

## LONG RANGE SUSTAINABILITY WORKING GROUP MEETING

Tuesday February 18, 2020 – 6:00 PM – Richmond Town Hall, 1529 State Road

**PRESENT:** Neal Pilson, Selectman, Temporary Chair; Danielle Fillio, Town Administrator; Peter Cohen; Dewey Wyatt; Jay Phelps; Lauren Broussal; Laura Brennan, BRPC; Stephanie Beling; Ed Fechner

**ABSENT:**

**GUEST:** Richard Bell

Mr. Pilson opened the meeting at 6:05.

**Review of the Minutes of the January 21, 2020 meeting:** Neal noted that some corrections have been made, but additional corrections from the assembled members were asked to be made on the copy Mr. Pilson passed around. A motion was made to approve the minutes of January 21, 2020 as corrected. The motion was seconded by Lauren Broussal and adopted by unanimous vote.

**Elect a Chairperson:** There was a discussion of the lack of attendance and whether it would be appropriate to elect a chairperson under the circumstance. There being no consensus about how to proceed, Neal volunteered to continue to serve as Temporary Chair. Neal will contact all the members of this committee to determine whether each one chooses to continue to serve.

**Discussion of a "Vision Plan" for Richmond:** Neal noted that this Committee's purpose is to serve as an advisory and consultative body for the Selectmen in their efforts to enhance the interests of the Town. He asked that in this meeting a limited number of objectives for the Town be identified. In his role as Temporary Chair, he would then assign members to perform certain tasks on behalf of the Committee and report back. He would be looking for a paragraph containing recommendations on certain things the Town should consider as it moves through the next five or so years.

One of the issues that has been brought up in the past is the "Age-Friendly Berkshires" concept which currently exists in several of our neighboring towns. Neal asked Peter Cohen for his opinion on how to direct the Selectmen's attention to developing participation in Age-Friendly Berkshires. Peter reported on his conversation with Carl Shapiro, founder of "Villages of the Berkshires," which is an organization that supplies help to the aging population for such things as transportation. There is a fee to access the help of that organization which goes to providing insurance for the workers supplying the services. Neal asked that Peter or Mr. Shapiro prepare a short proposal for whatever action the Town can take to access those services and submit that report at the next meeting.

**Marketing Richmond:** Neal noted his belief in a continued need for a marketing program beyond what is currently on-going. He has seen that marketing effort have a significant impact on the perception of Richmond and was advised that the local real estate agents were very appreciative of the information that was made available to them through that program. Marketing needs to be a never-ending process and he is recommending that this committee endorse those efforts. Stephanie Belling suggested that the new Director of the Berkshire County Board of Realtors be invited to attend a meeting of this Committee along with Laura Brennan. Stephanie will make the invitation as soon as a date is set for the next meeting. Neal suggested that the Richmond Select-board and the Planning Board schedule annual joint meetings with their opposite numbers in West Stockbridge.

**Update on the future of the current Town Hall and the new Town Hall/Library/Community Space:** A question was raised concerning the possibility of using the West Stockbridge Town Hall/Library space instead of building a new center. There was a discussion that resulted in a consensus that there is no support for such a move.

**Opportunities for Expanding Shared Services with West Stockbridge:** There is a lot of sharing of services among all the local fire departments. Recently, there was training at the Richmond Fire Department that included the Towns of Canaan, NY; East Chatham, NY; Red Rock, NY; West Stockbridge, MA; Richmond, MA; New Lebanon, NY.

**Status of Affordable Housing Review:** Neal mentioned a few additional issues he felt worth looking at: preserving Open Space and Green Community efforts. He asked whether the Committee felt that efforts should be made to preserve open space or towards considering using some of the open space for housing (with the understanding that housing is a difficult, demand-driven issue and there is very little in the way of new housing starts in Richmond at this time). A discussion ensued that explored all the complex issues involved, including the idea of affordable housing, which does not seem to be an issue with any wide interest in the town. It was suggested that the question be put to the new Director of the Realtors Association at the next meeting as to whether there are many requests for affordable housing in Richmond, how many houses are up for sale and how many housing lots are available for sale.

**Marijuana Issues:** There was a question about the laws concerning marijuana cultivation on a commercial scale. Neal advised that marijuana cultivation is considered light-industrial development and is restricted.

Neal noted that after a review of any interest in marijuana growing in Richmond, the Town has designated the town's commercial district as available for marijuana development. The district is a small space limited to the area just north of the train tracks.

In response to a suggestion that in order to attract young families, the Town will have to allow development of interesting, fun things to do, Neal thought it might be helpful to ask the Town to promote recreational activities through marketing such as bike paths, a playground at the beach, hiking trails and the effort underway within Berkshire County to link the hiking trails that exist throughout the county. It was noted that in past Town Meetings there was push-back to spending money on preserving open spaces – especially when that leads to a drop off from the tax rolls.

