**Destination Groton Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Tuesday April 19, 2022**

**9am**

**Upstairs meeting room- Town Hall**

**Present:** **Greg Sheldon, Mairi Elliott, Jeff Gordon, Julie Platt, Mark Haddad**

**Guests: Senator John Cronin, Susan Templeton, Patricia Dufresne, Takashi Tada, Dawn Dunbar**

**Attendees: Judy Anderson**

**Agenda item A- Call meeting to order**

**Meeting opened by Greg Sheldon at 9:03am**

**Agenda Item B- Approve Minutes from 4/13/2022**

JPlatt asks to remove “wonders why they never completed” from a comment made. She was not the person who stated that.- Noted and updated

**Motion: Julie Platt makes motion to approve minutes from 4/13/2022**

**2nd by Mairi Elliott**

**All Approved by roll call vote: Greg Sheldon, Mairi Elliott, Jeff Gordon, Julie Platt**

**Agenda Item C- Meeting with Senator Cronin and Mark Haddad**

Mark Haddad makes opening statements to Senator Cronin welcoming him and explaining the purpose of the Destination Groton committee as a group who enthusiastically want to embrace the change that is coming with Groton Hill Music and protect the current lifestyle in Groton. Mr. Haddad then turns remarks over to Committee Chair Greg Sheldon.

Greg Sheldon starts his remarks with highlighting the facility size of Groton Hill Music and the inevitable impact it will have on traffic and influx of visitors to the town. He invites Senator Cronin for a tour of the facility at a future date.

Sen. Cronin indicates his enthusiasm over the idea and states he has done a drive-by and seen the size and is quite impressed with the scope of the project.

GSheldon brings up the work of the Groton Business Association and the report generated over the previous year. He states they identified towns that we can emulate in how they brought a resurgence of vitality to their areas. He emphasizes that the goal of our committee is to get ahead of any negative impact these issues may bring.

JGordon states it is very important to us to minimize the impact before it happens.

GSheldon returns to the conversation and raises that we need to access funding and be strategic for the region. He mentions that we are 8 years away from Groton’s 375th anniversary and our “goal post” is that culminating event. He would like to be in a position of partnership with the Senator’s office now as we move forward. He states that when we were formed the Select Board asked us to act as the Economic Development team until they could get funds approved for FY24 for a full time position. We will be involved in the search and hiring of that person.

He then explains the purpose of our upcoming public forums and that we will know more about what the Townspeople are concerned about most after those occur.

Senator Cronin asks the committee how Groton Hill Music will be operating and when the opening is.

JPlatt explains that they are doing a “slow roll out” to start with the School portion opening first late summer early fall and then moving to events every weekend and then moving to larger concerts by the Spring of 2023.

Mark Haddad indicates that they have an agreement with the town stating they will have no more than 14 large events per year. He also tells the Senator about the deal that was struck with Groton Hill with a $2 surcharge on each ticket that will come back directly to the Town.

Senator Cronin then asks if we are aware of the Groton Hill Music marketing plan. He recommends speaking with Lisa Fiorentino to coordinate marketing efforts.

GSheldon states that yes, we have been in contact with her and she was part of the advisory board for the GBA report. She is also on our current Destination Groton advisory board and we do have future meetings in the works.

Sheldon goes on to talk about the National Historic Register and how we have 7 historic sites now, but that he sees at least 10 more buildings in Town as potential to be placed on the National Register. He discusses the history of the Groton Minutemen and their march from Groton to Concord among many other parts of Groton’s rich history. He would like to have these things highlighted at the 375th anniversary celebration. He states we see Groton as a Gateway town to the rest of the Valley and more importantly to the Senator’s constituency.

JGordon hands the Senator the GBA report on the “Assets” page and the Senator is impressed with the vast amount that we have going on here. He states “This is incredible!”

The Senator then asks what are the major concerns of people in town with Groton Hill coming.

JGordon, along with affirmations from the rest of the committee, states that the biggest concern/hope of the people is that we do nothing to impact the character of the town, which needs to include mitigating increased traffic.

Senator Cronin tells us about growing up in Lunenburg and remembering that installing a traffic light was a big deal at the time and he fully understands the fears a small town can have in a situation like this.

