

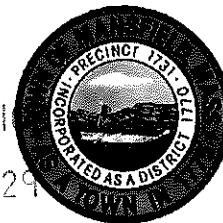
Town of Mansfield

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MANSFIELD



Downtown Committee

Meeting Minutes 12.3.2020

Present: Kevin Dumas; Chair, Beth Ashman Collins, Eileen Cusack, Neil Rhein, Jack Cooney and Nick Lorizio.

Guests: Lee Azinheira (DPW), Craig Miller, Waterfield Designs. Minutes: Nancy Griffin

Call to Order: The Downtown Committee was called to order at 4:30 pm by Director Kevin Dumas.

Acceptance of Minutes

Motion to accept the minutes from October 5, 2020 made by Neil Rhein, 2nd by Ms. Eileen Cusack. Roll Call Vote: Beth Ashman Collins – Yes, Eileen Cusack – Yes, Neil Rhein – Yes, Jack Cooney – Yes, and Martha O’Connell – Yes. **Vote 4-0 PASSED**

Review of Ongoing Projects

Parklette Update: Craig Miller, of Waterfield Design Group who is a civil engineer and architect, joined the meeting to give the Committee his thoughts on possible ideas and designs for the Chace Place park and area. Mr. Miller stated he and his team have decades of experience with a dual focus of both public and private sector clients.

He began his overview by stating that the original charge was to consider and advise on what could be done within the confines of the pocket park/parklette. He noted that the size of the current area plays a significant role in what can or cannot be done. He told that Committee that before his team dives into any project they like to take some ques from the community as they look for ways to enhance or tell the story of the community, the land, or of significant events from the past that make up the history of the area or community. Then they strive to create layers of opportunity for the open space, so public money is doing work in different ways, with a goal of helping to enhance the cohesiveness of the community. He believes, this Old Colony area plays a supporting role with the downtown business district and as a well-established neighborhood. One goal is to bridge the gap between the downtown and the neighborhood in this vibrant area where people work, play, and call home.

Mr. Miller reviewed what his team did in their initial assessment. His team looked at what could be done in the confines of the size of the walking area and green space with a goal of trying to take the existing space and do more with it. They considered how bikers and pedestrians use the area, and what could be done to connect that with the history of the area or town. One recommendation is to leave the grass alone and enhance the green space with plantings. He remarked that this space is also right for a landmark art piece because one of the things open space is great for is becoming a hub for community gatherings and a centralized piece of art would make the location a destination. It gives people a reason to gather there, which makes community relations better. The shape and size of the oval green space is perfectly suited for a unique piece of artwork.

Mr. Miller stated that outdoor fitness pieces are another way to accomplish this, and there was a proposal

from a local scout who had this idea in mind for his Eagle Project. Therefore, one of the proposals Mr. Miller's team offered used exercise pieces to demonstrate that it could be done, but he noted that the space starts to feel crowded. Mr. Miller stated that professionally he doesn't feel strongly one way or the other, and that it comes down to what Committee wants to have in this area. As a sidebar Mr. Miller said, normally when we put exercise equipment like this in place, we put it at a playground as some adult pieces are a nice tie-in because without other visual cues exercise equipment alone doesn't have synergy.

Mr. Miller's team did some research on the history of Mansfield and on some possible concepts for art in this park. Mr. Miller stated that it is always best to have art pieces that have a direct connect to the community through history, location, or events related to the community. He noted that there is an interesting tie-in for geese in Mansfield, which means you have this great Mansfield historical thing that you can bring into the space. He offered that you could create a fun, interactive sculpture that would be receptive to kids, while telling the history in a fun way. From there it could take on a life of its own. He said that this space is too small for a playground, but there are interesting art elements that could serve as a dual use. He also offered that there are elements that are not directly related to Mansfield but have a whimsical element to them, and that these have become widely popular. He suggested that some land forming could be done by giving the space some terrain. This and a central art piece help bring the park to life. Another suggestion was to bring a storybook character in, which is meant to be fun and whimsical and kids climb all over them and are designed to be visually and physically enjoyed.

One of things Mr. Miller's team talked about was how tight this space is and its limitations, as there is probably only room enough for one object. So, they decided to look further at the entire area and asked themselves what if we had more area to work with. For example, if the parking along Old Colony is sufficient for the needs of the area, it would be interesting to turn the additional pavement area into green space. This would more than double the green space. This could give a lot more variety in the layout and design options. Mr. Miller stated, because you have a densely developed neighborhood, this additional green space would offer an oasis that serves as a relief valve for everyone in the area. You would now be able to see the sightlines into the green space and visibility from N. Main Street through the open parking lot. The park comes to life because you can see it so much more and the space serves the neighborhood as the need for outdoor space will never go away.

Mr. Miller offered, you could also put in some pavers so if someone wanted to do a small performance there would be a space to do it. By having more space, those more informal uses become more attractive. By limiting the size of the space, you limit the capacity and the amount of engagement because people will feel less comfortable because they are too close.

Mr. Miller did review the railroad-themed concepts because that was one of the things the Committee had mentioned in their initial concept conversations. He noted, if you want to go with the railroad theme we could create a canopy that becomes a bridge, and the canopy could be an old railroad platform motif to have a connection to Old Colony. We could have a map or panel to demonstrate the history.

Mr. Dumas stated that the improvements to the current parking lot area were not set in stone. That design was a direction the board went in a few years ago, but it was known that other possible concepts might be considered in the future. Mr. Rhein stated that he was part of the Fales Committee which was tasked with coming up with something to do with this property, and that the original recommendation was much like what Mr. Miller was recommending to this Committee, and that it had covered the entire area. Mr. Rhein

stated that Mr. Dumas is correct and that it was mentioned when the Select Board voted that it was understood that it might not be a parking lot forever.