Peter Cohen reminded the group that at its inception, this Committee was intended to find ways to create financial stability for the Town by finding ways to attract more families into town thereby increasing the tax rolls. The concern at that time was about the School, which was eventually proven to be a big draw for younger families to move into Richmond. He felt that the new Municipal Building will also prove to attract new families given the inclusion of an attractive Community Room and the possible use of the outdoor space for various recreational purposes.

Neal mentioned some of the residents of Richmond Pond with the noise from Balderdash. He noted that Christian Hanson, the owner and operator, will be approaching the Board with a series of special permits for events they hope to schedule this summer that fall outside the right to do business that is inherent in the Farm Function Bylaw. Neal anticipates that there will be a large turnout for that meeting.

Danielle raised the issue of income sources for Richmond. The Town has no industry or businesses on the tax rolls. Free Cash is getting reduced every year and will continue to do so until the Town acquires some source of income. There is not much left in the Stabilization Account, given that the Board prefers to pay for capital

expenses rather than finance them and there will be an additional \$300,000.00 added to the tax rolls for the new building, which will not be offset by anything.

Neal responded that, historically, the Town has not encouraged new businesses because of the nature of the Town. It was Neal's belief that the taxpayers in Richmond are willing to pay to keep the Town in pretty much the same configuration it is in now.

Danielle suggested making it possible to slightly enlarge the "business district" and include something like a restaurant in a single-family home, which would retain the town's image but would provide some income. Danielle reported that she and Laura Brennan, the Town's Marketing Director, had explored ways of making small changes that would bring in some new businesses to bolster the tax rolls without changing the basic image of the Town. There was considerable discussion, which would have to be continued when a larger number of members of the Committee would be present and could be party to it.

Discussion then turned to getting some of the large numbers of elderly residents more involved in town functions. Neal believes that accomplishing that starts with welcoming people who move into town. There used to be a nice welcome protocol that the Civic Association used to run, but that does not seem to be happening any longer. New residents need information about many aspects of town life: town government, garbage collection schedule, the website, the weekly town newsletter, etc. Peter suggested that the Civic Committee be asked to send a representative to the next meeting of this committee.

**Update on the Status of the new Town Hall/Library:** Next Monday, numbers will be available to indicate the cost of the new building and its configuration. The project may be presented at the Town Meeting in May, depending on whether it is determined that there is a need for education of the public and a campaign for residents' approval prior to rolling out the specifics. It was suggested that prior to any public disclosure, approval of the Select-board and of the Finance Committee would be prudent. Neal agreed that both of those approvals would be obtained after the Municipal Building Committee is able to present a specific plan with concrete pricing and its recommendation.

#### **Update on Anticipated Discussions with Berkshire Hills School District about Current Shared Service**

**Arrangements:** Neal raised the issue of the possibility of Richmond joining the Berkshire Hills School District and described some of the factors involved. There was a discussion of the pros and cons.

**Open Meeting Law:** Ms. Fillio asked the group to sign off on having read the Open Meeting Law materials they were sent the previous week if they had not already signed as a member of some other committee. It was noted that Fred DuPres, the Council for the Richmond School Committee, had offered to have his office present a training session on the Open Meeting Law for members of Boards and Committees. That would entail a separate fee, which Neal agreed could be found somewhere.

Neal recognized Rick Bell and invited him to speak to the Committee. Rick brought up a report he wrote entitled, Richmond Vision 2025. He shared some of the bullet points contained in that work: 1. Most sought-after town in which to live in Berkshire County: marketing. 2. Best school system and programs in Western Mass: How to get there. 3. Active community: 4. Strong leadership in town government. 5. User-friendly, informative website with all paperless applications and forms.

He also suggested that the Committee choose a vice-chair for those times when the chair may be unable to attend a meeting and that it would be advisable for the Town to hire a part-time, professional planner, who could also act as the chair of the Committee.

Additional comment on getting the elderly involved in Town life and sustaining the future by getting more people involved in the committees. Peter Cohen recounted that he was successful in obtaining new members for the Council on Aging by calling individuals he knew and asking them to join the Board. He felt that would be the most effective way to get more people involved. There was a discussion of how widespread this problem is, which resulted in no viable solutions.

Neal noted that he felt the Committee had achieved a good deal by identifying some recommendations it feels the Board of Selectmen should be aware of going forward over the next few years. For the next meeting, he suggested that a half-dozen paragraphs be drafted on the sentiment of this Committee as to their feelings about the vision for Richmond over the next two-four year, which was the intended role of this Committee.

**Next Meeting Date:** Tuesday, April 28, 2020 – 6:00 PM was the date generally agreed upon.

**Adjournment:** There being no further business before the Group, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded and passed by unanimous vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17

Signed:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Neal Pilson", is written over a horizontal line.

Mr. Neal Pilson

Acting Chair