

APPROVED
WOBURN REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MINUTES FOR THE (VIRTUAL) MAY 25, 2021 MEETING

Chairman Queenin called the May 25, 2021 Woburn Redevelopment Authority meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. and asked Dan Orr called the roll.

1. Roll call of members

Mr. Art Duffy, Mr. Wayne McDaniel, Mr. Dave Ryan and Chairman Don Queenin were present; Mr. Gary Fuller was absent. WRA Administrator Tina Cassidy, City Planner/Grant Writer Dan Orr, and Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) Program Study Consultant Cynthia Stewart, were also in attendance.

2. Approval of minutes: April 27, 2021 (virtual) meetings

Queenin called for a motion to approve the prior meetings' draft minutes and asked if members were prepared to do so.

The vote subsequently was not taken after it was discovered that a sufficient number of members were not present to take a vote to approve the draft April 27, 2021 meeting minutes, as presented. This matter will be brought before the WRA at a subsequent meeting.

3. Bills to be paid

Cassidy stated that there is one quarterly bill before the Authority in the amount of \$981.90, to be paid to the order of the Group Insurance Commission (GIC).

Queenin asked if there was any discussion on this matter. Hearing none, he called for a motion.

Motion to approve payment to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (Group Insurance Commission) quarterly bill in the amount of \$981.90, made by Ryan;
Seconded by McDaniel;

Roll Call Vote on the motion to approve payment to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (Group Insurance Commission):

Queenin-Aye
McDaniel-Aye
Fuller-Absent
Duffy-Aye
Ryan-Aye

The motion carried, 4-0-0.

4. Monthly financial report

Cassidy reviewed the monthly financial report for the period ending April 30, 2021. The balances of the Authority's Operating and Sign/Facade Program accounts are \$71,636.70 and \$14,433.23, respectively.

Fuller asked if there was any discussion on this matter. Hearing none, he called for a motion.

Motion to approve the monthly financial report, as submitted, made by McDaniel;
Seconded by Ryan;

Roll Call Vote on the motion to accept the monthly financial report, as submitted:

Queenin-Aye
McDaniel-Aye
Fuller-Absent
Duffy-Aye
Ryan-Aye

The motion carried, 4-0-0.

5. Correspondence

Queenin asked if there was any correspondence to present to the Authority this evening. Cassidy responded that there was none.

6. Update on Storefront Façade and Sign Program, including financials, and interest in program expressed since last meeting

Orr stated that there are no new applications or inquiries to report for the Storefront Façade and Sign Program since the Authority's April meeting.

7. Other business

Queenin stated that the WRA's next meeting is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, June 22nd at 5:00 pm.

Cassidy stated that the WRA's currently scheduled June 22nd meeting will have to take place in-person given the upcoming expiration of the Governor's State of Emergency. She added that she would ask any members to email her should they have any concerns related to attending an in-person meeting and asked for members feedback on the use of the Council Chamber as a venue for an in-person WRA meeting to better enable social distancing (up to one member may be able to be accommodated to attend the June meeting virtually). Members did not express any issue with the use of the Council Chamber for an in-person WRA meeting.

McDaniel stated that he takes no issue with an in-person meeting scheduled for June 22nd, but he supports the continued use of Zoom in circumstances of a special meeting, or during inclement weather, should virtual meetings be authorized for such use in the future. Cassidy responded that the issue of accommodating virtual meetings for future use is currently under consideration by the State Legislature and will keep members update on the outcome.

Queenin provided his thoughts on the positive trend of private property investment in Woburn Center in the form of various mixed-use projects underway or being contemplated. He added that he is concerned with the number of commercial vacancies that have surfaced up in recent months, particularly at the former CVS space (415 Main Street) and looks forward to forthcoming efforts to address those.

8. Discussion of WRA initiatives and actions to support downtown businesses during and after the pandemic including an update on the Local Rapid Recovery Program (LRRP) study

Cassidy began by re-introducing Ms. Cynthia Stewart, of Goman+York, who has been assigned to Woburn as its program study manager as part of the City's participation in the state's Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) Program. She explained that Ms. Stewart is attending this evening's meeting to present the results of the Phase I LRRP survey to provide a status update on the initial results of the study via PowerPoint presentation, the final results of which will be shared with the general public.

