

MPIC Minutes for July 19th, 2023

Attendance: Dave Golden, Amber Kumpulanian (chair and secretary), Nick Zeo, Patience Hartley, Anne Miller and Ben Hood from Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop

Start time: 6:09pm

The committee discussed briefly their report not making it on the Town Council's agenda and instead being fit in under public comments. We also discussed a response to Bondsville Water/s request to have input via email.

Anne Miller and Ben Hood from Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop joined us for the meeting tonight. They brought great news that 4 million dollars has been allotted by MassDOT for study and design of a Palmer station. This means that Palmer is ON the line and will no question get a station. MassDOT has also applied for Federal Railroad Administration money for additional track work on the section that includes Palmer.

Anne and Ben gave us a brief history of their advocacy for a Palmer rail stop dating back to 2015, and the role of the Western Mass Rail Coalition, which they helped create. They also went over the long road to keep Palmer in the running. They have personally written emails and letters, attended numerous meetings, and had the ear of several key people throughout the process. They are an invaluable resource to the Town of Palmer.

There are several points moving forward where the Town of Palmer could capitalize on this momentum:

1. There needs to be a point person within the Town government to coordinate and work with MassDOT and also UMASS. There was a Rail Steering Committee which could be revived to help with this task but it really needs to be someone from the Town of Palmer and NOT volunteers. Linda Leduc has a lot of experience in this sector.
2. In order for the Town of Palmer to have their input from citizens and businesses, it is important for them to be more proactive on a study for the station site. Several preliminary studies have been done but they don't take into account all the things that need to be put into a site that works not only for MassDOT and Amtrak, but also the Town. PVPC has experience here and could help the Town plan for a station that meets ITS needs. Some of those needs could include working with business owners such as the Lamothes and other downtown businesses, or grants to move the current DPW. This would be a better option than the State coming in and just telling Palmer where they want it.
3. Ben Hood as chair of the Palmer Rail Steering Committee has asked to be put on the Town Council agenda repeatedly without success. As a result, he, Anne Miller, and Scarlet Lamothe have addressed the Council without invitation during the public comments. Rail should be a priority to the Council.

4. They have asked the Town Council to send a letter to Maura Healey, Governor of Massachusetts, thanking her for keeping Palmer in the plans. Without her, Palmer would have been excluded. Amber will follow up on this with the Town Council.

The meeting adjourned at 8:11pm