

Pierce House Property Committee Meeting Minutes

February 2, 2021 on Zoom

Attendees: Terry Green (Chair), Dan Pereira (Assistant Town Manager), Peter Braun, Barbara Peskin, Pam Weismann, Margi Byrnes, Ann Crosby, Victoria Otis (Pierce House Director).

Welcome - Meeting came to order at 4:01. Minutes from the January meeting were reviewed and approved with one correction (Margi Byrnes was not present). It was announced that Pam Weismann will not ask to be reappointed when her term expires in the spring. Pam has been an active and important member of the PHC.

Discussion:

Budget - Victoria reviewed the most recent financial report. She reviewed the revenue (\$117,036.50) and expenses (\$99,028.80). It is estimated that 11 more events would have to be booked in order to eliminate the need for the Town subsidy this year. Discussion ensued to better understand the targets of the FinCom for the PH savings account to be maintained above \$60,000 and for the Town's \$40,000 annual subsidy of the PH to be reduced or eliminated. PH has not realistically been able to meet these targets in 2020 due to COVID-related revenue shortfalls. The monthly cost to run the PH remains around 13K. With \$155,179 as the fund balance it would take approximately 8 months to exhaust the fund. Further review of the budget/expense details raised the question as to why mowing of the lawn is allocated to the PH, as opposed to being part of the Town budget. There was a robust discussion about what expense items the PH should be accountable for. Peter also questioned the format and content of the financial report. He finds it cumbersome for focusing on actual revenues and expenses, and others agreed. He indicated that he will be meeting with Tim Higgins, Dan Pereira and Colleen to discuss the report, expense allocations, and related questions.

Director Report-

Victoria continues to actively seek bookings for the PH. She reviewed availability in 2021 and indicated that there were 47 dates available. 33 events are currently booked for 2021 and 19 for 2022. January inquiries – 92 (an all-time high); and 26 tours took place in January. Town events: The COA has booked a Spring Thing event. There are some inquiries regarding classes. The PHC continues to believe that it is important for the PH to be available for Town-sponsored events. It is expected that the PH's capacity to meet the FinCom's targets will continue be challenging in 2021 due to COVID. There was further discussion of whether and to what extent the PHC should try to limit the number of events per weekend, as had been discussed with neighborhood representatives. Dan Pereira shared that he believes that it is Tim Higgins' opinion that the sound mitigation measures being implemented were intended to be the primary method to address the neighborhood concerns and therefore that limiting the number of events should not be necessary if the sound mitigation measures are effective.

Pond Revitalization - Victoria shared with the group what information she has found out to date regarding revitalizing the two ponds. Questions were raised regarding the relationship of the ponds to the Town's management of water and wetlands upstream and downstream from the ponds, as well as whether and to what extent the PH Director should be involved. The discussion recognized that although the PH has a stake in the appearance of the ponds, the revitalization of the ponds should be managed by the Town agencies and staff with general jurisdiction over Town property and water/wetlands, especially the Conservation Commission. It was therefore recommended that the Selectmen and Conservation Commission be informed by Terry and Dan of the PH's interest in pond revitalization and be requested to form the appropriate working group, to include the PH Director to express the PH's concerns.

Fund-Raising Concept – Peter gave a general overview of the concept of encouraging more residents and others to donate to the PH, rather than continuing to rely only on occasional unsolicited donations. He summarized his general understanding of the questions that would need to be considered, such as the legal limitations on using Town resources for fund-raising and the existence of numerous other fund-raising organizations in the Town. The general model would be a “Friends of the Pierce House” organization, for which he believes the formalities of incorporation and obtaining tax-exempt status (501(c)(3)) would be the easy parts. Peter will include this topic in his meeting with Tim Higgins and report back at the next meeting.

Five Year Plan- Capital and Maintenance –

Victoria will take the lead on this. Terry asked the PHC to submit ideas for a 5-year plan. There was discussion of what types of expenses should be in the Town Maintenance budget instead of being viewed as a PH expense, as well as the distinction between true capital expenditures and regular maintenance expenses.

Newsletter- this discussion was delayed until the March meeting.

Pierce House website – Victoria explained the continuing challenges with being able to manage or discontinue the current website hosting arrangement, related to the fact that the former PH Director is still the official administrator. It was decided that Dan and Victoria would attempt to resolve the situation without further involvement of the PHC for now.

Meeting adjourned at 5:30 p. m.