

Ocean Street Property Advisory Committee (OSPAC) Meeting Minutes



APPROVED MINUTES

Thursday, 8 April 2024 – 09:00 am (Town Hall)

Members Present:

Paul Legere--Chair David Myers

Maura Sullivan Don White

Peggy Lamb

Members Absent:

Doug Pinciaro

Others Present:

None

Meeting called to order at 9:03 am.

1. **OLD Business:** Committee recommended approval of meeting minutes from 15 Mar 2024 meeting.

2. **New Business:**

a. Discussion of Input

Committee members discussed the inputs received to date. Peggy reported that with the addition of the latest hardcopy submissions, there are approximately 75 total responses. The most repetitive theme of the input was to try to maintain as much green space as possible with minimal additions (benches and path and/or Gazebo) to preserve the open space and views. The other most consistent theme was to somehow focus on making the property connections with the residents of New Castle vice the more public Commons property. The discussion of the storm repairs (see notes from last meeting) to ensure maximum green space included the need to have native plants as part of those repairs.

Generally, the most wide-ranging alternatives have to do with the disposition of the existing housing on the property. Responses ranged from demolishing to selling off the housing area with strict single home zoning (no bigger or taller than the existing housing). There was a myriad of ideas on the use of the existing housing for town employee housing, converting to other uses such as bathrooms or a meeting center to name a few. As part of the town employee housing, the discussion of the current eligible employees indicated that there would likely be several school aged children that could potentially increase enrollment at MHT School. It was noted that the financial aspects (such as savings in overtime costs) of employee housing would need to be fully developed and presented as part of the evaluation of alternatives for full disclosure in the decision process. Additionally, the decreased response time and safety of the employees (who currently reside outside of the area) who might have to travel from their homes through dangerous weather conditions were notable aspects to consider.

Based on input at the last meeting, Don White (Police Chief), reported that he reviewed the data for the last 15 years for the Ocean Street area, and found the complaints to be very low in numbers overall. However, the opportunity to shorten the Ocean Street (roughly back to the last driveways) as part of the major repairs needed was an excellent way to reduce traffic and to focus the area on pedestrian traffic. Additionally, by adding “no parking” signage of some type to direct parking to the upper lots would also decrease issues and assist in enforcement of parking violations. Perhaps signage that would include drop off only or no unattended vehicles might be necessary to accommodate handicap access would be needed. Additional signage in the parking area for residents only and pointing out the location of the public restrooms located in the UNH facility along the road to the Coast Guard station would be an enhancement. The placement of bollards would likely be necessary to prevent vehicles from driving on the grass and an appropriate path (allowing for strollers and wheelchairs) to the shore. Rather than repair the road, the idea would be to remove the pavement and existing dilapidated sidewalks (which are a significant tripping hazard) and restore the area to green space with native plantings etc.

Finally, the committee discussed the final report to the Select Board. IAW with the charge to the committee, the consensus was to provide the summary tables which identified the individuals who provided input, and a summary of that input. Additionally, the committee would provide a hard copy of all input as the backup data for the report. It was noted that all the committee members have read the full text of all the input provided. The committee also noted the great work done by Peggy to summarize the responses and to put them in table form for the committee and the report. The input will not be ranked in any way but simply compiled for the Select Board as they requested. The committee agreed that they would like to continue in their advisory capacity to assist the select board in their decision process that will ultimately be presented to the residents for their vote in the future.

b. OSPAC Information Briefing

The committee discussed the information briefing for the residents on the progress of the committee with a summary of actions to date. Provide the details of the housing units through realtor type pictures and videos of the property so that the public can see what the condition of the homes. Additional items to be included will be the police reports for the area, summary results of the request for input, and a summary of the fact sheet put out by the town regarding the purchase of the property. Paul Legere indicated that he would put together a draft information briefing for the next meeting. Subject to the approval of the Select Board, the briefing will be presented at the 13 May town hall meeting. The briefing would go a long way to ensuring flow of information to the public and maintaining transparency.

c. Evaluation Criteria

In preparation for the report to the Select Board, the committee brainstormed some potential course of action evaluation criteria. In no order, the criteria discussed included residential focus, preserving the seacoast, future planning, cost, and public safety. The discussion of the residential focus was an outflow from both the residential input but also in one of the main purposes of purchasing the property to preserve the town's access to the ocean and the connections to the community. Many towns throughout NH have "town only" areas and the proximity of the property to our town center makes this a great opportunity to focus on that aspect and is reflected in most of the input. The preservation of the seacoast for native wildlife, plants and other species should be a key part of the decision as well. With the storm damage and the future Federal funding to make repairs, there is great opportunity to provide for a construction that takes natives species into consideration. As discussed during the Master Plan process, the potential for the Coast Guard to vacate their remaining property is highly likely, providing the town with a unique opportunity to have contiguous property from the Commons to the Lighthouse. Partnering with the State, the opportunities to revive and enhance the historical significance of the Whale Back Lighthouse, Battery Farnsworth, and Fort Constitution through pedestrian access on the ocean side would be of great value to the community and public. The cost factor would be more difficult to quantify without additional work (outside the expertise of the committee) to fully develop. Finally, on the public safety, there are different aspects to that criteria that include the reduction of traffic on Ocean Street as well as the ability to house key safety and emergency personnel on site (a 5-minute walk from the town hall/fire station/fire department). The committee agreed that this initial list would be provided to the Select Board in draft for them to consider as we move forward in the decision process.

- d. Establishment of a Nonprofit 501 (C) (3): The committee agreed that a Nonprofit 501 (C) (3) should be initiated to allow for donations to support the OSP reuse. This would enable potential streams of funding to include Grants, corporate and/or individual donations to support the efforts to reuse the property that are not subject to the State/Town strict budgeting processes. As noted, the first 7 years of bond payments are covered by the first two donations received totally \$1.5M ensuring no impacts to the tax rate. The nonprofit goal would be to offset any impacts to the town's budget in perpetuity and to eliminate the impact of the bond on the tax rate. The committee unanimously agreed to forward this suggestion to the Select Board for approval.

e. Next Meeting: 9:00 am 22 April 2024

3. Public Questions and Answers None

4. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 1057 am.

Respectfully Submitted,

Paul Legere
Chair/Recording Secretary