

**WHITE CLIFFS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
January 12, 2023**

9:00 a.m. – Selectmen’s Meeting Room, 63 Main Street, Northborough, MA

Committee Members Present

Todd Helwig, Committee Chairman - CPC Representative
Norm Corbin, Committee Vice Chair - Historical District Commission Liaison
Tom Reardon, At-Large Member
Diana Nicklaus, At-Large Member
Julianne Hirsh, Board of Selectmen Liaison

Town Staff Present

Laurie Connors, Planning Director
Scott Charpentier, DPW Director
Shawn Thompson, Facilities Manager

Also Present

Brett Pelletier, Kirk & Company

1. INTERVIEWS WITH RESPONDENTS FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT AND REUSE OF THE WHITE CLIFFS PROPERTY RFP

Mr. Helwig began by stating that the purpose of this meeting is to meet with the two respondents to the RFP. Members provided questions for each respondent in advance of the meeting. After each presentation, members will be able to ask one question each. There will be no public comment at this meeting. He deferred to the Town’s consultant, Mr. Pelletier to run the meeting.

Mr. Pelletier reiterated what the Chairman stated and reviewed the ground rules. The process will be introductions, presentation, questions & answers, and closing remarks. He reiterated that the members will be limited to one question each.

9:00 A.M. - Metro West Collaborative Development

Present:

Caitlin Madden, Executive Director
Derek Hansen, Senior Real Estate Manager
Cliff Boehmer, Principal Architect, Davis Square Architects
Micaela Goodrich, Job Captain, Davis Square Architects
Maureen Cavanagh, Senior Planner, Public Archaeology Laboratory

After the presentation, Mr. Pelletier began the question/answer session.

Mr. Pelletier - Began by stating that Metro West received glowing references. He had several questions.

Question: Their proposal has \$800,000 earmarked for CPA funds. Since this Committee can't guaranty CPA funds what is the impact if the request is not approved.

Answer: Ms. Madden replied that DHCD expects that there will be local funds contributed to this project. Metro West will do their due diligence in the process.

Question: Metro West indicated that the timing of this could possibly lead to a longer option period. What does that look like and who will maintain the building in the meantime?

Answer: Ms. Madden's response was that this would help in their argument to the State. The question is how many other projects on the State's list are in a similar situation. This will require their due diligence mainly on the historic side, coordinating with various state agencies. The faster they are designated as developer, the faster they can move forward with the various processes.

Question: Have they ever gotten to a place where a municipal project did not receive local funding?

Answer: Ms. Madden replied no they have not.

Question: Describe the community outreach process and how it will work here.

Answer: Ms. Madden stated that they have received the list of priorities already identified by the community. They would meet with town departments, boards and committees. They would schedule a "Meet the Developer" session where they would talk to the community and respond to feedback. They would hold a series of informational events and use social media and the paper to notify the community.

Question: They mentioned the 1st floor is open community space and the 2nd and 3rd floors are for dwelling units, are there any plans for the basement?

Answer: Mr. Boehmer responded. At this time, nothing is definite. They will need to get in and do the research. Once the additions are removed, they will be able to see what is there and what they have to work with. The basement is a large and very interesting space. The amount of space needed for the mechanical room will be limited, so there is a possibility of using some of the basement for other needs.

Mr. Helwig

Question: What is the anticipated time period to permit and build this and who will pay the carrying costs for White Cliffs during that time.

Answer: They will not take ownership of the property until financing and closing. The Town will continue to pay costs for 18 months or until approved.

Mr. Corbin

Question: Community outreach is critical, so the question is how will they get the community involved?

Answer: Ms. Madden answered that this will be their first order of business. They will obtain a list of abutters to invite to a meet and greet. Schedule a series of events, use social media for notices and updates, make the rounds to various agencies, provide updates and provide feedback.

Ms. Hirsh

Question: What is their experience with projects involving acreage and landscaping and how will they maintain landscaping?

Answer: Metro West will cover maintenance costs. They work with fabulous landscaping contractors.

Mr. Reardon

Question: What are the general strategies for upgrading the White Cliffs Mansion, with its degraded exteriors and well-maintained interiors? What type of interventions will be used and how?

Answer: Mr. Boehmer stated that the first step is remove the additions and see what the damage is. Some challenges will be fire protection and accessibility. He wanted to go back to landscaping and he mentioned how that is also a good opportunity to engage neighbors in the discussion.

