

Housatonic Improvement Committee Meeting

September 21st, 2023; 6:30pm

Housatonic Community Center (the Housy Dome)
1064 Main St, Housatonic, MA 01236

Members present:

Angela Lomanto (chair)
Eric Gabriel
Ben Elliot
Louise Goldsmith
Scott Shortt
Beverly Nourse

Members absent:

Daniel Bialowas (vice chair)

Angela read Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18 as well as MGL. c. 30A sec. 20F regarding recording meetings.

Eric made a motion to open the meeting at 6:37PM. Scott seconded. The meeting was opened by unanimous vote, 6-0.

The first item on the agenda was the Housatonic wide garage sale.

Louise stated that she heard from participants that it was very successful.

The second item was Vice Chair and Secretary

Angela was voted as Committee Chair last meeting. Daniel has been absent for the past several meetings, so the Committee decided that a new Vice Chair should be elected. Angela made a motion to elect Eric as secretary, and it was voted yes unanimously with a vote of 6-0. Eric made a motion to elect Scott to the Vice Chair of the HIC, and it was voted unanimously yes with a vote of 6-0.

The third item on the agenda was approval of minutes.

No minutes were reviewed.

The fourth item on the agenda was areas of work for the Committee.

Angela reported that Ruby from the Library Board of Trustees has approached the HIC to request a letter of support regarding their grant process. Eric requested a member of the Library Board of Trustees come to a meeting and explain what support exactly they are requesting so the Committee can best understand. Angela stated she would ask Ruby to come to the next meeting to speak on scope of work.

Scott brought material to review, which included the charter for the Committee and areas that he thought would be good to focus on. These items included Cooks Garage RFP process, village master plan, extending broadband, extending cell service or offering town wide Wi-Fi, the vacant mills, the Housy Dome kitchen, the old baseball field, Housy signs, and community wide composting.

Scott spoke about way-finding in Lenox, and their signage for pedestrians. Scott suggested offering a charrette. For civil engineers. Scott also discussed the different possibilities around Wi-Fi calling, town wide Wi-Fi, and expanding broadband availability. Scott suggested reaching out to vacant building owners to see what possibilities are available to incentivize them to develop or upgrade these properties. Angela asked if anyone else has things to add to the list, and Louise added the Halloween parade. Eric added the Party in the Park as a revolving event. Angela suggested that Housatonic the Beautiful think about taking on a more active role in Party in the Park. Eric reminded the Committee that HTB needs to revamp their board.

Eric mentioned community members bringing forth ideas for revamping the basketball courts at the park, and suggested bringing in Housatonic the Beautiful for this effort. Eric also stated he was in favor of a river walk. Louise stated that the items regarding broadband were of interest, along with the items regarding the walkability and master plan of the village overall. Scott asked the Committee where they feel the priority lies, and if most of it may fall under a village master plan. Ben asked for clarification if the Committee was looking to discuss an overall master plan for the entire village, or if they were focusing more so on the village center itself. Ben and Louise suggested focusing on pedestrian areas and tech infrastructure. Eric suggested the language to "Housatonic Village Center Plan". Eric also suggested compiling a list of seemingly vacant properties and reaching out to owners of these buildings about possible suggestions. Louise suggested categorizing the areas of focus as a pedestrian master plan and current development opportunities. Angela brought up the school development starting, and other community members taking notice. Eric spoke about his progress at 425 Park Street, which he recently acquired and will be leasing as a restaurant space.

Louise wanted to circle back to the landscaping for the future apartments at the school building. Eric reported that the new fire chief is requesting 5 foot sidewalks around the building for safety.

Scott circled back to categorizing areas of focus- he suggested a pedestrian village plan, and a real estate asset plan. Eric wanted to make sure that community engagement is not lost. Ben asked if the Committee had any opinions on development occurring, or if they wanted to encourage any development that was being proposed. The Committee discussed the pros and cons of limiting the scope of development, and whether or not new businesses were better than empty buildings. Louise wanted to make sure that composting didn't get lost. Angela stated that she is going to propose to Chris Rembolt that village wide wifi be a priority in the RFP.

Eric requested that Cook's Garage is an agenda item for next meeting, and that Chris is invited to discuss. He also requested that the Committee members look at the Housatonic cemetery as an item for consideration as a historic item.

The final agenda item was Citizen Speak.

Al spoke about working with Fiber Connect.

Angela proposed the next meeting be on Thursday, October 19th. The Committee agreed on that date at 6:30PM.

Nobody from the media was present.

Eric made a motion to adjourn at 7:54pm, Scott seconded. The Committee voted unanimously to adjourn with a 6-0 vote. The meeting was adjourned at 7:54PM.

Respectfully submitted, Eric Gabriel