



**ECDC COMMITTEE
VIRTUAL MEETING**

**Minutes of Tuesday, November 10, 2020
6:30 PM**

Committee Members participating were Chair Lynne Bermudez, and members Zillie Bhujju, Sarah Guido, Janet Kmetz, Rosie Discipio, Kimberly Daly, Kim Philpot, Alex Qirjazi, and Kevin Harutunian (Town Administrator). Also present were Select Board Chair John Spencer, Select Board member Dick Gandt, Planning Board Chair Martha Morrison, and Cultural Council Chair Kathleen Hunt.

GOVERNOR'S ORDER

Select Board Vice Chair Bermudez announced that, due to the COVID-19 State of Emergency announced by Governor Baker, this meeting would be conducted as a Virtual Meeting via ZOOM and as such, participation was remote. She then read the following:

"Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, § 18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Topsfield Select Board will be conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible. Specific information and the general guidelines for remote participation by members of the public and/or parties with a right and/or requirement to attend this meeting can be found on the Topsfield website at www.topsfield-ma.gov For this meeting, members of the public who wish to watch or listen to the meeting may do so in the following manner: Video conference (see log-in information below.) No in-person attendance of members of the public will be permitted, but every effort will be made to ensure that the public can adequately access the proceedings in real time, via technological means. In the event that we are unable to do so, despite best efforts, we will post on the Topsfield website an audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of proceedings as soon as possible after the meeting."

CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chair Bermudez called the meeting to order at 6:32PM.

Dick Gandt asked to video record the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Zillie Bhujju made a motion to approve the minutes of the Select Board meeting held Tuesday, October 6, 2020 as presented. Kimberly Daly seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously by a roll call vote as follows:

Lynne Bermudez – Aye

Zillie Bhujju – Aye

Kimberly Daly – Aye

Rosalee Discipio – Aye

Sarah Guido – Aye

Kevin Harutunian – Aye

Janet Kmetz - Aye

Kim Philpot – Aye

OLD BUSINESS

Membership Update

Chair Bermudez informed the committee that she received word from ECDC member Rich Crosson that after participating in the first ECDC meeting and giving it much thought he felt he would not be able to commit the time to continue as a member. Subsequent to that discussion Alex Qirjazi expressed interest in the ECDC as a downtown business property owner and previous member of the Downtown Strategic Planning Committee. At the most recent Select Board meeting a unanimous vote was taken to appoint Alex Qirjazi to fill the open ECDC position for a term ending June 30, 2021. Lynne welcomed Alex to the committee.

NEW BUSINESS

Member Updates – Prior meeting action items

Sarah Guido, President of the nonprofit, Topsfield Community Partnership (TCP) provided an update on her inquiry into TCP offering a funding program to support local Topsfield businesses suffering hardship during the pandemic. Discussion was held on the impact the fund might have and the number of businesses that might qualify. The general sense was that it would be a significant effort to establish the program and to determine how the funds would be used by a business. Also

unknown is if the program could make a substantial impact on the long-term viability of a business.

Zillie Bhuju provided an update on her inquiry into public art offerings in Ipswich. Several groups in Ipswich are involved in these offerings including the town's Recreation Director (skateboard and sculpture park), the Cultural Council (Annual Art Exhibit), the Chamber of Commerce as well as the Essex County Community Foundation (ECCF). Ipswich's efforts specific to downtown 'feel' seem driven by businesses through the chamber of commerce's business round-table group.

Lynne Bermudez provided an update on her discussion with Cultural Council Chair Kathleen Hunt. Kathleen Hunt then provided background on her Council's grant activities for the Arts, Humanities and Science, their recent expansion to promote social engagement and economic development, and their previous efforts to coordinate Art events in Topsfield. Kathleen noted that Cultural Council grants are available for Art activities.

Discussion was held. Martha Morrison suggested the ECDC contract the Library Trustees as Gould Funds are available for Library events dedicated to the arts such as concerts, poetry, music and sculpture. Zillie Bhuju volunteered to work with Kathleen, the Historical Society and the Library to map out current events in Town as well as potential events that would reflect the culture of Topsfield, enhance offerings to residents and to bring new visitors to town to support local businesses.

Town Administrator Updates – Downtown Revitalization

TA Harutunian provided an update on activities underway with Downtown Revitalization and discussion was held on each:

Solar Streetlights:

- Bases for 17 of the new 19 streetlights have been installed. The remaining 2 will be installed shortly. The streetlights will be arriving from the Netherlands and installed in December. The arms/brackets for the flower baskets to be located on each streetlight will be ordered this week.
- Kim Philpot volunteered to lead the effort to change out the Fall Main Street decorations and replace them with Holiday Planters using the 15 existing planters. She is coordinating with the Gary Wildes (Highway

Superintendent) and Martha Morrison of the Topsfield Garden Club (who could possibly fund the trees/decorations in the planters). Janet Kmetz volunteered to work with Kim on this effort.

