

Ayer Office of Community & Economic Development

Monthly Report: August 2023

Respectfully submitted by Alan S. Manolian, Dir. AOCED

Ayer-Lancaster-Lunenburg-Shirley Regional Trucking/Freight Study & Committee

In preparation for the September launch of the “Ayer-Lancaster-Lunenburg-Shirley Trucking/Freight Study” Project & Committee Meetings administered by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC), the Dir. of AOCED began review and analysis of study orientation material and background documentation. The 1st meeting of the Trucking/Freight Study Committee will be scheduled for mid-late September. The Town of Ayer will be represented on the Committee by APD Deputy Chief Bigelow and the Dir. AOCED.

“Ayer+Devens 2033 Study & Report Committee”

The first official meeting of the Ayer+Devens 2033 Study & Report Committee was conducted on August 9th at Ayer Town Hall. Agenda items included, Organization of the Committee, Review of Open Meeting Law & Public Records Law, Review & Overview of the Charge of the Committee, Overview of the Background of the Devens Disposition Issue, Discussion of Major Considerations, etc. The Committee will meet on a monthly schedule.

Downtown Ayer Main Street (TIP) Redesign & Reconstruction Project

On Aug. 8th Ayer DPW & AOCED received update from Tighe & Bond (Project Engineering Consultants) that the proposed 25% roadway design plan, known as the Design Justification Workbook (DJW), has been completed and submitted to Massachusetts Dept. of Transportation (MassDOT). The project would result in the complete redesign & reconstruction of Main Street between Park Street & Columbia Street, as well as Columbia Street and the intersection of Columbia Street & Central Avenue in Downtown Ayer. The approx. \$5-6 million project will be funded through the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission federal (TIP) Transportation Improvement Project process – and is scheduled for 2025-26.

Ayer Disabilities Commission

The Dir. of AOCED, who also serves as a member and Secretary of the Ayer Disabilities Commission (ADC), scheduled and participated in the August 17th meeting of the ADC. The ADC was joined at the August meeting by Ayer Town Manager & Municipal ADA Coordinator Robert Pontbriand – and the Committee proceeded to review, discuss, refine, finalize and voted in favor of a new Town of Ayer Municipal “Reasonable Accommodation Policy” for municipal employees/applicants. The ADC will proceed to review, discuss, refine and recommend updates to the Town of Ayer Municipal Personnel Manual with regard to ADA issues and considerations.

Catania Oils Job Fair & Tour of Plant Expansion

On August 23rd the Dir. of AOCED attended the Catania Oils Job Fair in support of local job creation efforts and efforts to provide long-term employment opportunities to Ayer-residents. In addition, Catania Oils Plant Manager, Dan Brackett conducted a great tour of the Catania Oils Plant facility, showcasing the impressive plant investment & expansion, supported with a (TIF) tax-relief agreement by Ayer Town Meeting in 2021, for the Dir. of AOCED, Chairman of the Ayer Planning Board, and other municipal officials. Catania Oils of Ayer MA is today the largest processing plant for olive oil/cooking oils in America!

3rd Annual Newton Street Folk & Arts Festival

During the month of August, the Dir. of AOCED continued to be fully engaged in planning, fundraising, organizing, scheduling and advancing all activities involved with conducting the 3rd Annual Newton Street Folk & Arts Festival in Downtown Ayer scheduled for Saturday, October 7th. This very popular local downtown festival has become a great new tradition in our community.

\$3.1 million MassWorks West Main Street Public Infrastructure Improvement Project Grant Close-out Administration

The Dir. of AOCED is pleased to report that the State MassWorks Grant Program administrator contacted the AOCED to inform and confirm that the \$3.1 million MassWorks Grant for Ayer's West Main Street Public Infrastructure Improvement Project is successfully closed-out and the final reimbursement check for the total of the \$3.1 million grant is being forwarded to the Town of Ayer.

Ayer Affordable Housing Trust (AAHT)

The Ayer Affordable Housing Trust monthly meeting was held on August 30th, 2023. Upon review the Board agreed that going forward annual independent audits would take place. With the need to fund an annual audit the Board amended their CPC request for \$200,000 as follows: \$72,000 for rental assistance, \$125,000 for future housing support and/or acquisition, and \$3,000 for administration. The Board approved two ARAP (Ayer Rental Assistance Program) applications at their August meeting. Board Elections were held and Geof Tillotson will remain as Interim Chair, James Stephen and Cyndi Lavin will remain as Vice Chair and Clerk respectively.

Ayer Affordable Housing Committee

The Ayer Affordable Housing Committee's monthly meeting was held on August 18th, 2023. The committee outlined an agenda for their October 19th public input session, "Future of Housing in Ayer". The committee is looking to engage the public in a discussion of housing needs and development in Ayer. This will be an interactive discussion and listening process.

Proposed Ayer Commons – 40B Comprehensive Permit Project

The Ayer Office of Community & Economic Development received a request for a letter of Support from the Ayer Select Board, regarding a waiver from the State Appraisal Requirement of the purchase price of the property for the Affordable Housing project, (40B) at 65 Fitchburg Road, being developed by NOAH (Neighborhood of Affordable Housing). This appraisal requirement affects the non-profit, NOAH's eligibility to qualify for housing subsidies through the State's Tax credit program. The Office of Community & Economic Development has submitted a draft letter of Support for the Select Boards review at their second meeting in September.

Ayer Fuel and Housing Assistance Emergency Fund

The Ayer Fuel and Housing Assistance board received no applications in August. Since the Emergency Fund inception of January 2023, the fund has helped a total of five families in need.

CDBG

Ayer Emergency Housing Rehabilitation Program – Ayer Program Income

The Emergency Housing Rehabilitation program currently has \$5,000 of Program Income in its budget. The overall Program Income account's current balance is \$48,778.91.