

EASTHAMPTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RE-USE COMMITTEE
50 Payson Avenue, Easthampton, MA 01027



Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

Chair: Joe McCoy (JM)

Board Members:

X	LJ Clark (LC)	X	Pamela Means (PM)	X	Chris Korczak (CK)
X	Brad Riley (BR)	X	Patrick Brough (PB)		Tracey Harris (TH)

Absent: TH

Recording Clerk: Zoe Ingram

City Planner: Jeff Bagg (JB)

Consultant: Emily Innes (EI)

Guests: *Attendance taken through live Zoom meeting.*

- None

1. Call to order: 6:00PM, JM by remote participation.

2. Welcome & Introductions

- JM gives brief introduction as he was absent at the first meeting. Served as City Council President in the past.
- PB has lived in town for 24 years and works at Finck and Perras Insurance Company. Has served on Charter Review Committee, School Building Committee, and COA.
- Michael Owens, City Procurement Officer, gives brief introduction.

3. Review and discussion of reuse criteria (based on Downtown Plan), weighting and priorities

- The group will rank the potential uses and look at the changes over the last year.
- The group will look at what may be high advantage.
- Group will also look at requirements for developers.
- In December the group will begin drafting and discussing.
- EI created a Miro diagram to show criteria of the Downtown Strategic Plan.
 - CK asks if it is already ranked based on public opinion. *EI clarifies it is ranked, but she left the numbers off on purpose as it was ranked in 2018, and the focus should be that this is a baseline for criteria.*

Group begins ranking/evaluating criteria.

- **Community Benefits**

- JM asks if they are ranking based on personal opinions. *EI clarifies it is on personal opinion.*
- CK ranks public parking as less important. PB thinks it should be in the middle and JM agrees. PB believes it varies by location.
- JB counted the parking on Cottage Street after additional parking was added to Maple. On the busiest day 15 cars used the 25 spaces.
- LC asks for clarification on “payment for on-site or off-site improvements”. EI clarifies it provides indirect civic benefits. JB points out there may be more pieces to single criteria, for example public open space and public off-site parking may fall under this category.
- BR has thoughts surrounding senior/caseworkers’ services on the first floor.
- JB speaks about intergenerational use and the auditorium/gym at Pepin. JM thinks it is a priority.
- JB mentions the enhanced tax revenue and if this will lead to any tax revenue. If developer turns all three into affordable housing, they may be tax exempt. EI clarifies it depends on who the developer is.
- JB mentions how River Valley Co-Op enhanced the site and they are paying taxes. Points out how the sites don’t generate taxes currently, but it could be of interest.
- CK points out the budget is \$40 million, and the tax revenue would be a small percentage of that.
- JM believes there would be pushback if there was no tax income at all. PB agrees that there would be upset residents.
- PM mentions paid parking like Northampton does. JB and EI think that would not work and free parking is a benefit.
- JB points out the senior benefits and there is a growing number of seniors. JB mentions the senior center may be relocating and they will know for sure before RFP is finalized.
- JB mentions how the new school has new gym space. Is there enough gym capacity for youth sports? Is the gym at Pepin needed?
- JM mentions how difficult it was to find space for pickle ball.

- **Building Uses**

- JB curious about the group’s thoughts on Affordable Housing. PM and CK believe it is most important.
- CK mentions example of studio and retail space in mills in Worcester.
 - JB also mentions market-rate housing versus affordable housing.
 - JM does not see a developer going for 100% affordable housing without some sort of profit. CK agrees with JM.
- JB talks about how affordable housing was added in 2015, and has not been added since. LC asks if affordable housing would preclude commercial use. JB thinks that it would.
- CK would like to prioritize flexibility for future uses.

- **Circulation, Access, and Parking**

- **Compatibility**

- JB speaks to how Building Code could be a barrier down the road, as certain uses may trigger energy/ADA requirements.
- CK asks if there are height requirements. JB mentions that zoning allows for 5 stories for affordable housing.
- **Financial Consideration**
 - JM touches upon the cost and the long-term benefit and the financial cost of holding onto the buildings.
 - EI speaks to the long-term economic benefits and the comparative economic benefits. The other pieces were how long will it take to develop and do they have the financial capability. In other RFPs developers must show letters from banks and additional evidence to prove they have the means to do it.
- **Architectural Design**
 - JM touches on require preservation or allow all new. EI if they demolish the buildings, what should be kept.
 - PM supports letting them tear down the buildings. The descriptions all mention poor air quality and that may lead to future issues.
 - PB has question on history of the buildings and if they must be kept. He thinks it would be easiest to allow developers to tear the building down.
 - BR agrees with group. Mentions that Valley CDC is looking at the buildings and they prefer a blank slate for affordable housing options. Thinks it is advantageous to allow for total removal.
 - JB gives overview of the demolition delay process for any building over 50 years old. Developer would need to meet with the Historical Commission before demoing and the Commission could implement a demo delay.
 - LC does think the buildings are cool from a historical point of view, but it is difficult/expensive to repurpose the buildings. Points out that it is possible one or two could be demolished and the buildings do add character to the town.
 - EI mentions that portions of buildings may be able to be preserved.
 - JB mentions the preservation of existing character and that it is closer to less important.
- JM asks if they are looking at a single RFP or 3 different RFPS.
- JB clarifies it is not yet decided on and they will need to continue looking at the criteria priorities.
- EI clarifies it will be a single document, but the group will need to decide if developer can do one school or all three.
- JB describes the process and how City Council will need to agree with the final RFP document the group produces.
- MO shares that many developers will look at Center and Pepin as one development site and Maple is in a different part of town.

4. Review of One Stop for Growth grant and due diligence

- JB mentions they are still waiting to hear back from the state.

5. Review of Valley CDC technical assistance

- JB states they are still waiting to hear back from the ValleyCDC.

6. Public Speak:

- None

Next Meeting:

JB asks if the group wants to continue meeting on the second Wednesday.

The Historical Commission meets at the same time, and he would like to be able to invite a member.

CK and LC are flexible with the time and agree to a poll.

(tentative) Wednesday, November 10, 2021 at 6 p.m. (virtual)