



Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

Mayor Raymond M. Morriss
Councilman Richard J. "Rock" Cioni
Councilman Eugene T. Frazier
Councilman James L. Furstenberg
Councilwoman Laurie P. Marchini

City Administrator Jeffrey F. Silka
City Solicitor Michael S. Cohen
City Clerk Allison K. Layton

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WORK SESSION

701 Kelly Road, Room 100
Cumberland, MD 21502

Tuesday, April 2, 2024, 5:15 p.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Raymond M. Morriss; Council Members: Rock Cioni; Jimmy Furstenberg, and Laurie Marchini. Council Member Frazier was absent.

ALSO PRESENT: Jeffrey F. Silka, City Administrator; Allison Layton, City Clerk; Michael Cohen, City Solicitor; Ken Tressler, Director of Administrative Services; Chuck Ternent, Chief of Police; Shannon Adams, Fire Chief

Media: Teresa McMinn, Cumberland Times-News
Kathy Cornwell, WCBC Radio

I. CENTRAL AVENUE PROPERTIES DISCUSSION

Mr. Tressler advised that they have been pursuing properties on Central Avenue parallel to I-68 coming into town. He said there are 21 properties, and the City has acquired 8. He went on to say that they have been talking with the County, and they are interested in working together on the remaining 13. He mentioned Community Legacy Strategic Demolition potential, and said the State advised that the more you own and the more under contract, the better chance you have of getting the funding.

Mr. Tressler handed out a copy of the suggested letter that will be sent to property owners. He advised that of the 13 left, 4 have no structures, 5 are vacant structures, and 4 are occupied. He explained that the plan is to send the letter out and invite property owners to come in and learn about what the City is trying to do, to explore their interest.

Mr. Tressler stated that if there's too many holdouts, he said they're still better off getting some rather than none. He added that the plan is for greenspace and removing blight as you come into town.

Council Member Furstenberg advised that he has been contacted by two owners who want to get out. Mr. Tressler stated that they have had conversations with a few, but it has to come back to the M&CC for funding approval. He said the County supports the project and said they have had some conversations with Sara Jackson of the State of MD. In answer to a question from Council, Mr. Tressler explained that demolition of a home can cost about \$15K, but can be less if there are multiples.

Mayor Morriss stated that this is a good area for greenspace, but also a good option for development in the future, and said that just clearing it off will look better from I-68.

Mr. Tressler said if they get a couple properties in their initiative, and there are still holdouts, the City is still better off. M&CC seemed to think it is a good plan.

II. CITY ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

Mr. Silka wanted to advise on a few projects going on, and said he plans on doing this every couple months so things don't get lost.

Mr. Silka advised that the feds just released a Safer grant, to allow for hiring firemen. He explained that it's 100% for 3 years with no retainment requirement at the end. He said they're going to try to hire 9 – 3 per shift. He explained that the ISO standard counts people on engines, not on shifts, and said there must be 4 on an engine. He advised that he will inform M&CC how the grant application goes.

Mr. Silka discussed absorbing people if we want to retain them, and said there's a caveat that in the third year that if you lose someone through attrition, you don't have to replace.

In answer to a question, Chief Adams stated that training is free, as they have their own academy.

Mr. Silka moved on to the Citizens Local Government Academy. He stated that they met with directors and in the next month will get some dates together, hopefully starting in late Fall. He explained there will be seven 2-hour sessions, and applications will go out mid to late July. He added that they're looking for 20 City residents, and you have to be 18 or over to attend.

Mr. Silka discussed the Skatepark project, advising that engineering started in April. He stated that the project did reopen their grant process, and said the application added 2 questions – physical address and an amount. He said he's asked for \$100K which would cover the gray section in the rendering. He added that Stephanie Hutter-Thomas put together a nice presentation which gave good demographic information for the grant application. He also mentioned a timeline of March 30th when the grant has to be in.

Next, Mr. Silka discussed the Attainable Housing Group they are working on. He advised that Allegany is the only county with no housing initiative to get people into housing. He discussed a trip to Garrett County to see how they did with theirs, and said right now they are in a work group with HRDC, County Community Development, and some lenders, to help lower-income residents attain home ownership. He advised that they are meeting once a month to get this rolling. He explained that the programs are out there, but said there has been no support in the City to administer. He added that they have been talking with Teabow Development about how to help get people into housing.

Lastly, Mr. Silka discussed the Directors working on action plans for the Goal Setting session. He stated that at the second work session in May they will present a draft, and said they are setting up more action plans going forward.

III. AGENDA REVIEW – APRIL 02, 2024

There were no questions on the agenda.

IV. MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL UPDATES

Council Member Cioni reported on the Constitution Park Easter Egg Hunt, advising that Mr. Mackey from Parks and Rec stated it was a good turnout and a great group of kids – at least 100 there – more than last year.

No update from Council Member Furstenberg

Mayor Morriss talked about the progress on Baltimore and Liberty Streets, and said the pavers are down for the street and parking area. He advised that Robert Smith, Director of Engineering and Utilities, said trees will be planted within a few weeks. The Mayor stated that the pavers for sidewalks will arrive the middle of April, and said they will go in as early as May.

The Mayor discussed their recent trip to Frederick to meet with their Economic Development department, Community Development, the Main Street Manager and their Chamber of Commerce. He said it was a nice gathering and said they got ideas from them on what they have done the last 20 years for economic development. He said they saw the partnerships between the different organizations and how well they work together – all on the same page with the same goal. It was noted that Frederick is now the 2nd largest city in Maryland. Mayor Morriss said he was impressed at the size – 24 square miles, lots of good, flat space.

Council Member Marchini stated that they had their quarterly town hall meeting for the Baltimore Street project, with 30 people attending and asking lots of good questions. She also advised that they are going to have the first civics meeting for middle school, held at Allegany College. . Council Member Marchini gave a shout-out to Allegany Mock Trial Team, and said they have a meeting with Rich Rhinehardt from Percy Public Affairs on May 7th.

Mayor Morriss discussed the state's operating budget. He advised that the \$500K for Evitts Creek Phase 4 has passed through, and said they have the bond initiative for Bond and Harrison for \$300K. He talked about the \$1.5M for the WMSR, that's coming from Canal Place. He added that as of now all budgetary requests look like they are coming through, and said everything should have been settled by 4:00 p.m. yesterday, but was extended due to the Key Bridge collapse. It was also mentioned that the Greater Cumberland Airport will be getting money as well.

Mayor Morriss advised that Chief Ternent had his first listening session, and it was a good meeting, with people coming to share their concerns, hoping to make their neighborhood better. He advised that there will be another meeting on the 10th for the West Side at the church on Lee Street at 6:00 p.m.

Chief Ternent said the session was well-received, and said the most common topic was blight – not too much on crime.

V. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business at hand, the meeting adjourned at 5:49 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Allison K. Layton
City Clerk

Minutes approved on: April 16, 2024