

DRAFT

VPI TASK FORCE REPORT - Town of Rockport

DATE: 8/30/22 START TIME: 5:00PM

CHAIR: Doug Cole

LOCATION: Opera House, Parker Room

IN ATTENDANCE: Doug Cole, Denise Munger, Orion Thomas, Kim Graffam, Mary Jane Young, Sally Cook, Michelle Gallant, Clare Tully (joining several minutes late by phone due to technical difficulties).

Absent: Jon Duke, Mike Young.

Items Discussed: No motions were made during this meeting, which focused largely on the review and group editing of a draft letter of intent to MDOT written by Chair Cole. This letter is to support Rockport's request for matching funds for a PPI traffic calming study of the "downtown" and some immediately adjacent streets. Orion Thomas entered the edits into the draft as they were agreed upon. Clare Tully thanked Chair Cole for his substantial work on the draft. She asked whether it might also be helpful to make a stronger economic development case for the study, in keeping with the two criteria Steve Cole had outlined to Chair Cole for the letter of intent.

Members discussed the "complexity of the intersection" formed by Pascal Avenue, High Street and the Rockport Marine Park access road, just before the bridge. Kim Graffam noted that as a longtime Rockport resident, she has always heard Pascal pronounced PAScal rather than PasCAL. The complex intersection is flanked by two pedestrian pathways leading to Harbor Park (the stairs in Cramer Park and the rustic pathway near the north side of the bridge). The access road to the harbor is so sharply angled that right turns on to it off Pascal are prohibited, so drivers need to turn onto High Street and go back across Pascal. Members also noted that the pedestrian crosswalk is located below a slight hill in Pascal Avenue making it difficult for pedestrians to see oncoming vehicles and vice versa. Although Rockport's hilly and curving roads adjacent to the bridge and harbor are part of its historic topography and beauty, they do present sight line and safety challenges which a speed and traffic calming study could make suggestions to address. Clare Tully noted that residents of several houses on Pascal Avenue must back out their vehicles directly on to the street as they lack sufficient parking or driveways to turn around. This apparently was part of the rationale given for only having a 25mph on part of Elm Street/Route 1 in Camden. Yet Pascal is even more residential and has a 30mph speed limit.

The members then talked about cyclist safety and Ms. Tully mentioned that this concern had been noted in the hotel traffic study commissioned by the Town. Denise Munger requested that Ms. Tully look into this issue further. Michelle Gallant (?) also noted that there are cyclist reviews of biking in Rockport that might be helpful for this purpose.

Ms. Munger also mentioned the need to address the “confusing parking”. Sally Cook said that failing to address this following the new hotel “will lead to a deteriorating situation”. In response to a question from Ms. Cook, Chair Cole clarified that a speed study and a traffic calming study are one and the same. Ms. Gallant noted that there are additional pathways through the Park which pedestrians can use to access the downtown, such as the one leading down from the scenic overlook above Goody’s Beach and the Eagle Scout pathway which leads pedestrians to the intersection of Main and Central streets opposite Nina June. Ms. Tully asked for clarification of the plan to bury the electric wires near the hotel on Central Street, and for confirmation that this will also include the adjacent stretch of Main Street which originates down by the Harbor and curves up around to Central Street and across to the bridge. She noted that this stretch of Main Street, which also contains businesses and is zoned commercial downtown, is sometimes erroneously referred to as Central Street. Chair Cole responded that he would bring the proposed plans to bury the utility wires to the next meeting. After Ms. Cook noted that the downtown is “tiny and small”, members discussed how adjacent or nearby streets that currently encompass businesses, like Union and Pascal (or West Street which might gain more businesses as part of the RES development) perhaps also should be mentioned in the letter, to strengthen Rockport's economic development argument for MDOT.

Ms. Gallant then spoke about the budget for the VPI Task Force and the process. An amount of \$100,000 was proposed. Chair Cole and Orion Thomas discussed the downtown TIFF, the restructuring of which will be placed on the November Town ballot but that these funds might already have been “spent”, so presumably would not be available as matching funds for the traffic study.

Mr. Thomas then noted he had met with MDOT to discuss the crosswalks and the paving of Pascal. MDOT indicated to him that they didn’t want to “mess with anything near the bridge”. Mr. Thomas did make some suggestions to them about the sidewalks and crosswalks. It was noted that Stuart Smith had suggested that the crossing at High Street should not be as wide, but that narrowing it could prove problematic for drivers of trucks pulling boats on trailers. They use High Street to enter or exit the Harbor Park access road to launch their boats and to park their trailers in Cramer Park.

Chair Cole adjourned the meeting at 6:15PM. The next meeting will take place on September 19,2022 at 4:30PM in the Richardson Room.

