

Downtown Improvement Project Committee Meeting

5/21/2025 Meeting minutes

Approve Minutes from 4/23/2025 Meeting

The chair called the meeting to order at 8:35 am. Members present included Marlene Dolan, Gar Morse, Kurt Svetaka, Linda Crosby, and Chair Carhart. Select Board Liaison Cathy Bilotta was also present. The meeting minutes from the previous meeting were not ready for review due to a new system being implemented. It was noted that both the current month's and last month's minutes would be reviewed at the next meeting.

Organizational Issues

Committee Membership

Steve Carhart reported that he expected to receive a note from town hall requesting whether everyone wishes to be reappointed to the committee. He mentioned that the committee was down at least one member and encouraged anyone who knew of potential good contributors to apply at town hall.

New Minute-Taking System

Gordon had facilitated a new system at town hall that would convert the meeting recording to formal minutes, eliminating the need to recruit a new member as secretary. However, this system was not in place in time for the current meeting's minutes.

DPW Update (Chuck Dam or Nate Derosiers)

This agenda item was skipped as Nate was not present at the meeting.

Town Planning Update (Marc Resnick)

Marc Resnick introduced Kathy McCabe of McCabe Enterprises, who had been hired by the planning board to facilitate a project on visioning the downtown area. He explained that the planning board, having completed work on various town meeting articles, was moving into a new project to look at the entire general district, starting with downtown visioning.

Kathy McCabe presented her background as a consulting planner with experience in town center and downtown revitalization. She outlined the planning board's intention to conduct a visioning and short-term workshop, tentatively scheduled for Monday, June 19th. The workshop aimed to broaden discussions, gather input from various stakeholders, and develop both a broad vision and a short-term action plan for downtown Manchester.

McCabe emphasized the importance of addressing immediate needs while also considering long-term planning. She invited committee members to share their thoughts on what makes downtown Manchester special and any concerns they had about its future.

Committee members and public attendees shared various perspectives:

- Jim Diedrich highlighted the importance of dining options, noting the limited choices for breakfast and lunch. He emphasized how good meals bring people into the community and encourage exploration of retail and other businesses.
- Steve Carhart stressed the value of maintaining a diversity of basic businesses in the downtown area, comparing it favorably to other communities where high rents had led to a loss of variety.
- Kathy Hemenway shared her experience of moving to Manchester due to its walkable downtown and harbor views. She emphasized the need for a balance between resident needs and visitor attraction, suggesting a community discussion on this topic.

- Linda Crosby spoke about the welcoming nature of the community and how it contributes to the downtown's appeal.
- Kurt Svetaka mentioned the importance of walkability, access to the ocean, and the need for unique businesses that would draw people to town.
- Matthew Cummings provided a historical perspective, noting the changes in transportation and business models over time. He expressed concern about the potential loss of small businesses due to online competition.
- Sarah Pierce, a public attendee, emphasized the importance of enhancing existing businesses rather than drastically changing Manchester. She suggested focusing on creating gathering places and catering to school-age children.
- Christine DiLisio raised concerns about the aesthetics of downtown improvements and stressed the importance of seeking public input through surveys or polls.

Kathy McCabe thanked everyone for their input and noted that the planning board would be holding a public forum on June 9th to gather further feedback from the community.

Report on Real Estate Marketing Project (Steve Carhart, Jim Brown)

Steve Carhart reported on efforts to promote Manchester to realtors engaged with commercial space. He mentioned that he and Jim Brown had been working on a pitch book outlining the value of local Manchester commercial real estate to offer to realtors.

Jim Brown shared his findings from researching the Multiple Listing Service (MLS) for commercial properties in Manchester over the past two years. He suggested using local realtors to gather thoughts and ideas on marketing businesses in Manchester, as well as potentially reaching out to successful businesses in nearby towns to consider moving to Manchester.

Christine DiLisio expressed concern about the committee potentially overstepping its role, emphasizing that elected officials on the select board and planning board should be driving these initiatives.

Kathy Hemenway suggested asking residents about reasons they leave Manchester to shop or dine elsewhere, to identify potential new businesses for the town.

Discussion of Business Improvement District (Steve Carhart, Jim Brown)

Steve Carhart introduced the concept of a Business Improvement District (BID) under Massachusetts law. While not suggesting immediate creation of a BID, he explained that it could be a useful framework for thinking about attracting new businesses, supporting existing ones, and getting advice from the state.

Carhart mentioned being in touch with a state office that provided ideas such as "pop-up" businesses to temporarily occupy vacant storefronts. He also noted ongoing brainstorming on a Facebook page and expressed interest in working more closely with community members engaged in these discussions.

Carhart suggested the possibility of conducting a market survey with help from the Small Business Administration to determine what businesses might be supported in Manchester.

New Business

There was no new business discussed.

Date for Next Meeting

The next regular meeting was scheduled for June 18th, the third Wednesday of the month.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn made by Kurt Svetaka, seconded by Chair Carhart. All members voted in favor.

The meeting was adjourned.