**Meeting Minutes - Destination Groton Committee (DGC) Meeting**

**Meeting Date:** May 7, 2025

**Attendees:**

* **Committee Members:** Greg Sheldon, Joni Parker-Roach (dialed-in), Brian Bolton, Heather Puksta (dialed-in)
* **Sub-Committee member:** Karen Tucker-Barisano

**Meeting Summary:** This meeting focused on a range of agenda items. Key agenda items included:

**Vision Planning and Grant Applications**: Continued discussion on the Rural Development Fund and the One-Stop Grant application, with a focus on presenting a comprehensive vision plan for Groton’s downtown by October 2025.

**Budget Management and Allocation**: Reviewing current funds, pending expenses, and planning allocations for the Visitor Center, social influencer marketing, and town beautification projects.

**Community and Developer Engagement**: Preparing to meet with developer John Amaral for insights into feasible development strategies for Groton’s downtown.

**Walking Tour Promotion and Event Planning**: Discussing the upcoming spring newsletter, promotional strategies for the walking tour, and coordinating future events.

**Key Takeaways**

* The committee is prioritizing a clear, actionable vision plan for Groton’s downtown, to be presented at the fall town meeting.
* Grant applications will focus on site preparation and accessibility rather than vague or unsupported initiatives.
* Developer John Amaral’s insights are expected to be critical in refining the vision plan.
* The committee continues to explore promotional strategies for the walking tour and other local attractions.
* A conservative approach to budgeting and cost control was maintained, with a focus on leveraging existing funds for impactful projects.

**Key topics included:**

**1. Vision Planning and Grant Strategy**

* The committee reviewed their approach to the One-Stop Grant, emphasizing the importance of presenting a clear vision plan at the fall town meeting.
* Potential projects discussed for grant applications included:
  + A footbridge over Broad Meadow and Prescott.
  + Traffic calming improvements and pedestrian enhancements.
  + Engineering support for accessibility and site preparation.
  + Burying power lines in the town center (ultimately seen as too costly and complex for current grant scope).
* Concerns were raised about “rummaging” for grants without a clear strategy, leading to a consensus on focusing on the vision plan first, then aligning grants accordingly.
* The committee highlighted the need for clear, measurable goals in the vision plan, which should focus on a walkable, mixed-use downtown.

**2. Developer Consultation with John Amaral**

* The committee emphasized the importance of consulting with John Amaral to gain a developer's perspective on the vision plan and related grant opportunities.
* A meeting was tentatively scheduled for May 14, 2025, with Amaral hopefully able to provide insights on which development concepts are feasible.
* Amaral’s feedback will inform the grant application and vision plan, with a focus on attracting developer interest.

**3. Budget Review and Allocations**

* The committee reviewed their remaining funds:
  + General Fund: $5,560.56
  + Gift Fund: $5,504.09
* Proposed budget allocations included:
  + $500 for the Visitor Center.
  + $2,500 for social influencer marketing.
  + A $1,000 contribution to a town beautification project (tree planting).
  + $1,500 for an event reservation at the Groton Inn.
* The committee debated the cost and feasibility of a proposed 45-foot tree (ranging from $22,000 to $42,000), with concerns about disease and cost.
* The group also discussed reserving funds for website maintenance (HubSpot: $267/year, GoDaddy: $192/year).

**4. Walking Tour Promotion and Spring Newsletter**

* Plans for a spring newsletter were confirmed, including:
  + Walking tour promotion.
  + Recaps of past events (Josh Vollmar event and the Minutemen, Groton Road Race).
  + Promotion of local authors and books (including the Boutwell book).
  + Possible photos from the Groton Road Race.
* Additional advertising via Facebook was considered to enhance walking tour visibility.

**5. Infrastructure and Zoning Considerations**

* The committee discussed potential development and infrastructure improvements for downtown Groton, including:
  + Parking adjustments, accessibility enhancements, and site preparation grants.
  + Potential future grant applications for pedestrian bridges, trail access, and downtown connectivity.
  + Concerns about over-emphasizing residential development in the downtown area.
  + Preference for mixed-use development with a focus on retail, eateries, and public spaces.

**Action Items**

* **Schedule a meeting with John Amaral** (Developer) to gain his insights on the vision plan and grant strategy (May 14).
* **Finalize the draft letter to Don Black**, ensuring it maintains a respectful, collaborative tone.
* **Reach out to Jeff** regarding the status of the Prescott elevator grant application.
* **Confirm final budget numbers** with the finance office.
* **Provide feedback to consultants (Stantec and Studio InSitu)** on emphasizing mixed-use development over dense residential housing.
* **Complete the spring newsletter**, ensuring it includes:
  + Walking tour promotion.
  + Recap of past events.
  + Book promotions (Boutwell and others).
* **Verify and review website hosting and maintenance costs** (HubSpot, GoDaddy).
* **Coordinate with the Visitor Center (Julie Platt, Megan Donovan)** for shared event calendar planning.
* **Evaluate potential future grant ideas**, including traffic calming, accessibility improvements, and pedestrian enhancements.