Stewart began by discussing the preliminary status of the initial survey phase of the LRRP study. She added that Phase II of the study is comprised of consulting with "Subject Matter Experts" on a number of topic areas requiring greater expertise, such as marketing, art installations, etc. and Phase III will be comprised of a final report submitted to the State's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), who is the granting agency for the program.

Stewart stated as part of the overall project goals, ten (10) total projects should be identified that fall into several focal categories: 1) public realm; 2) revenue and sales; 3) administrative capacity; 4) tenant mix, 5) cultural & arts organizations, or 6) other.

Stewart continued to review the distribution of storefronts in the study area based upon a recent foot survey, which includes 75 active store storefronts and 11 vacancies (excluding government/non-profit organizations, 2nd story businesses, and residential housing. She added that 1,443 total parking spaces were counted within this area (including public/private and on-street/off-street), as well.

Stewart continued to review a summary of the survey data she collected based on online survey and in-person interview methods. She indicated the topics of declining revenue and foot traffic were universal among all business respondents. She added that respondents were asked to prioritize a number of project topics from which she was able to identify the "Top eight (8)" topics (or those topics considered "important" by at least 70% of respondents overall), which included 1) marketing strategies; 2) public spaces/seating areas; 3) public parking availability; 4) cultural events/activities; 5) storefront/building facades; 6) safety and/or cleanliness; 7) outdoor dining & selling; and 8) business recruitment.

Stewart provided an overview of the results of the assessment of the physical environment of the downtown area, including the condition of sidewalks, the appearance of building facades/signage, and the presence of elements like street furniture. She indicated that, overall, she would grade the downtown with a "B" as a result of her assessment and that while some properties have had positive upgrades, others would benefit from greater investment and focus.

Stewart continued to provide an overview of her assessment of the specific public realm features, including downtown lighting, street furniture, and pedestrian accommodation. She followed the assessment of the public realm with her observations of private storefront marketing/window merchandising, lighting and sidewalk elements and indicated examples that were either positive or need improvement.

Stewart continued her presentation by providing an overview of the proposed Phase II of the LRRP initiative, which entails a more in-depth conversation surrounding specific projects that stakeholders of Woburn Center would like to see brought to fruition. She began by introducing the topic of the public realm for conversation posed the question to members of what types of projects they would support.

Queenin thanked Stewart for her presentation so far and stated that members would likely be open to preliminary recommendations relative to potential project ideas. Stewart responded that she will eventually be providing specific feedback and recommendations in that regard but first she would like to provide WRA members with the opportunity to engage in a brainstorming session this evening without influencing initial feedback.

Queenin stated that he agrees with the notion that the pedestrian crosswalks in Woburn Center would be a priority for a public infrastructure project. Cassidy added that re-application of pedestrian striping specifically would be ideal for a capital project.

Cassidy stated that investment in private realm has been encouraged in the past by the WRA for at least one property owner in particular to seek a way of improving the appearance of window merchandising. The WRA's façade loan program was also intended to facilitate interest in building façade upgrades. However, there have been no applications for this funding since its inception. She added that more targeted outreach (specifically addressing property owners) and the adoption of a façade grant program may be more effective in the long-term.

Queenin stated that he believes that properties in Woburn Center may be targeted for new investments or redevelopment as they transfer to new property owners.

Stewart continued the conversation by introducing the topic of parking and asked for members' thoughts on that topic. Queenin responded that the City and WRA have been considering options, such as relocation of the Main Street bus stop to discourage commuter parking downtown and the addition of parking meters, for approximately 25 years without a resolution. He added that the addition of the Main Street parking lot has ultimately been a benefit for downtown businesses for parking access.

Stewart stated that there may be some opportunity to shift the conditions of parking availability downtown by requiring residents to obtain a parking permit for use of the public parking facilities or to look to require more on-site parking for private developments. Cassidy responded that there are a number of ideas that can be proposed on this topic, although members may not be able to highlight any definitively this evening.

Stewart continued the conversation by referencing factors that might be considered as part of, or along with, a revamped sign/façade improvement program in Woburn Center, such as more proactive real estate outreach to property owners or working with landlords on leasing/redevelopment plans. Queenin responded that the WRA and the City have engaged with property owners in the past regarding plans for their properties but more capacity to be proactive requires an employee who has the time and ability to be dedicated to economic development projects.

