

EDC Minutes

Meeting Date: January 19, 2023

Members in Attendance: Marc Romeo (Chair), Beth Pelick (Vice Chair), Brian Connor, Kevin Spendley, Donnell Murphy (via zoom), Patrick Deschenes (Community and Economic Development)

Members Absent: John Shalbey, Harry Brousaides (Liason/Non-voting Member)

Meeting called to order at 7:05 PM.

Presentation and discussion regarding study of reuse potential and financial impact of Walpole's former Town Hall, 980 Main Street *Eric Busch and Chris Cardarelli of the Peregrine Group*

Eric Busch, managing partner of the Peregrine Group, appeared before the Board. He noted that he had a lot of experience with working on historic sites and has worked with the Town since 2019 to find the best way to repurpose the former Town Hall. Two RFP's were conducted in 2019 and 2020 as well as a feasibility study. In May 2022, a Facility Condition Assessment and Report was conducted. In 2021, a MassDev One Stop Grant was applied for but not successful.

Regarding next steps, they must first identify why previous RFP's were not successful. The main goals were to preserve and protect the existing building, unburden the Town from paying operating expenses and figure out a way to integrate the building for a community benefit. There needed to be an evaluation of the work that has been done so far and identify a use based on interest (i.e mixed use, shared work space, etc.). Then, realistic financial models could be established and appeal to potential operators.

Mr. Busch estimate the total cost to renovate the existing space was somewhere between \$7,000,000-\$8,000,000 however that was dependent on the market. He presented financial models based on proposed uses (i.e Mixed use, Multi-tenant professional, office). All numbers could vary or be challenged, however they provided good perspective.

In 2019, they also looked into the potential for reusing the building for event or function space. There was a demand for the use, however, it was hard to retain a potential operator as the cost to bring the building up to date were too high.

An additional RFP could be useful.

Mr. Romeo asked if the \$7,000,000-\$8,000,000 included the purchase price of the property as well as the cost to renovate. Mr. Busch confirm was the total and it included the purchase price. Mr. Romeo asked if any study took into consideration what it would cost to bring the building up to current codes. Mr. Busch those numbers were taken into account and while they were conceptual, they were a good baseline.

Phil Czachorowski, Planning Board, appreciates the work that Mr. Busch has done. He explained the historic nature of the building and how the intention was for the public to have an architecturally significant building for decades to come. He stressed that this could be an invest in Walpole's future and all should be mindful when considering going forward as this building was an important part of the Town's history. A rental component could work, but there should be some part dedicated to public use. Project costs would continue to rise and Mr. Czachorowski felt strongly that the Town should act sooner rather than later.

Mr. Connor asked if there would be an opportunity for the Town to have a joint investment with a developer to keep the property viable. Mr. Busch said that could be a possibility.

Lisa Vanderlinden, Finance Committee, asked what the total operating cost the existing building costs the Town annually. Mr. Deschenes said it was roughly \$30,000.

Sarah Khatib, Destination Downtown, asked if the Town could offer credits and other incentives without an established developer or occupant. Mr. Busch explained that Federal Historic Tax Credits require proof of viable project, along with other requirements. Ms. Khatib asked if Mr. Busch could recommend other avenues the Town could pursue. Mr. Busch said there were other ways and he could work with the Town to identify them.

Mr. Romeo agreed with Mr. Czachorowski's comments and noted that while the building was historic, it was not completely protected going forward. He felt the Town had an opportunity and obligation to do something. He also wanted there to be a public component.

Mr. Busch explained that there was a \$3,000,000-\$4,000,000 funding gap after Federal Tax Credits and other incentives. Mr. Romeo felt that the Town could bridge the funding gap to make the building more desirable to potential developers and operators. Mr. Busch said that was a possibility, but when that idea came up previously it was noted that it should only be done if the proposed use was clearly identified. Mr. Romeo said that a capped dollar amount pledge from the Town could make a huge difference.

Mike Amaral, former Historic Member, agreed with Mr. Romeo regarding a capped dollar amount pledge. He believed that as the Town grew, there would be a need for more office space.

Mr. Romeo asked if there had been cases where Towns had largely contributed. Mr. Busch said yes but explained that the onus did not need to fall completely on the Town as there were several other ways to fund the gap.

Cliff Barnes, warned that the funding gap could increase if the proposed tenant failed. Mr. Busch noted that a lot of the upgrade that were required were not predicated on the tenant. He understood that a failed tenant could have a negative financial cost, but did not believe it would be a large risk.

Minutes

Motion by Ms. Pelick to approve the minutes from December 20, 2022, seconded by Mr. Spendley.
Motion carried 4-0-1 (Connor).

EDC Business Forum

Mr. Deschenes said that since the last EDC meeting, the subcommittee had met one time with a forum target date of March 9, 2023. The location had not been finalized with the Country Club. He wanted to confirm the location prior to advertising. Mr. Brousaides retained a speaker for HR and was working on finding two additional speakers.

Mr. Deschenes said he was working to find the best way to capture and track attendees. The goal was to have this completed by the end of January so the entire month of February could be focused on marketing.

Mr. Romeo asked if there was back up if the Country Club could not commit. Mr. Deschenes did not have a back up at the moment, but was working on other locations that could hold 100 people. Mr. Romeo said that if the country club did not work, another option would be to have a smaller venue and limit the number of people that could attend.

Mr. Deschenes suggested a lunch as opposed to a breakfast. The EDC agreed that breakfast was the best option. There could be another event which could be held later in the day going forward.

Wayfinding

Mr. Deschenes explained the Wayfinding grant the Town received and provided an overview of the process of working with the consultant. He was tasked with coordinating an advisory committee and needed a volunteer from the EDC to join. Mr. Romeo volunteered.

Adjournment

Motion by Mr. Romeo to adjourn at 6:17 PM, seconded by Mr. Connor. Motion carried 5-0.