Mark Haddad adds that he feels the largest concern is the intersection of 119 and Old Ayer Rd., as well as Broadmeadow and 119/ Rte. 40 intersection. He states they requested an Earmark from Congresswoman Trahan and Senator Warren in the amount of $3mil for improvements to Broadmeadow Road, the road behind the former Light Department Building, a new water main to Court Street and parking along the rail trail.

JPlatt then reads into the record Joni Parker-Roach’s letter to the Senator:

“Thank you for joining our meeting, Senator Cronin and guests.  I am so sorry that I am not able to be present to meet with you.  I look forward to hearing about it.  I am grateful that my colleague, Julie, is willing to read a statement from me now.

,I bring the interest in the arts and culture to our committee.   Groton, MA, has been a center of culture and learning since the beginning of European history in this area in the 1600's. It was a central hub of transportation and that, in turn, created a community of art and culture, as well as transportation and commerce.  Salons, lyceums, places of learning emerged and many artists, musicians, writers, poets, creators of all kinds have been drawn to this beautiful place for hundreds of years.  This continues to the present and is only growing with the opening of our new 'neighbor'.  The Groton Hill Music Center, a spectacular new addition coming to our town, has been described as "Tanglewood East" and only 30 miles from Boston!

There are many wonderful facets of our town that we want to highlight and showcase.  History, natural beauty, shopping, fine dining, outdoor/nature activities are all vibrant reasons to visit Groton.  But I feel that arts/music and cultural activities are fundamentally important to the emerging of the town becoming a 'destination community' in tourism.  In fact, according to the research firm, Destination Analysts, 13.1 percent of traveling Americans describe themselves as being "passionate" about visiting art attractions.

There are certain places in the world that attract artists, often because of their natural beauty, and Groton has always been one of those. Among our most well-known residents are a Boston School portrait painter and also the grandson of Henri Matisse, known for his kalliroscopes.  Groton was also the home of a world-renowned German painter and his poet wife who made a farm into an art center. We have two art galleries featuring the work of local/regional artists and three stores featuring locally made jewelry and handcrafts. The Prescott Community Center houses the studios of a potter, a costume designer and a stained glass artist. Our newest addition is a metal sculptor who took over an old church as his studio. Over the years, Groton has been home to Art Walks, has installed public art along the rail trail and most recently, hosted a town-wide exhibit featuring 25 local artists, from painters to woodturners, with an accompanying coffee table book.  All of these are unquestionably a draw for visitors and could be part of a self-guided tour of the town's cultural attractions.

We are thrilled that the town has embraced the yearlong focus group study and resulting report created by the Groton Business Association enough to have created the new Destination Groton Committee.  I am honored to have been invited to be one of 5 people on that town committee. We are quickly ramping up promoting and supporting our town before the much anticipated opening of the spectacular new Groton Music Center over the Fall.  My fellow committee members will do a good job in explaining our strategies and vision to you today, I am sure.  I look forward to exploring the possibilities.”

All the best,

Joni Parker-Roach

Greg Sheldon then emphasizes that Tourism is a $25 billion dollar a year industry which results in $5.4 billion in tax revenue for the state and it employs over 150,000 employees. Senator Cronin states he sees four main avenues for us to pursue, one being with the Office of Travel and Tourism and asks if we had applied for grant funding from them yet.

GSheldon explains that yes we have already had a meeting with Keiko Orrall and she is very supportive of us; however, that grant needed matching funds spent by the town of at least $15k. We have just received those funds to spend in FY22 and will be able to apply for FY23. The Senator then suggests creating a relationship with Roy Nascimento of the North Central Chamber of Commerce and offers his office’s help in setting up a future meeting, He suggests his office can arrange a meeting for us to centralize who to ask for what.

GSheldon tells the Senator that that brings him to our second “Ask” of the Senator, which is - Would you come back for a tour of Groton Hill Music along with instrumental people including Juan Vega of the EOHD? They then both bring up Michael Bobbitt of the MA Cultural Council. The Senator advises that the “best way” to receive grant funding is to apply and then reinforce the relationship with tours or meetings to bring home the impact of what is going on in Town. He suggests the 4th and last thing on his list would be to invite Secretary of Housing and Development Michael Kennealy out to town for a tour once we have made a grant application.

The Senator states that the best plan of action is to Identify, Ask and then Invite. He asks for us to identify short- and long-term goals and to be sure to ask the Baker/Polito administration for funding as soon as possible on the short term goals because they have a lot of money to distribute before they leave office.

