

Housatonic Improvement Committee
Town of Great Barrington
Wednesday, June 17, 2020

The meeting was conducted via remote participation.

Chair, Dan Bailly called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM
He called the roll to determine which members were present.

Members present: (All of the following participated remotely by Zoom
videoconference.)

Eric Gabriel, Angela Lomanto, Dan Bailly, Beverly Norse, Patrick Barrett, Chris Tucci
and Jane Wright.

Town Staff Present: Edward Abrahams and Sean Van Deusen

Minutes

Angela moved to open the meeting. Roll Call Vote: all members voted “aye”.

Approval of meeting minutes from 6/2/2020 was delayed until the next meeting
because the HIC members did not receive a copy of the minutes.

Dan read the open meeting laws. There were a few minutes of technical difficulties
as Eileen Mooney attempted to join the meeting. These were resolved and the
meeting continued.

I. Ed Abrahams gave an update on bringing Fiber Optics to Housatonic. Fiber
Connect is now in Great Barrington as far as the Dempsey Intersection at Route 7
and Route 183. To bring “make ready” service to Housatonic, the cost would be
\$20,000. There is an item on the warrant for the upcoming Great Barrington town
meeting to allocate available funds for this purpose. The estimated rate for
residential end users to connect to this service is \$100 and \$150 for business
owners.

II. Sean Van Deusen gave a synopsis of past plans for the Housatonic School
renovation. At that time, the quotes for new HVAC, asbestos remediation, new roof,
wiring and fixtures, plumbing, elevator and sprinkler system with tanks amounted
to \$5.5 million. Sean clarified that the layout of the interior of the building does not
impact this estimate. The approximate square footage of the Housatonic School is
22,000 square feet. This estimate does not include the separate Housatonic
Gymnasium.

Dan Bailly spoke about past proposals for the Housatonic School.

During the years 2004-2009, a proposal was made by a private investor and rejected because the town did not believe the proposal fit into the town plan. In an outreach to the community, a survey determined that the community wanted the Housatonic School to remain in the public domain.

In 2011, findings were again presented to the Select Board regarding the Housatonic School. Changes in the town administration prevented this committee from moving forward and plans were put on hold.

From 2013-2016 ideas were presented. A local group made a proposal for a renovation idea. They asked for a year to form a plan and secure tenants. Financial constraints thwarted this plan.

Dan said at this time, everything is wide open.

Dan asked Sean if there were available funds to off set the expense of a renovation. Sean said it “depended on the end use of the building”. The Community Preservation Act does fund some projects including: Open Spaces for communities, Historic Preservation and Affordable Housing.

Dan stated at this time that Great Barrington has no directive to do any repairs on the Housatonic School.

Angela asked the following questions:

How this committee is going to decide what to do with this building?

What is the cost of operating the library in Housatonic?

What is the library’s annual budget?

What is the cost of operating the Housie Dome? What is the number of days it is in use?

How much money is now budgeted for both buildings (the school and the Dome).

Sean Van Deusen will provide this information.

Ed Abrahams said the library’s HVAC System needs updating. Sean Van Deusen will provide this information.

Eric suggested that the committee poll our neighbors regarding their renovations of public school buildings. Both Stockbridge and West Stockbridge converted old school buildings into “Town Offices” and “Community Spaces” including Senior Citizen’s Centers and a Town Library.

III. Sean Van Deusen gave an overview of the public works projects in Housatonic for the past five years. These include:

Paving Main and Pleasant Streets. (Main Street to Route 41 to commence soon).

Funding for the school roof - \$600,000

Funding for Ramsdell HVAC replacement - \$600,000

Waste Water Pump Stations – to be replaced

Division Street Bridge – hoping for temporary replacement to re-open fall or Winter 2020. Also working on a grant for a permanent bridge.

Dan asked if there has been a discussion with Berkshire Gas regarding natural gas service in Housatonic. Ed and Sean both said they did not know of any discussions.

Dan would like information about potential Natural Gas Service in Housatonic, including the cost.

Sean said the Town of Great Barrington looks into all available State & National Grid incentives and grants for town projects.

IV. Next Steps

Eric suggested we review information on the Grey House Partners proposal for the Housatonic School. He suggested a mailed questionnaire to determine the community's thoughts on the Housatonic School at this time. Ultimately the committee is charged with developing a plan to make the Housatonic School building functioning.

Patrick suggested we compile a packet of information on the school for the committee and the public.

Dan can collect any available information about the School, past and present. He will need help organizing and compiling the information for dissemination. Please contact him directly if you are available to help with this project.

Joe Gratmo, Special Projects Manager, Great Barrington, offered another resource: Great Barrington Works. They have active fellows available to help with civic projects.

V. Eric asked if we are doing ZOOM Meetings for the foreseeable future. Ed Abrahams responded that it was up to the Governor.

VI. NEXT MEETING via ZOOM Video Conference- July 22, 2020 at 6:00PM

VII. Adjournment- A motion was made to adjourn the meeting. All members present voted "aye".

The meeting was adjourned at 7:14PM

