

# DRAFT

## Housatonic Improvement Committee Meeting

October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023; 6:30pm

Housatonic Community Center (the Housy Dome)  
1064 Main St, Housatonic, MA 01236

### **Members present:**

Angela Lomanto (chair)  
Scott Shortt (vice chair)  
Eric Gabriel  
Ben Elliot  
Louise Goldsmith  
Beverly Nourse

### **Members absent:**

**Louise made a motion to open the meeting at 6:31PM. Scott seconded this motion. The meeting was opened with a unanimous yes vote, 6-0.**

Angela read Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18 as well as MGL. c. 30A sec. 20F regarding recording meetings.

### **Approval of Minutes**

With the amendment noting that Scott attended the 9/21 meeting in person instead of virtually and some grammatical corrections, the minutes were accepted via a unanimous vote, 6-0.

### **The first item on the Committee Vacancy**

Angela announced Daniel's departure from the HIC, and asked the Committee members to start to look for a new member. Louise asked if members of the Committee needed to live in Housatonic to serve, and Eric said yes. Louise asked if owning a business counted, and Angela stated she would look into it.

### **The second item was the Ramsdell Library**

Ruby Chang attended the meeting virtually to discuss Ramsdell Library to discuss the renovations. Ruby requested that the Committee members state how they feel about the library, and how they see it serving in their vision of Housatonic. Does the Committee see it as a community space, a maker space, a childcare space, music, etc.? How does the Committee see the Ramsdell moving forward? Ruby went on to share the details of the grant that they are working on, and detailed the Community Needs Assessment they would be undergoing. She also requested a letter of support from the Committee regarding their grant.

Angela asked if the Trustees if they would be sending a survey to all residents of Housatonic. Ruby stated that they will be working with a specific group that conducts surveys and gathers data. Ruby also reported that a main area of focus is ADA accessibility. Angela asked when the needs assessment would be taking place so they can figure out what they would be supporting. Ruby stated that she is asking for support to apply for CPA funds that are being voted on on Monday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Scott asked how much is needed for the needs assessment- Ruby said \$20,000. Angela asked how supportive Friends of the Library are, and Ruby reported that they are very supportive.

Eric asked about what the rest of the \$30,000 would be for of the \$50,000 they applied for. Ruby reported that this would go towards architectural assessments. It would also go towards starting a foundation. Eric requested more clarification regarding the needs assessment, building assessment, and set up for a trust or foundation of some sort. Scott asked if the needs assessment needs to be completed before the architectural assessment, and Ruby replied yes. Scott asked if the Building Department could assist with this task. Ruby reported that the grant requires that architects with specialized knowledge of libraries to work on this. Scott asked what the maximum construction grant amount is, and Ruby reported that it's \$5-6 million, but there will still be a deficit and the rest will need to be fundraised separately. Louise asked for clarification on what can be changed given its historic status. Ruby reported that there are a lot of concerns about making the building useable and healthy, and is requiring a lot of infrastructure upgrades. Eric stated that he feels the building is underutilized, and is a great space. Eric asked for Ruby to elaborate on the funds being requested through the CPA.

Eric asked what the timeframe is for getting all this done before May, and asked if that's enough time to get all this work done. Ruby reported that once the \$50,000 is granted, they can start the process. Ben asked for clarification regarding what was being requested at this time. Ruby asked for Committee support in figuring out what should go in the needs assessment, a letter of support for the \$50,000 at the special meeting on Monday, and the \$150,000 being requested in May. Eric stated that he would feel comfortable with a letter of support, and proposed to talk more about the \$150,000.

Eileen Mooney, who writes for the newsletter, asked for clarification and said that her impression was that the \$150,000 had to be in before the end of October, and Ruby reported that was not true.

Eric made a motion for the HIC to write a letter of support for the \$50,000. Louise seconded, and the motion passed unanimously with a 6-0 vote. Angela offered to write the letter and submit it as requested. Lauren Clark asked if this letter could be read at this special town meeting.

### **The third item was Housatonic the Beautiful**

Lauren Clark came to discuss HTB (Housatonic the Beautiful), and how they could take on planning more events (such as Party in the Park). Eric clarified that the HIC would be involved to a certain extent, but HTB would take on more of the work. Lauren said she would see who else might want to join the board. Angela suggested talking to Andreas from the Center for Peace Through Culture, as well as Richard from T Square.

Lauren also stated that she hoped that the Committee would vote in favor of the WEB Dubious statue at the upcoming town hall meeting (which is article 3).

**Louise requested to discuss the Rail Trail renovations.**

Louise wanted to know why the trail was being renovated, and if widening the trail would diminish its beauty by taking down too many trees. Eric reported that this was voted on four years ago, and they will be widening it to 8 feet to make it more accessible and more resilient to climate change and heavy rains. Eileen reported on an email from Joe clarifying the scope of the project and next steps.

**The fourth item on the agenda was areas of work for the Committee.**

Scott presented his draft of previously discussed priorities.

Eric briefly discussed the Housy Hustle, which previously had taken place during the week of Thanksgiving.

**The final agenda item was Citizen Speak.**

Angela proposed the next meeting be on Thursday, November 16<sup>th</sup>. The Committee agreed on that date at 6:30PM.

Eileen Mooney from the media was present.

Louise made a motion to adjourn at 7:48pm, Eric seconded. The Committee voted unanimously to adjourn with a 6-0 vote. The meeting was adjourned at 7:48PM.

Respectfully submitted, Eric Gabriel

## HOUSATONIC IMPROVEMENTS

	Short Term / Tactical	Vacant Real Estate	Village Improvement Plan
Description / Definition	Event focused, community engagement activities within a rolling 18-month timeframe	Committee efforts focused to spur new uses for vacant real estate throughout Housatonic	Committee efforts to improve community wellbeing, life safety, ease of movement, and to advocate for Housatonic Village priorities within Town of Great Barrington budget through the creation of a Village Improvement Plan.
Objective / Success Measures	Well attended events – (defined per event); Positive community feedback; items that deliver value in 12 months or less	Fewer vacant properties	Funds allocated for capital improvements and planning
Items / Target Dates / Next Steps	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Party in the Park v2 – June 8, 2024 or date TBD</li> <li>Halloween Event / Pet Parade – October 26, 2024?</li> <li>Community-wide composting</li> </ul> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore if these events can transition to Housatonic the Beautiful. Contact other volunteers.</li> </ul>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Old baseball field</li> <li>Cook's Garage</li> <li>Mills</li> <li>The "Power House"</li> <li>Water Tower</li> <li>Vacant / condemned houses</li> <li>Vacant commercial properties</li> </ul> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create list, map of subject properties for prioritization / strategy</li> </ul>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housy-dome improvements – broader use, catering kitchen, role in the village center</li> <li>Village-wide free WiFi and / or improved cellular signal coverage</li> <li>Traffic / pedestrian study; way finding</li> <li>"Housy" branding and signage</li> </ul> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invite chair of Parks &amp; Rec to HIC meeting.</li> <li>Identify resources for planning</li> </ul>

Other Actions: Review Town's Master Plan to align HIC's work with it