Stewart stated that the City might engage with property owners/businesses to create more administrative capacity, either through the creation of a new public position or a new Business Improvement District (BID), which must be legislatively authorized.

Queenin stated that he believes that the creation of an economic development position should be a priority for the City. Stewart responded that Economic Development Coordinator could be an overarching managerial position who works with/manages someone with more marketing experience.

Stewart continued to discuss the potential role that the City and the WRA could have in influencing the mix of tenants downtown and the range of more active involvement it could take but emphasized that this depends on how the City would like to approach that goal, such as conducting a retail market analysis or creating a "tenant improvement incentive." Queenin responded that the City and WRA

must also be mindful of property owners who choose to rent to tenants based only their property debts without regard for the results of any type of analysis.

Stewart stated that an Economic Development Coordinator for the city could potentially work with landlords/property owners prior to a leasing deal being made official for more thoughtful re-tenanting of a commercial space. She added that the creation of a Broker Committee may be a helpful tool for the City's goal of having more of an impact on tenant mix in Woburn Center.

Stewart turned the conversation to the topic of cultural/arts needs in Woburn Center.

McDaniel stated that Authority members have discussed and expressed support multiple points the creation of a mural in the downtown area but it comes down to the resources to do so. Cassidy added that some discussion has been dedicated to the addition of some visual art/ornamental piece at the location of the new downtown parking lot given its prominent location.

Stewart stated that something in the form of iconic art could be added to the pocket park area, but this would also lead to a conversation about seating and the "policing" of that area. She added that the element of live music could also be considered in this area.

Cassidy stated that the City and WRA have discussed at length how to activate the Main Street Pocket Park space with programming that could augment the surrounding businesses based on prior design concepts. She added that the rock wall feature, in particular, could be incorporated into an artistic lighting scheme or projection during evening hours to encourage more patron interaction.

Stewart stated that she is familiar with a town local to her where impromptu music performances are encouraged, which may be appropriate for either Marlowe Park or the Main Street Pocket Park in Woburn's case. She added that the lack of a formal name for the Main Street Pocket Park could be an opportunity to launch a naming "contest" to bolster interest in the space.

Ryan suggested the involvement of the High School Drama Club for scheduled outdoor performances, potentially with a historical theme.

Cassidy stated the Historical Society could serve as a resource for the creation of a historical placard program for various Woburn Center properties. Stewart responded that highlighting the historical aspects of downtown, such as making more prominent historical references to individual buildings, could take the form of a family-minded scavenger hunt. Stewart added that creating downtown programming/events can be enticing to patrons as a "hook" in order to compete with newer commercial developments in other parts of the city or surrounding communities for business.

Queenin stated that he would appreciate the opportunity to provide post-meeting feedback in case members have follow-up ideas to add. Stewart responded that members are welcome to provide post-meeting feedback, including those not present this evening, and that she will provide her presentation in PDF format for ease of reference and emailing.

Stewart stated that her next step is to consolidate final feedback over the next couple of weeks, after her presentation and feedback request is posted publicly and she receives any additional thoughts from WRA members or other Woburn Center stakeholder. She will then progress to the Phase II task of project identification (to be finalized during the mid-August timeframe).

Cassidy stated that she would be willing to email a copy of the PowerPoint and request for comments relative to Phase II project theme ideas to the Chamber of Commerce, in addition to restaurant/downtown business contacts on file with staff, with an agreed upon deadline for a response. Queenin and Stewart expressed agreement with that approach.

Duffy left the meeting due to connectivity issues.

Adjournment

Queenin asked Cassidy if there was any other business for the Board to conduct. There was none so Queenin called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Motion to adjourn the May 25, 2021 WRA meeting at 6:02 p.m., made by McDaniel;
Seconded by Ryan;

Roll Call Vote on the motion to adjourn the May 25, 2021 WRA meeting:

Queenin-Aye
McDaniel-Aye
Fuller-Absent
Duffy-Absent
Ryan-Aye

The motion carried, 3-0-0.

The meeting adjourned at 5:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dan Orr

Dan Orr
City Planner/Grant Writer