The Senator goes on to say that his office loves long term one-off projects that can be paid in one step. He brings up that Peter Cunningham recently won and Earmark for 100k for the Squannacook River Rail Trail, which is a perfect example of a longterm impact one time pay out project that he can address with an Earmark.

He states there can be exceptions to a position being funded through an Earmark, if the Town subsequently commits to paying for the future years’ salary.

GSheldon justifies his request of $450k spread over 3 years by stating that Sturbridge MA received funding in the amount of $350k and it turned the trajectory of their town around.

The Senator states he feels this is a “build it and they will come” kind of facility and that marketing will come on the heels of Groton Hill Music Center, in addition to what the surrounding towns are doing to publicize it.

JGordon brings up that we know that it will be advantageous to us to engage in regional partnerships for future funding. GSheldon brings the Senator’s attention back to the fact that part of what we are asking him for in funding is for an economic development consultant and perhaps an Infrastructure Development consultant. He also includes that some of the funds we are requesting would be put toward signage, which also needs to be planned out with the Town Planner, Takashi Tada.

Mark Haddad brings to the Senators’ attention that the Planning board is starting work on the new Master plan and our two Committees will marry their efforts together.

The Senator then asks what the vision is for commercial development. MHaddad discloses that we have 3 available pads at the Four Corners area and some commercial space will be in place at the site of the Previous Deluxe building which will be converted to Rental properties. He has approached a local land owner many times to sell for commercial development and been told no every time.

Judy Anderson chimes in that Mickey Higgins of South Coast Development has an additional building site in his development at Four Corners.

GSheldon brings up the Town Center Overlay plan and confirms the name with Takashi Tada. He then explains that it is an excellent vision of how to bring more commercial space to the center of the Town.

He has plans to align with that plan and grow in to that vision.

JPlatt brings up the future possibility of mixed use residential/commercial zoning.

GSheldon hands the Senator a brochure on Earl Carter’s collection of Groton historical items. The Senator is impressed by the sheer volume of items and states he is very interested in that.

MElliott brings up the possibility of creating an Earl Carter Museum in the Center of town for him to visit in the future.

Senator states that he and his team were very impressed with our efforts and materials that had been sent to his office prior to this meeting. He states this group really has its act together. He goes on to say he will do everything he can but indicates our next steps should be to investigate our options with MassWorks, MOTT and the Mass Cultural Council. He asks us to keep him informed of what we are doing and grants we are applying for so he can speak with involved parties on our behalf. He can help us identify when and what to ask for.

He suggests that we save a visit with Secretary Kennealy until we have applied for a grant and that they have $2.6 billion that they are trying to get out the door.

He continues that the marketing funding we are looking for is more of a MOTT grant and we should pursue. He states they have $15million in trust. The next roll out of funds will be next February.

He recommends finding out more specifics on the Groton Hill marketing plan and to create a partnership with the Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce. He states he wants to have a long term impact for us.

MElliott asks if a one year consultant position is more in line with what he is looking to be able to fund for us with an Earmark. The Senator replies yes that is something he can get behind.

Mark Haddad asks the committee for specifics, would this be full time? Long term?

MElliott replies this would be a part time consultant position with the hopes of turning it into a full time Town paid employee position when the Select Board can get funds approved for it.

Senator Cronin points to a recent grant for North Central Chamber of commerce that we should look at the results of called One North Central which was an 18-month planning study for economic development of the North Central Region. He invites us to view the plan at <https://www.northcentralmass.com/economic-development/onenorthcentral/>

JGordon reiterates that our large focus is to minimize the destruction of our town.

JPlatt states we will learn much more at our upcoming forums of what the constituency is most concerned with.

Senator Cronin states that in 2-3 weeks he will be in budget discussion in the Senate and asks us to get him a request with the scope of work and a specific vendor for a Consultant in Economic Development and Infrastructure Development.

JGordon implores the Senator to come back for a visit and tour of Groton Hill Music Center. He wholeheartedly accepts the invitation and his office will help us arrange it in congruence with a visit from Michael Bobbitt. He asks the cost of the Groton Hill project. GSheldon replies with $80 mil.

JGordon then asks the Senator to be a partner in our “sales team” to the integral people who will help push our efforts forward. The Senator happily agrees and states that is what he is here for. He suggests we wait on others to ask the 7 figure numbers for which he will help us with.

