



VPI TASK FORCE REPORT – Town of Rockport

DATE:8/8/22 START TIME:5:04PM

COMMITTEE:

CHAIR: Doug Cole

LOCATION: Richardson Room

IN ATTENDANCE: Doug Cole, Denise Munger, Orion Thomas, Clare Tully (by phone), Kimberlee Graffam, Mary Jane Young. ABSENT: Michelle Gallant, Jon Duke, Sally Cook, Mike Young.

ITEMS DISCUSSED:

Chair Cole called the meeting to order at 5:04PM.

He then proposed changing the order of the agenda, to move item number four, PPI, to item number three. Orion Thomas then reported on a conversation with Gorrill Palmer about a PPI study. GP indicated that based on their prior experience with MDOT, a traffic calming study might be in order, and that a more focused study might result in a higher score.

Chair Cole then discussed a telephone conference which had taken place between him and Steve Cole of the Maine DOT, to clarify his understanding of what a PPI study would entail. He noted that he and Steve Cole had spoken for “a good hour”. Clare Tully requested that Chair Cole share his notes of this meeting with other Task Force members and he responded he would do so. Denise Munger noted that if Rockport gets funding for the PPI, it will be a leg up for the VPI.

Chair Cole mentioned that Steve Cole had emphasized the importance of planning a letter of intent to MDOT, to help attain state funding for the PPI. His tips to Chair Cole for the letter of intent included demonstrating that the project will improve economic development; that it will also improve the safety of cyclists, pedestrians and drivers from accidents; and the need to populate the PPI template with ideas for accomplishing these improvements.

Chair Cole then asked a question about one idea, “How would we get pedestrians up to our new bridge?” He noted that a new sidewalk on the ocean side, continuing past the pump station, would put tourists and locals on to the Central Street sidewalk.

Kim Graffam said she thought this was a “done deal”. Ms. Tully noted that the existing bridge sidewalk provides a beautiful scenic view of Goose River, an important part of Rockport’s history. Ms. Graffam asked about MDOT’s deck replacement option, which might allow for a slight widening of the bridge. Ms. Munger responded we should not limit ourselves to that option, which would involve a more limited renovation.

Chair Cole emphasized the importance of Orion or Jon having a seat at the table as MDOT works with Stantech. Mary Jane Young said it would be good to find out more about what MDOT can accomplish with a typical span or bridge structure.

Chair Cole emphasized his desire to have improved pathways up to the bridge from the park, which he felt would be more durable and safer. Ms. Tully agreed that safety is very important and that some improvements are in order. She noted that the rustic nature of these trails and the popular unpaved area below the bridge are part of Rockport’s historic harbor character, which appeals to both residents and tourists alike. She cautioned against detracting from it by making it look modern and suburban through the use of hardscaping, paving and prominent light fixtures. Ms. Young said that she agreed with Ms. Tully’s opinion.

Orion Thomas noted that Damariscotta had done a harbor improvement project using a retaining wall and creating parking and bathrooms.

Chair Cole then mentioned the hotel parking study completed by Gorrill Palmer and noted the concern that had been raised about bias. Ms. Tully responded that both the GP and the SLR traffic studies were performed by qualified professionals, and that the SLR study gathered and assessed vehicular and accident data in accordance with MDOT standards. She also mentioned that the GP study specifically raised concerns about the safety of hotel bike valets using the bridge, some of which might also be relevant to other local cyclists and VBT and Backroads tourists. She suggested that it might be helpful to pull other relevant data and information from both studies to minimize duplicative effort and expense on a third traffic study or to otherwise help support the PPI.

Chair Cole noted that MDOT would want a map of the PPI area. Ms. Tully asked if the RES site should be included, as it likely will create additional housing and businesses in walking distance to the bridge. Chair Cole noted that he is a member of that committee and while there are “big dreams” for the site, he thinks they are too far down the road. There was additional talk of the PPI’s scope including other businesses on Pascal, such as Rayr and Maine Street Meats, and Graffam’s on Union Street.

Chair Cole suggested focusing more on Pascal. Mr. Thomas noted that the updating of the Comprehensive Plan will focus on a larger area of businesses in the downtown. Chair Cole also noted the Pathways Committee’s role in connecting different parts of Rockport.

Chair Cole noted that he had followed up on the Village Soup July 20, 2022 article regarding the stop sign at the intersection of Elm and Union Street, which Patrick Adams of MDOT discussed at a Camden Select Board Meeting. MDOT said that it would mail a copy of the traffic study it conducted of this intersection to the Select Board members.

Chair Cole motioned to adjourn the meeting at 6:11PM, which was seconded by several members. The next meeting will take place on August 30 at 5PM at a location to be determined.