



**Town of Camden
Minutes of the Meeting of the
Downtown Network Board**

**June 10, 2013
3:30pm**

PRESENT: Co-Chair Peter Gross, Staci Coomer, Deb Dodge, Dave Jackson, Meg Quijano, Lowrie Sargent, Development Director Brian Hodges.

Guests: Don White, Camden Select Board; Opera House Committee: Kerry Hadley, Judy Godwin, Susan Dorr

ABSENT: Erick Anderson, Rick Bates, Bernice Berger, Pete Brown, Martin Cates, Ellis Cohn, Samantha Hill, Janis Kay, Jill Lang, Robin McIntosh, Sue Michaud, Barrie Pribyl, Liz Valente, Oscar Verest, and Kipp Wright.

1. **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 3:30pm.

2. **Approval of Board Minutes**

There was not a quorum present to vote on the minutes of the May 13 meeting.

3. **Maine Downtown Center Annual Conference**

Brian Hodges reported on the Maine Downtown Center Annual Conference held May 31st at Point Lookout. He said this was a statewide conference with approximately 275 people attending.

Feedback on the Conference:

Don White said he had attended the historic tourism session and had found it informative. He noted that on the post-conference survey he'd suggested that the programs were a bit too long and that not enough time was set aside to network with those from other municipalities. However, he said he had met good contacts and that it was worthwhile.

Dave Jackson said he had learned a lot about historic tax credits.

Amy Rollins had attended the session on local food as it relates to tourism and that she'd learned a lot about the healthy communities movement.

Hodges told the group that Camden had been nominated statewide for the Plan of the Year, and that we would find out a next two weeks whether we had been awarded this designation.

4. **Priorities List**

The group talked over possible uses for current TIF funding.

Waterfall/Dam

Peter Gross discussed the repairs required around the area of the dam. Prock Marine had quoted

a cost to fix it at \$40,000. Gross said that this would get the water flowing over the dam instead of around it as it is currently doing. To replace the existing gate would be another \$38,000, he told the group. Lowrie Sargent said it would be helpful in assessing the project if Prock Marine could give us an estimate on how long the current gate would last.

Wi-Fi

Hodges reviewed the option of using the available TIF funds to install free Wi-Fi for the downtown. He had researched costs, which were:

Start up costs: 60,000

Engineering design in the first year only: \$5000

Operational costs: \$10,000 per year.

Total expense for year one: \$75,000.

Hodges said that since town-wide Wi-Fi was not included on the previously-submitted TIF project list, it would be hard to sell it to the state. Staci Coomer noted that the Chamber of Commerce will be offering free Wi-Fi in the public landing area. It was suggested that a map of town be developed showing where free Wi-Fi is available. Boynton McKay, Zoot, and the Library (extending across Library Park) all offer free Internet at this point, in addition to the Chamber.

Opera House

Susan Dorr and Kerry Hadley talked about proposed renovations of the Opera House. Hadley told the group they hope to work on upgrades to the exterior of the Opera House in addition to plans for renovating the third floor. Lighting & signage improvements were part of the plan, she said, along with improvements to the face of the building. A new box office would be placed at the location of the current front window to give it a street presence. The committee's proposal to the Downtown Network Board totaled \$40,000 to fund these improvements, using currently available TIF funds.

Meg Quijano asked what the timeframe would be for making these renovations if they had the money available. Hadley estimated that they would begin within six months. The group suggested that the Opera House Committee write up detailed plans regarding lighting, signage, monitors, the new box office, and the front window redesign, and submit them to the Network Board for further consideration.

5. Downtown Plan

Hodges announced to the group that two major grants had come through, the first to fund the bus stop sidewalk proposed in partnership with the Town of Rockport, in the amount of \$134,000. The grant will involve a local share of 20% to be funded by the Economic Development Reserve Fund. The second grant that had been approved will fund projects recommended in the Downtown Master Plan. The full request had been funded, amounting to nearly \$500,000. The award would pay for new sidewalks as well as repairs to existing sidewalks, bumpouts, lighting and other pedestrian-focused improvements to the downtown area. Timing of this grant approval also coincides with the Riverwalk and development of the Public Landing. Hodges was congratulated on his hard work in getting these grants approved, hosting decision-makers, and clearly articulating the needs of the community.

Donald White asked about timing of when the money would be available. Hodges explained that due to the recent government sequester, it may be 2016 before the money is made available. However, if state infrastructure bonds pass or if other circumstances change, the money could be released sooner. He noted that this is federal money that flows through the Maine Department of Transportation, and the DOT decides which municipal projects it will fund.

An important factor will be which municipalities indicate to MDOT that their local share is ready, Hodges said. If we were able to indicate our readiness at this time, it would put Camden at the top of the list. Our local share for these projects amounts to \$123,000. There was discussion on the possibility of using current and future TIF funds to make up the local share. Additional funds from TIF will be available in September and could go toward Camden's share, which would serve the purpose of moving the project forward. Hodges explained details of how this could happen:

Year one: \$30,000 has been allocated, \$16,191 has not been allocated.

Year two: approximately \$47,000 remains to be allocated but will be available.

Year three: an estimate of \$45-\$50,000 will be allocated, and the amount will be determined in September of this year.

Therefore, he said, we can consider that we have about \$94,000 in TIF funds to bank on at this time. Along with money from the Economic Development Reserve Fund, this would make it possible to pledge the necessary \$123,000.

Members of the group were in agreement that this approach should be considered. Gross noted that we could go ahead and spend the \$30,000 that's currently available on other projects that are under consideration.

Other

There was brief discussion on the current situation with emergency medical services.

Addressing tactical urbanism was postponed to a future meeting.

The next topic that the group discussed briefly was how to convey the recent accomplishments.

6. What's Next

The next community meeting for Riverwalk and Public Landing projects was on the schedule for June 24th at 6:30pm at the Camden Rockport Middle School. Hodges said that at this meeting the consultants would be presenting plans to date and looking for feedback from the public.

7. Public Comments/Questions

There were no public comments.

8. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Downtown Network Board will be held on the second Monday of the month, July 8th.

Adjourn

Meg Quijano made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Deb Dodge seconded this motion and the Board adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Brace
Recording Secretary