



Town of Bridgewater Downtown Revitalization Ad Hoc Committee

February 5, 2026

9:00 AM

66 Central Square

Academy Building

Conference Room 201A/Second Floor

and via Zoom: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82268315041>

MEETING MINUTES

A Quorum of the Town Council May Be In Attendance

Call to Order

Councilor McGrath called the meeting to order at 9:00am. The meeting took place in Conference Room 201A and via Zoom.

Councilors Present: Councilor Perry, Councilor Linde and Councilor McGrath.

Also in attendance was CED Director Robert Rulli, Town Manager Justin Casanova-Davis via Zoom, Councilor Hunt, Bill Smith Chair of the Historical Commission and Ray Ajamian Chair of the Tree Committee.

Public Comment

- Janet Hanson, Pleasant Street: interested in what the plans are, would like to keep the historical value of the town, buildings need to be spruced up.

Councilor McGrath made a motion to take D. Items for Discussion out of order. This was duly seconded by Councilor Linde.

A roll-call vote was taken with the results as follows: McGrath – Yea; Linde – Yea; Perry -Yea.
Motion passed 3-0

Items Referred

- a) Zoning Ordinance D-FY26-009: Zoning Ordinance Amendment - Central Square Property Maintenance Standards

Councilor McGrath noted that Councilor Loreti brought this forward and we could discuss at the next meeting.

Councilor Perry noted that this is all and good but it comes down to enforcement. If no one there then how can it be enforced. I suggest we hold this for the next meeting and invite the building inspector.

Mr. Smith noted that there should be some kind of fee structure. Councilor McGrath believes that there are existing fees that would pertain to this.

Councilor Perry made a motion to continue Ordinance D-FY26-009 to the next meeting, which was duly seconded by Councilor Linde.

A roll-call vote was taken with the results as follows: McGrath – Yea; Linde – Yea; Perry -Yea.
Motion passed 3-0

Items for Discussion

a) Discussion of Downtown Development Projects

Councilor McGrath asked CED Director Rulli to discuss landscaping and Mr. Rulli noted that they are not working on landscaping for downtown, there is no money to do it. Noting that there is no ordinance in zoning for code enforcement so cannot tell property owners. Need to have a dedicated person to look at buildings at fine those not in compliance. The number one source of funding you are looking at for downtown is community block grants. We are not eligible unless the council deems the downtown area to be blighted. Previous councils did not want that designation. Applied when I first came here and we met all the requirements except the council did not designate it a blighted area.

Councilor McGrath would like to put signs up, not put the burden on the owners. Want to bring businesses into the downtown. I invited Melissa and yourself to see if we could get a preliminary plan, not sure what the cost is.

Mr. Rulli noted that last year they applied for technical assistance to achieve what you want to achieve and we did not get funded because we were not in compliance with the MBTA communities act. There is no guarantee on getting Federal money. We need a plan. Signs are not going to solve the problem. Need to know parking strategy.

Councilor Linde noted that the front of the buildings look awful; need to do that designation in order to get money.

Mr. Rulli noted it would not effect anyone on a day to day basis.

Councilor Hunt gave a brief update on when a grant was received in 2010.

Mr. Rulli noted that he is all for having a thriving downtown, especially with BSU being there and the 2022 Master Plan addressed that but it is a matter of money and direction. CED is available to help. Need to know what we want Melissa to do.

Councilor McGrath noted that the Town Manager is going to meet with the business owners. The Master Plan has been in place and nothing has been done. Taking chunks because nothing is getting done.

Town Manager Casanova-Davis noted that he does agree with Mr. Rulli that it is a comprehensive plan but there are some things we can do now, like line striping, etc. CPGD grant is a competitive grant and we should explore.

Councilor Linde noted that we have to take the magnifying glass and look at the downtown area. We do not have anything on the books about residents/business owners having to clear the sidewalks of snow.

Councilor McGrath noted that the new Tree Warden said that before they remove the dead trees they would like to have a landscaping plan. If I need to go to BSU I will. Not sure if there are grants to go for.

Mr. Ajamian noted that many of the trees on the common are dead so they need to be replaced so he suggested a landscape architecture.

Councilor Hunt noted that any changes would need to go through the Historic Commission.

Councilor Perry noted that the discussion in the past was the traffic flow and the sidewalks, are they being widened, etc. What do we take first. We thought we would need to decide the traffic pattern first and then go from there. If the shape of the common is not going to change then we can go forward.

Councilor McGrath noted that we are just working on the greenery, the fences are sinking into the ground. Need to get new trees planted.