Ms. Ashman- Collins said that she is super enthusiastic about art that double as a play area. She said she likes animals or abstract shapes that people can climb on, walk through, think about.

Mr. Dumas said, the Committee should keep the Master Plan in mind because we want this project to be in concert with it, and he challenged everyone to think of this as a decade perspective. It will add features in the downtown, by having something between North and South Common. Mr. Dumas added, although it was more than we charged Craig with, there aren't too many times we have the opportunity to tie together a whole bunch of features such as the Master Plan, interactive features, with place making in the Downtown in a meaningful way. We want to have our own goals in mind, but also keep in mind how it should be tied to the Master Plan. We have an opportunity to provide a nice space that has a permanent placement in the future development of the entire area by plugging in all the pieces of urban development and the Master Plan.

Ms. Ashman-Collins comment that the conditions have changed since the vote to make more parking in this area, and acknowledged that when you build a lot and then tear it down you might get laughed, but the benefit is that you are going to activate this area. Mr. Dumas mentioned that through the recent work done by DPW there is now an additional 20+ parking spaces since the time the decision was made to use some of the Fales area for a new parking lot.

Mr. Miller stated that his firm does a lot of work for retail developers who want to give their customers multiple reasons to stay at their establishments, and there is an industry term called "departure effect." Through the development of this area, we are creating a reason to stay in the Downtown by creating this open space and giving it a prominent position. He added, you are really making a choice that supports this entire retail district which will help the downtown to start to reform. Ms. Ashman-Collins added, we want to give the people who live in the Downtown area condos a reason to come out and get to know Mansfield.

Mr. Dumas cautioned that we must be realistic as this is going to take years, and that we are just scratching the surface at this point. He continued, in the near term we could consider uses for the existing space for one main art object and a pavilion or gazebo structure. And then also discuss ideas for future plans that might include an expansion of the existing space which would fit into a five-year capital plan.

Ms. Cusack asked if Mr. Miller had heard about the Committee's train idea. Mr. Miller said yes, and that the train idea is what got his team excited about what could be done in this space. Ms. Cusack mentioned that in Salem at Salem Willows they have pavilions that people use for spontaneous get-togethers such as baby showers. She added, we have gazebos on our commons so perhaps those should be considered. She also asked if the idea of having a bicycle rental station had been considered. Mr. Dumas informed that the Town did a group bid and no one ended up bidding on it.

Mr. Rhein said that this presentation is very similar to one put forward by the Fales Committee a few years back. He stated that the path going around the expanded area was to be a race track for children's bikes. He agrees that it makes sense to think big and beyond what is there now. Mr. Miller stated that a parking study should be done to determine how many of the Old Colony parking spaces are occupied during the day, nights, and weekends to determine how close to capacity they are during these times of day. Mr. Dumas agreed that a time and use analysis for a seven-day period would need to take place. Mr. Dumas noted that

the DPW needed a temporary staging area for the downtown construction projects, and while that area could stay as a parking lot it doesn't necessarily have to remain a parking lot. Mr. Azinheira stated that the construction project could not have been done without the staging area. And although it would be a detriment to the DPW to lose the parking area, he cannot argue with it being a great enhancement to the downtown. He offered that perhaps after a parking study was done some possible recommendations could be made regarding overnight parking for the Grain Mill residents during snow storms.

Mr. Dumas suggested the next entire Downtown Committee meeting be used to continue this discussion to make some decisions and recommendations on this project. He tasked Mr. Miller with looking at the project in two phases. Phase one is to choose something to go in the middle of the existing space with a canopy or other different structures. And Phase two would start with a discussion of different renditions of a future phase. Ms. Ashman-Collins said, that the Fales Committee should be credited for having the original idea of developing this area into a park. Mr. Miller offered that the Committee take this a step further and look at the Fales Committee plans to see what their ideas were as more good ideas might come from it. Ms. Ashman-Collins said the Committee put forth some ideas for a park, but the Town was not ready for it. Mr. Rhein said he would find the plans and share them with the Committee.

Mr. Azinheira gave his report on the following projects:

Fulton Pond History Panel & Pad: The panel is installed and looks great.

N. Main Street Public Parking Lot: Paving is done in the N. Main Street lot and on Thomas Street.

Old Colony Dumpster Enclosures: DPW poured the concrete pads before the paving was done, and the dumpsters have now been put on the pads. They spent a lot of time to install them in the way they need to be used so they function properly. Mark is still trying to get the base wall done this year. Mr. Azinheira said he is amazed at how much they accomplished this year. He added, DPW is also still working on the signs at each intersection along the multi-use path and he said it is nice to see all of these improvements coming together to enhance this area. Mr. Dumas gave kudos to the Highway Department for all of the work they did this year. He said it looks wonderful. He is so pleased. Mr. Azinheira gave all the credit to Mark Cook and his crew.

Old Colony Road: The paving of Old Colony is complete from one end to the other.

Next Meeting Date: The Committee agreed to hold Tuesday, December 29th at 6:00 pm for the next meeting. Everyone in attendance agreed that this date worked.

Any items not known 48 hours prior

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 5:45pm made by Neil Rhein, 2nd by Jack Cooney.

Roll Call Vote: Beth Ashman Collins – Yes Eileen Cusack – Yes, Neil Rhein - Yes, Jack Cooney – Yes, and Kevin Dumas – Yes. Vote 5-0 PASSED



Kevin Dumas, Chair



Date