. The process would take several years. Mr. Muraco did not think the process would include the paving if it were to occur in the next year or so. The construction would need to include opening up the road for the work after the paving had been completed.

Businesses would be impacted by the construction rather than being without power. The poles might remain for a long time after the utilities were placed underground. All utilities would need to be off the poles and then Verizon would remove the poles. The surcharge would only cover National Grid's work and not the other utilities. Rick Mitchell asked about the involvement of the State regarding Bay Road. Joe Muraco indicated that permitting would be an added cost, but construction costs would be the same.

The surcharge would be applied to every electrical account in town. A summary of collected charges would be provided to the Town Manager as well as a comparison of what had been spent. Once the fees were collected, the surcharges could be shut off unless other areas of town were proposed to be put underground. Collection for future projects could occur ahead of construction with payment for the newly proposed areas occurring later. Reimbursement could be done for fees collected, but once the surcharge system was shut off, the process of approval via By-law would need to be restarted.

The reliability of underground versus on poles was discussed. Joe Muraco indicated that the reliability would not matter as power was coming into the area overhead. The underground nature of the utilities could be affected by ground shifts, frost heaves, or conduit failures. For the first 20 to 30 years, reliability would be increased and then decreased as conduit started to fail. The largest benefit would be visual and the opening of space. Mr. Muraco reiterated that there would be potentially five to seven years of inconvenience.

All businesses needed to be on board with easements being completed. Meters and conduit would be on the buildings going into the ground. Five green transformer boxes, serving 16 customers would be placed in suitable locations. Cable and telephone would have similar boxes. If there wasn't room, transformers would be put into vaults. Transformers would be placed on property lines to avoid trespassing onto another property for access to the transformers. If not, easements to each other would be required.

Joe Muraco would provide a sheet listing the responsibilities of the Town and National Grid, pricing impact, and a cost estimate for Bay Road (from Linden St. to Asbury St.). Mr. Muraco thought the engineering costs could be paid by the Town and then refunded through the surcharge if the By-law was passed. Anthony Nickas asked for a task responsibility list and timeline. Mr. Muraco would provide a 25 page book that outlined common roadblocks.

Poles were originally installed because they were easier to manage and easier to fix, but aesthetics was a reason to change. The National Grid Project Manager would be paid through the surcharge. National Grid did not make a profit on the change but only charged the direct cost. Conduits could not be shared between companies and would likely not be completed at the same time. If National Grid was due to install during June 2019 and Verizon 2020, National Grid could wait to try to install at the same time. Joe Muraco indicated that traditionally, there were inefficiencies in the coordinated installation. Comcast, Verizon, and fiber optics would all need to be removed before the poles could be removed. Brian Stein added that new sidewalks could be completed at the same time.

Michael Lombardo said he thought most easements would be on Town property and that the paving could be held off. A total roadway reconstruction, which would be good for decades could be completed once the work was finished.

Brian Stein said the whole idea would be to beautify downtown. Jeff Hubbard thought the flowers and wreaths downtown had been well received but the cost benefit analysis was troublesome as it might cost too much for a few blocks of improvement. Rick Mitchell offered that the \$75,000 in annual meal's tax money could be used to repay a small bond, possibly lessening the amount surcharged to residents. Michael Lombardo said Town Meeting would need to vote to use the meal tax money as a revenue stream to pay for it.

Michael Lombardo asked what the goal of the project would be, to enhance the area or enhance business. Mr. Lombardo said he was unsure if the project would entice new business. A Master Plan of improvement was proposed by Mr. Lombardo. Brian Stein added the need to unify and connect the whole downtown and the need for consistent sidewalks and curbs would make the downtown more appealing for businesses and people. Rick Mitchell noted that people in town were focused on open space and preservation but did not consider the area they traveled through every day. While the Shoppes at Hamilton Crossing was considered fine, the rest of the

downtown area was considered non-cohesive. Anthony Nickas suggested paying for the incremental cost of Railroad first and others later.

Rick Mitchell suggested Option 1: buried utilities, Option 2: new sidewalks, curb bump outs, and pedestrian friendly signage, and Option 3: whatever else that might occur. Michael Lombardo suggested having a community Charrette to look at all three options. The Corporation agreed that it might be worth engaging a consultant to put together a good schematic presentation with costs and benefits.

MAPC was currently working with the Town on two projects. Residents would be asked how important downtown was. The Corporation debated casual conversations with residents versus a formal process of talking to downtown merchants. It was suggested that having a commitment with deadlines prepared professionally was the best approach. If the town decided not to pursue the concept, the Corporation would pursue something else. Michael Lombardo suggested having a presentation and straw pole at Annual Town Meeting or Fall Town Meeting with the charrette being held before that time.

Jeff Hubbard suggested period lighting, banners, and sidewalks. Brian Stein responded that there were many vertical elements downtown. If the Town was going to the expense of repaving the road, reconstructing sidewalks and planting trees, spending \$500,000 to \$600,000 to bury the lines would be a benefit, otherwise all the work would be done and the poles would still be there. Michael Lombardo added that now would be the time to do it as it would be harder to go back and do it. Anthony Nickas suggested putting it out for a vote. Rick Mitchell said the question would come down to cost.

Rick Mitchell made motion to adjourn.
Seconded by Anthony Nickas.
Vote Unanimous to adjourn at 8:30 am.

Prepared by:

Marcie Ricker

Attest

Date