Councilor Perry noted that if we are doing this work we need to make sure traffic flow and sidewalks does not affect what you are doing. The council needs to designate the area as blighted is the first step and then look at what finances we can get and use.

Councilor McGrath noted that the trees are coming down in 3 to 5 years and we need to come up with a plan.

Town Manager Casanova-Davis noted he does not see a reason why designating the area blight would cause any issues in the town. We need to look at comprehensive needs. There are some areas where we can make some changes. Striping lines, painting crosswalks etc.

Mr. Rulli noted that last year we had funding for the State and brought in a team that gave us a plan and does that bring in the businesses. The governor did have money in her budget to continue that but that money got pulled out at the last minute. Better chance of getting money when its part of a larger plan. The one offs scare funders. Better to have a plan. Prioritizing the trees can be part of the plan. There are 15 crosswalks in this area and that is way too many crosswalks, but the execution has to do with money.

Councilor McGrath noted that she thinks it can be fixed up with the trees and no matter where the sidewalks go it can be accessible.

Councilor Hunt noted that the War Memorial faces the street and the previous Town Manager had someone come in to see how it can be turned so people can see it.

Donna Jewell business owner in the Common noted that when she looks at the buildings around the common, it seems that it could be freshened up. Do all the buildings around the rotary qualify for CPC Funds? Carlton Hunt, CPC Chair noted that the common is designated as historic so CPC can pay for historic. But cannot fund maintenance, only historic restoration. Generally only fund non-profits and municipal.

Councilor McGrath asked if the business owners can tear down their buildings and it was noted that they would have to go through the historic district commission.

Mr. Rulli noted that it is not as easy as just painting, some of those building have lead paint and there is a process to remove the lead paint. We could have design standards, sign standards, etc. This downtown used to be thriving. Need to have people living downtown to attract businesses.

Councilor McGrath noted that we have a college and we need to attract better businesses, like Foxboro.

Councilor Linde noted that it would be great to see the college move the bookstore downtown so that the residents could get books there. We keep hearing the rents are too high.

Councilor Perry noted that any new businesses would have to get the buildings up to code which would means thousands of dollars.

Mr. Rulli asked Mr. D'Emilia was the challenges are of renting his first floor. D'Emilia noted that parking was an issue. Those that looked to rent the area out looked at the parking across the street and the parking was in a dumpy area and not a good look.

Mr. Rulli noted that many communities are looking at shared parking. Mr. D'Emilia noted that the problem with shared parking is who would be liable if someone slipped and fell. Mr. Rulli noted that it probably would not work in your situation but would for like Walgreen's.

Councilor McGrath noted that the action items are designating the downtown area as blighted to try to get funds, set up the tree warden with Melissa to see how we can fix it up without making huge changes.

Melissa noted there are three phases 1) where the trees would go; 2) trees that are going to die and 3) what would be the best plan, where do we want the crosswalks.

Mr. Rulli noted that blighted is just for the town to be able to solicit funds, property owners will not be notified. There are absentee landlords who are making money and don't want to put money into their buildings. Need new development to fund a DIF. The economic climate we are in it is difficult to get deals. Commercial side it is hard to get money and some rates are 13% to 14%. Perkins and Friendly's site the banks are not taking into consideration the commercial portion.

Councilor Linde asked what can be done with the parking lot in the back, no one wants to park there.

Mr. Rulli noted he cannot speak about the lease with Laz but it is a concern for BSU as well. Been trying to come up with a plan. Abandoned cars back there, who is the code enforcer.

Mr. D'Emilia noted that there used to be a parking enforcement officer who was funded with the parking tickets and it also made revenue. Also noted that there used to be a part time building assistant that helped.

Town Manager Casanova-Davis noted that it all comes down to funding. There are a lot of opportunities in Bridgewater. We need to repave that parking lot but there is a cost associated with that. That is why partnering with BSU for funding is being looked at, trying to be creative.

Mr. Rulli noted that there have been many conversations happening but it comes down to money.

Councilor McGrath asked about the billboard in the historic district and whether it should be there.

Mr. Smith noted that they tried 20 years ago to have it removed and a ton of lawyers fought it. Tried to say that the building could not hold the sign. Maybe it is something that we can look into now.

Adjournment of Meeting

Councilor Linde made a motion to adjourn, which was duly seconded by Councilor Perry.

A roll-call vote was taken with the results as follows: McGrath – Yea; Linde – Yea; Perry -Yea.
Motion passed 3-0

In accordance with the applicable provisions of the Town of Bridgewater Home Rule Charter and Town Council Rules and Procedures, the Downtown Revitalization Ad Hoc Committee assembled voted, at their meeting on March 5, 2026, to approve the aforementioned minutes, as submitted.