- Sarah Guido will ask the TCP for a vote on financial support for spring flowers for the baskets.
- Kim Philpot is also leading the analysis to provide a recommendation to the Town Administrator on the choice of a vendor from which to purchase Spring flowers and the approach for maintaining the flowers (watering). The Spring flower order must be placed by the first week in December.
- Kim Daly suggested to consider high quality artificial plants as an economic alternative since they would last several years and not require watering.
- Martha Morrison asked Kevin Harutunian if any funds were still available from the state grant to purchase additional planters that would coordinate with the new streetlight baskets. Kevin will investigate this option as well as ask VHB to consider incorporating planters into the Main Street streetscape design.
- Kim Philpot asked if there were outlets on the streetlights. Sarah Guido noted that an outlet would allow mini lights to be strung on the streetlights. While there are no outlets on the streetlights, Kevin Harutunian will investigate the capacity of the solar batteries to support such lights.

VHB Streetscape Design:

Kevin Harutunian provided an update on the focus group sessions held with businesses and residents (October), the estimated date for the completed design (December) and the scheduling of a town-wide virtual event to review the streetscape design (January).

Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Stations:

Kevin Harutunian stated the Select Board had recently approved the purchase/installation of two charging stations beside the Town Hall with a significant grant from National Grid. These will be installed in November and can charge four vehicles simultaneously.

Holiday on the Green (HOG):

Kevin Harutunian stated the event is currently scheduled for December 5th. It will be a virtual event with the firetruck arriving with Santa to light the Memory Tree in front of Town Hall. They are pursuing getting three students to sing and possibly a few students with instruments. Kevin described the efforts underway to ensure the Memory Tree and Brownie Tree (in front of the Congregational Parish) have holiday lights. Most of the lights left in the trees from last year do not work.

Current funds available for the lights are \$1,721 but an additional \$3,300 is required. The Highway Superintendent and Police Chief are investigating the cost for commercial grade lights that will last several years. Sarah Guido will ask the TCP Board for a vote on financial support for the holiday lights.

Discussion was held generating many creative ideas for the HOG to help increase traffic to local businesses and further market/enhance the virtual HOG event (e.g. raffle drawing with the winner riding the firetruck and helping Santa light the tree, short videos of the local businesses to help residents get to know the proprietors and their business, helping local businesses decorate their stores, fun "scavenger" events to encourage/engage people to walk throughout the downtown).

Rosie DiScipio mentioned her daughter is a film major in college and might be able to help create the videos. Kevin Harutunian will reach out to Ms. DiScipio to discuss. Kathleen Hunt mentioned that a cultural grant is available for the video but the application must be submitted by 11/16/20. Kathleen will send Lynne the application. Lynne Bermudez will meet with the HOG Committee and Kevin Harutunian to discuss the generated ideas to see which might be feasible with only three weeks until the event.

Telephone Pole Relocation:

Kevin Harutunian had an action item from the previous ECDC meeting to obtain a contact from the town of Danvers for an ECDC member to discuss Danvers's relocation of telephone poles from their Main Street to an area behind the Main Street buildings. Kevin will provide the contact's name and number to Janet Kmetz who will initiate discussions to help determine if such a relocation is feasible for Topsfield.

Other:

Sarah Guido asked the status of the Church of Latter-Day Saints' celebration for the newly installed John Smith monument. The celebration was rescheduled to the Spring but will be much smaller in size (200-400 vs 2,000-4,000). Kevin is looking into enhancing the safety of Tour Buses which arrive throughout the year with tourists to visit the Smith monument as well as how to encourage these tourists to visit the downtown.

ECDC Priorities – Downtown Revitalization

An action item from the previous meeting was for ECDC members to review the Downtown Revitalization Strategic Plan and using that, along with any other ideas, submit what they consider should be town priorities to revitalize the

downtown, as well as identify those activities the ECDC should focus on. A summary of those lists was distributed to the ECDC, including the Town Administrator. Several of the items on that list were discussed at tonight's meeting. Discussion will continue on members' priorities at the next meeting on December 8, 2020.

ADJOURN

At 8:20 PM, Janet Kmetz made a motion to adjourn. Zillie Bhuju seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with a roll call vote as follows:

Lynne Bermudez – Aye
Zillie Bhuju – Aye
Kimberly Daly – Aye
Rosalee Discipio – Aye
Sarah Guido – Aye
Kevin Harutunian – Aye
Janet Kmetz - Aye
Kim Philpot – Aye
Alex Qirjazi – Aye

Respectfully submitted,
Lynne Bermudez – ECDC Chair

DOCUMENTS

1. Agenda
2. ECDC – Member Priorities

Pursuant to the 'Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18-25, the approval of these minutes by the Board constitutes a certification of the date, time and place of the meeting, the members present and absent, and the actions taken at the meeting. Any other description of statements made by any person, or the summary of the discussion of any matter, is included for the purpose of context only, and no certification, express or implied, is made by the Board as to the completeness or accuracy of such statements.