



TOWN OF THOMPSON

Mill Sites Redevelopment
Advisory Committee (MSRAC)

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REGULAR MEETING- MSRAC

Mill Sites Redevelopment Advisory Committee (MSRAC)

Friday- 14 October, 2022 – 9:00 AM

Hybrid – Merrill Seney Community Room and Zoom

MINUTES

Listen to Meeting on Zoom:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/WFbh4T6vT2S2vcshf6QqYvolLf5cyDzFbvYryPIIY8COEL7Xs6tB5IEhb_Al2oah.VVCRjLJDM-oodUq6?startTime=1665752459000

Passcode: +!in6x8S

View Meeting on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xM1CVPVIWXY>

Members Attending: J. Blanchette – Chair, J. Hall, C. Langlois, S. Lewis

Others Attending: K. Bloomquist & Y. Lin – Freeman Companies LLC; A. Nunes & Jessica Doeckal – NC Inc AMN; Jay Fellowes – CT DOT; T. Penn-Gesek – Director of Planning & Development; A. St Onge – First Selectman

1. CALL TO ORDER – 9:02 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: August 12, 2022 MSRAC Regular Meeting

The action to approve the minutes is postponed to the end of the meeting while the quorum is temporarily lost due to a dropped call.

3. CORRESPONDENCE - none

4. CITIZEN COMMENTS – several citizens are in attendance to voice their concerns about the ongoing construction of the sidewalk project in the vicinity of Mill Town Grill and the attached hair salon. The following is a synopsis of comments made. Please note: not all speakers identified themselves prior to speaking.

Brian Murphy is a long time resident who has concerns for the safety of elderly and disabled customers visiting the business, both during the current construction and following completion. He believes it would be safer if the previous parking spots that back out onto route 12 were retained, rather than adding the 4 spots (with one handicapped spot) on Rawson Avenue. He raises the topic of a lease option from the State, since the former back-out spots were in the State R.O.W. He points out that the owner had a copy of the plan that is different than the configuration currently being installed (note: T. Penn acknowledges that she inadvertently gave the owner an older version of the plan). He has concerns that the project appears to be unfriendly to the local business.

Tom Angelo is another long time resident with similar concerns. He points out that the parking in the front of the building has been in a similar configuration for many decades. He also raises the topic of poor street lighting at that bend in Rte 12. He draws attention to a stretch of the project in front of the former Grosvenordale post office and the gravel operation on Riverside Drive. That stretch has not been done yet, and he wonders why concessions might have been made for that business and not for the restaurant and salon.

Julie Rumrill is a resident and one of the owners of the building. She expresses concern that individual patrons whom she knows are having difficulty accessing the restaurant and salon. She is worried for the viability of the businesses during the construction activity, and also with the current plan that shows a reduction to 4 spaces on Rawson. She believes that the project is making the property less accessible for the elderly and handicapped, not more accessible.

Eric Murphy is the other property owner, joining the meeting online. He provides a timeline of his communication with the Town regarding the project. In November of 2020 he, Ms Rumrill, and restaurant owner Dan Rainey met with

the First Selectman, the Director of Planning & Development and the Chair of MSRAC. They were informed that the Town had been awarded the grant to upgrade the sidewalks. At that preliminary meeting, the owners expressed concerns about the loss of parking. In the plan presented at that time, there were three spots that remained closer to the building, but the supplemental parking on Rawson was also shown to offset the loss of the back-out spots. Ms Rumrill also expressed concerns about the configuration proposed in terms of access for delivery vehicles, which was further discussed. Mr. Murphy raises concerns that a concrete sidewalk on his property was torn out as part of the construction activity. He compared the plan he was recently given by the Director of Planning & Development with the plan being used by the contractor, and it was discovered that Mr Murphy had the wrong plan in hand. He references an email thread from August 2020 with CT DOT regarding the frontage parking, where the possibility of seeking a lease from the State was raised. He notes that this seems to be in contradiction of information shared at the Nov 2020 meeting with the Town, where it was expressed that there would not be a lease option for the back-out parking. He wants to know more about any lease options that may exist for the area in front of the building.

Jay Fellowes is the CT DOT inspector assigned to the project. He confirms that the area in front of the building where the parking had been previously is in the State Right-of-Way. He states that the State does not permit allow parking which requires backing out into the State Road. He does confirm that there are some options available to the property owner: an alternate plan can be drawn and submitted to DOT for review and approval. He reiterates that a plan which includes back out parking will not be approved. T. Penn-Gesek asks him his opinion of the alternate configuration suggested by the contractor, which adds one or two parking spaces close to the existing porch, but would not require backing out directly onto Route 12. If those are found to be feasible, it would still require a lease agreement between the property owner and DOT. He reiterates that the prior parking configuration was not legal.