The Senator thanks the committee for their commitment and their time. The committee replies in turn with Thank You’s and handshakes.

The Senator and his Assistant leave the meeting at 9:56am.

**Second half of meeting-** Most guests leave at this time- Judy Anderson stays

**Agenda Item I – Grant discussion with Town Manager**

A brief discussion of the meeting with the Senator the committee and Mark Haddad. Mr. Haddad feels it went very well and that we should be encouraged.

GSheldon states he will reach out to Lisa Fiorentino for a meeting with the committee and availability for a tour with the Senator

GSheldon then moves to asking how we are going to spend our $15k on tourism. MHaddad replies that MElliott and he will be spending some of it the next morning with a contract for ad placement in Nashoba Valley living.

JGordon ask Mr. Haddad if we can pay a lump sum in contact for videos of they will not be completed by June 30 2022. MHaddad replies yes as long as the projects will be completed in the following fiscal year.

MHaddad encourages us to proceed full speed on requesting Earmark funding for an Economic Development position. He also suggests a potential earmark request could be for a traffic light at Old Ayer and 119.

GSheldon states we need to coordinate with MassWorks for grants as well as Federal Grants.

GSheldon asks how we identify what we need to provide the Senator for our request.

MElliott suggests that our future planned meeting with the Pepperell Select Board Chair could shed some light as Pepperell has a current Economic Development position and we could ask that person for recommendations of cohorts in their field willing to work with us.

GSheldon wonders if there is a Federal bucket of funding that we can pursue for burying a mile of powerlines through the center of town. MHaddad is interested in this idea.

Judy Anderson is invited to the table for discussion on what the biggest concerns are among the towns people. She states that she feels anything that goes before the town needs to keep in mind the “townies” who will want to know how any of this will help them specifically and maintain the way of life they are here for. She points to issues like parking in town center, the width of Main Street, drivers who try to pass, maybe marking two lanes or having more parking spots to fill the wide road.

JPlatt states that the idea of marketing Groton is a daunting one to long time/generational residents

MElliott brings up that as she is a lifelong resident married to a lifelong resident of a multigeneration family in town, she has a good perspective on the concerns and dislikes of that portion of residents.

GSheldon asks the committee to sharpen their pencils to get an Ec. Dev. Position description and potential candidates for a fleshed out Ask for the Senator.

JGordon starts a discussion about the meeting with the Senator and touring Groton Hill Meusic. He suggests we have two meetings with Lisa Fiorentino, one with the committee alone to discuss GHM marketing plan and then the tour with Senator and Michael Bobbitt.

**Other Issues**

JPlatt has been in contact with Sami at Town Hall for dates when we can have the public forum banner hanging in front of Town Hall. She relates that all of May is booked and we can have the last two weeks of June for the last meeting on June 25 at Prescott Center.

Committee discusses best ways to promote the first two meetings and publicizing in the Groton Herald. Discussion on placing ad announcements and requesting an article in the paper after the Grotonwood forum or before all forums to generate interest. Discussion on who to write the article and when. GSheldon suggests Connie Sartini to write article if she is willing.

GSheldon reflects that a takeaway from the earlier meeting is that we focus on infrastructure prior to marketing. He tells the committee that he is writing a request for CPC funds of $1k for the public forums, ads placed will be a part of that.

**Letter from Diversity Committee**

GSheldon brings up the letter sent to our committee from the Diversity and Inclusion committee asking us to support them at Town Meeting on changing the Town Seal. JPlatt states that we may all have our individual opinions on this issue, but it is not fair as a committee to come out with a formal position.

GSheldon says it sparked him to research hundreds of MA town seals and he discovered there are many with what could be disturbing call backs to history. He mentions that we can speak individually about our opinions but he feels it is not our committee’s place to take a position on this issue. JGordon discusses that we should not make public our personal opinions because we as individuals represent the committee and our fiduciary duty is to the committee. He states that making a decision in favor or against is discriminating on one section of the population or another. MElliott stresses that taking a public position will alienate one portion of the residents or the other. Some members in town could react to us being in support of changing the seal by actively working against anything we try to accomplish from that point on. The committee decides to abstain from writing a letter of support as requested.

**Motion: Motion to adjourn made by Jeff Gordon**

**2nd by Julie Platt at 10:42am.**

**All approved**