

Hardwick Planning Commission
February 9, 2021
Via Zoom
Minutes

HPC Members Present: Joyce Mandeville; Ken Davis; Jim Lewis; Michael Haveson; and Dave Gross, Chair

Also Present: Kristen Leahy, Hardwick Zoning Administrator (ZA); Shari Cornish, Select Board Member; Nancy Shepard, property owner; and Al Cockrell, property owner.

Absent: None

Chair Dave Gross opened the meeting at 6:30 pm.

The review of the Inn by the River/Green Mountain Solar application for public good was added to the agenda due to the March 1, 2021 deadline. Ken Davis moved to amend the agenda. Jim Lewis seconded. All members were in favor. Jim Lewis moved to approve the agenda as amended. Joyce Mandeville seconded. All members were in favor.

Joyce Mandeville moved to approve the January 12, 2021 meeting minutes as written. Ken Davis seconded. All members were in favor.

The pedestrian bridge in downtown Hardwick continues to be closed due to safety concerns. A select board-appointed committee reviewed the possible approaches of repair/replacement/etc. The committee report was provided for the Planning Commission's consideration. Shari Cornish reviewed the Select Board's discussion regarding the various proposals. There are possible funds available from the remaining LVRT monies – a multi-user trail approach may be incorporated (adding a bike lane or making the parking area another LVRT trail head). A survey was created by Geoff Sewake and over 100 responses have been received. The committee hopes to engage the community and to incorporate public recommendations in the ultimate bridge design. The best case scenario would be to have the project commence in the fall of 2021. This will potentially be a two-year endeavor.

Shari Cornish also referenced the transportation monies available to designated downtowns and informed the HPC that she will be rejuvenating the effort to pursue the downtown designation in Hardwick. Ms. Cornish will be meeting with Gary Holloway (State Downtown Coordinator) and Geoff Sewake to examine the process. This may provide another funding possibility for the pedestrian bridge.

The Town of Hardwick is currently pursuing a USDA RBDG grant to obtain funding for the repair/replacement of the pedestrian bridge in the downtown area. Geoff Sewake has requested a letter of support for the grant from the Hardwick Planning Commission. After discussion, the HPC identified various positive elements of the pedestrian bridge – the historical component, the downtown walkability aspect, the economic vitality aspect. Additionally, the pedestrian bridge is integral to the pedestrian and traffic safety recommendations and the bridge links the two areas within the boundaries of the designated Village Center. Kristen Leahy will write the letter of support and Dave will provide the review.

A motion was made to send a letter of support to the USDA RBDG grant for the repair/replacement of the pedestrian bridge. Joyce Mandeville moved and Ken Davis seconded. All members were in favor. (*The letter was written, reviewed by Dave Gross and has been forwarded to Geoff Sewake*).

The 2021 Better Connections Grant Letter of Intent was filed by Geoff Sewake. The actual grant will be submitted in the next week. After reviewing the grant parameters, it was recommended that the Planning Commission engage the Northeast Vermont Development Association (NVDA) to serve as a project manager for the grant. NVDA will receive a 10% payment to provide supervision of the necessary paperwork, the consultant, and manage the community outreach. Jim Lewis made a motion to hire NVDA to serve in the project manager capacity for the Better Connections Grant. Ken Davis seconded this motion. All members were in favor.

Two property owners in Hardwick, Nancy Shepard and Al Cockrell, attended the HPC meeting to communicate their opinion on the Compact Residential zoning district. They own parcels of property on Bridgman Hill Road in the Compact Residential zoning district. One parcel (114 acres) is conserved with the Vermont Land Trust and will not be developed, but the other parcel could have development potential. Ms. Shepard and Mr. Cockrell are seeking enhanced development options in their zoning district. The possible addition of the conditional use element “restaurant” would open another aspect to the district. This district could potentially benefit from more flexibility of development in a manner that acknowledges potential future needs. The HPC was amenable to adding this category to the CR district conditional uses. There is a growing list of bylaw changes that will need to be addressed in the fall of 2021 (including statutory changes for Accessory Dwelling units, etc.). Ms. Shepard and Mr. Cockrell will be kept apprised of the zoning process.

The Inn by the River has submitted their application for a certificate of public good in a solar net-metered electric power system. The project would occur at 223 Mill Street – between the Inn by the River and the current car wash. The HPC has three options – make a motion to intervene, provide a letter of support, or do not respond to the application. The members of the commission were in support of the solar project. Jim Lewis made a motion to send a letter of support to the Public Utility Commission (by EPUC) which notes that the project does not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the municipality. Ken Davis seconded. All members were in favor.

In additional news, the Select Board has chosen to wait on the retail cannabis town vote. A special meeting may be held in the fall of 2021. More information is needed to be able to convey the options accurately to the voters.

Ken Davis moved to close the meeting at 7:50. Jim Lewis seconded. All members were in favor.

The next HPC meeting will be on March 9, 2021 by Zoom.

~ Respectfully submitted, Kristen Leahy, ZA