Armando Nunes is the construction contractor. In his experience, he is only aware of one instance in which the State allowed a back out space onto a State road, and in that instance the State transferred the ownership of that road to the town in question. He clarifies that, even with an adapted plan submitted and possibly accepted, the timeline of those processes will not enable the project to be completed in the current schedule. In his opinion, the alternative recently proposed has the best chance of approval by DOT, but even if that is submitted, it would be a minimum of 5 months prior to approval. If that is the intention, then a plan to button up the current work to an acceptable degree, which would include some form of temporary paving in the area suggested for spaces against the porch.

T. Angelo asks A. Nunes if the concrete sidewalk that was removed was on State property or the building property. That sidewalk was a part of the building property, which the contractor acknowledges. The project will replace the removed concrete and tie it into the project. The new concrete will be color matched to the prior installed sidewalk. Mr. Angelo reiterates his questions regarding the gap in the project near the old post office and gravel operation.

Jessica Doeckal is the project manager for NC and she clarifies that that area is not a part of the construction plan.

Yuyang Lin, the project engineer, is asked why that section was left out of the plan. He states that the objective assigned to the firm was to design a connected length of sidewalk, and that the section in question was outside that objective. T. Angelo also asks about safety measures such as lighting in the area of the restaurant. Mr. Lin confirms that there will be a new crosswalk and added signage.

Amanda (last name)? is the salon owner. She is very concerned about the impact of the greater distance from the proposed parking, since the majority of her customers are elderly. She believes that the project will have the long-term effect of being discriminatory for her cliente, rather than inclusive.

Another question is raised re: the gap in the area of the gravel pit (speaker unidentified). Mr Nunes replies that it is his recollection that it was left out to accommodate for some subsequent development that was planned for the gravel pit.

Dan Rainey is the owner of Mill Town Grill. He is disappointed at the quality of the communication from the Town regarding the project. He asks for improved outreach via press and social media.

Mr. Nunes proposes a short-term solution: pouring the concrete for the plaza and the stamped colored concrete, which will bring the access flush for the entrance of the salon. At the same time, he will install temporary pavement in the area being proposed for the additional pair of handicapped spots near the restaurant porch. Once the State has accepted or rejected the alternate plan, the permanent solution can be pursued.

A resident (name unknown) asks if there would be a problem with the presumed 5-year moratorium on work in the road once the State paves. Mr. Nunes clarifies that the proposed alternate parking will not impact the State's paving project.

5. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

a. Riverside Drive LOTCIP Sidewalk Project

i. Construction update – Kevin Bloomquist from Freeman Co provides the update. All the curbing is installed, which will enable CT DOT to pave on schedule by the 26th of the month. Armand responds that there is less than 100ft left of the curbing left to go. Chair J. Blanchette also wonders why that gap was left in the area near the gravel operation and requests Freeman to look into it. Y. Lin confirms that he will do so. J. Blanchette suggests that a follow up meeting to discuss the restaurant parking problem should be scheduled. She also asks if it is possible to find out how much a lease from the State would cost the building owners, before any additional design costs are incurred.

ii. Schedule – the project is on schedule to meet DOT's requirements to pave Route 12

iii. Change Orders/Questions – as discussed in citizens comments & above

b. Blain Road Intersection paving

i. Construction update – no new information has been received from Provost & Rovero.

ii. LID grant - There are no updates from ECCD at this time.

c. River Mill/ FEMA flood map appeal update

FEMA did accept the most important portion of the Town's appeal, and reduced the flood level. T. Penn had a call with W. Bugden, M. Fanning and Craig (P?) from CHA to discuss options to submit a revision based on elevation surveys where one corner of the building remains clipped by the flood map.

d. Main Street Reconstruction

J. Blanchette, S. Lewis, T. Penn and A. St Onge reviewed 5 proposals from engineering firms for the design project. Freeman Co was the low bid and was unanimously recommended for award of the contract. The contract was awarded by the BoS, and has been received and signed. Needs follow up to determine next steps with the firm and establish who the project manager is to be for the Main St design.

e. Additional street lights on utility poles on new sidewalk

K. Beausoleil requested this agenda item be included. This also mirrors some concerns raised during citizens comments. The Chair asks what role MSRAC would play in recommending any additional lights. It is suggested that MSRAC write a formal letter to the BoS raising the topic. The topic is suggested for the next meeting. Currently there is no Nov meeting because it would fall on Veteran's Day. J. Blanchette suggests setting a special meeting on Thursday 10 Nov to touchbase on the Mill Town sidewalk/parking area, the subject of the streetlights and the sidewalk that could not happen at the October meeting because of the weather and the length of the public comment agenda item.

f. T-Mobile Placemaking grant

Discussion of potential grant projects will be postponed until the Nov special meeting. T. Penn posits that lighting improvements at Swanson Park and the restaurant patio may be an eligible activity.

6. MEMBER COMMENTS

C. Langlois thanks T. Penn for her work on behalf of the Town, in response to some disparaging comments directed at her during the public comment period.

7. ADJOURNMENT – 11:14 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted, Tyra Penn-Gesek, Director of Planning & Development