Ms. Nichlaus

Question: Asked to all three entities on the development team- do they have the capacity and resources to do the work?

Answer: The response from all three was yes.

Ms. Connors

Question: Concerned about the second floor, with its very ornate interior. How do they envision this floor being used as affordable housing without stripping out the ornate architectural features? Would they consider using second floor for something else?

Answer: Mr. Boehmer replied that there is no plan to strip out the historic elements and that was not an option. Ms. Madden added that, if selected, they need to get back into the building and take a good look at the second floor. There may be less space for units than originally expected in which case will have to look at adding units in the new structure or the basement but noted that when you start reducing residential space in the mansion you could be reducing the amount of housing funds to finance the project.

Mr. Charpentier

Question: How do they plan on funding early start-up costs?

Answer: Ms. Madden replied that they have trusted lenders and will apply for a loan to fund the pre-development mini-projects needed prior to closing on the property.

Mr. Pelletier thanked Metro West Collaborative Development for their presentation.

10:30 A.M. - Historic Artifact Preservation Organization (HAPO)

Present:

Nick Foley

After the presentation, Mr. Pelletier began the question/answer session.

Mr. Pelletier

Question: How much zoning or planning is required for this project?

Answer: Mr. Foley will get back to them because he has new partner and they have just started this discussion.

Question: How does having a new partner, Epsilon Associates, change the underwriting assumptions submitted with the original proposal?

Answer: Mr. Foley will get the details to them.

Question: Let's talk about the construction cost estimate and how this compares to estimates that the Town has received ranging between \$5-10M? How does he reconcile his estimate of \$3.85M?

Answer: Yes, there is a big discrepancy between the numbers. He envisions a lot of work program sessions, with the members doing a lot of the work to offset the cost. The work will be done in stages.

Mr. Helwig

Question: There seems to be a lot going on on-site. Who will manage that and have they done anything complicated like that before?

Answer: Yes, they would manage it with their group. His background is in start-ups and tiny homes.

Mr. Corbin

Question: Primary interest is in the restoration of the mansion itself. What are his skills with historic restoration and who will he be working with who has experience with the Department of the Interior's specifications for restoration?

Answer: That is part of the arrangement with Epsilon Associates.

Ms. Hirsh

Question: On page 13 of the proposal, it talks about the ownership structure. Can you provide more details on how that will work?

Answer: The ownership would be HAPPO and the White Cliffs Preservation Organization.

Mr. Reardon

Question: What is the vision for White Cliffs Mansion and surrounding landscape grounds? The plan stated that there will be 15 sustainable modular units, but they are not showed on the site plan. Mr. Reardon noted that it would have been helpful to have a site plan representing how these pieces relate to each other.

Answer: Modulares will be along the back of the property, so they will be out of site from the main road. Mr. Foley can send over a site plan as part of the follow-up.

Ms. Nicklaus

Question: Requested further discussion of the container construction – what is the life cycle of one of those units and what happens to the financial model if they are deconstructed? It is difficult to try to envision a temporary structure versus a fixed one.

Answer: Mr. Foley discussed the structures and replied that these are well built structures but noted that if there was a change in the future, these would be easier to disassemble and that there would be less impact on the property than a traditional structure.

Ms. Connors

Question: Can you speak to the \$1.5M in donations – are these committed donations? If not what is your fundraising strategy?

Answer: Donations include members' time, a volunteer list, and the material aspect of the project.

Mr. Pelletier thanked Mr. Foley for his presentation.

2. INITIAL DISCUSSION OF PROPOSALS, REVIEW OF PROCESS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REQUESTS OF RESPONDENTS

Mr. Pelletier reviewed the next steps. If any of the members or staff have any questions, please email them to Mr. Pelletier by end of day tomorrow. He will put them together in a memo and send them to the respondents by January 19th. He will then organize the answers and put together the responses for members to review prior to the next meeting, along with the analysis ranking sheet.

3. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for January 26, 2023 at 9 am.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Corbin moved the Committee vote to adjourn the meeting at 11:40 a.m.; Ms. Hirsh seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Hirsh	“aye”	Reardon	“aye”
Nicklaus	“aye”	Helwig	“aye”
Corbin	“aye”		

Respectfully Submitted,

Lynda LePoer
Executive Assistant

Documents used during meeting:

1. January 12, 2023 Meeting Agenda
2. Pre-Interview Due Diligence and Next Steps letter from Kirk & Company
3. Questions for both proposers
4. PDF presentation from Metro West Collaborative Development