

Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

WORK SESSION

City Hall Council Chambers
57 N. Liberty Street
Cumberland, MD 21502

Tuesday, August 18, 2020
5:00 p.m.

This meeting was held via Video-Conference

PRESENT: Raymond M. Morriss, President; Council Members: Seth Bernard, Richard Cioni, Eugene Frazier, and Laurie Marchini.

ALSO PRESENT: Jeffrey D. Rhodes, City Administrator; Michael S. Cohen, City Solicitor; Marjorie Woodring, City Clerk, Bobby Smith, City Engineer; Paul Kelly, Executive Director – CEDC; Matt Miller, Economic Development Specialist; William Cochran, Cochran Group;

I. BALTIMORE STREET ACCESS PROJECT UPDATE

Mr. Kelly advised that everything was proceeding as expected, and 90% of the drawings have been submitted to the State Highway Administration (SHA). He provided a summary of EADS' and Cochran's work on the project, and said that the CEDC is managing Cochran's contract. He added that they have received two invoices from Cochran and they were forwarded to the Downtown Development Commission (DDC).

Mr. Kelly said there were lots of concerns about what the cost of the project could be, especially regarding Covid-19 repercussions. He stated that people may have a picture in their minds of what they want, and said that they have not found anything that would require material deviations. He added that from his perspective, everything is on target.

Mr. Kelly discussed enhanced services for sprinklers and fiber access. He stated that the City, CEDC, DDC, and Engineering have always planned that there be a water pipe to each property fronting Baltimore Street so they can have enhanced sprinkler services for redevelopment of upper floors if needed down the road. Mr. Kelly also discussed the goal of having fiber optics up and running, with the line running to the foundation of each building for easy access, but added that homeowners would have to do something if they want sprinkler or fiber to penetrate their building, as it's not the responsibility of the municipality. There was discussion on how citizens can coordinate what they want to do during construction, rather than after the fact.

Mr. Smith agreed, saying that the intention is to make fire suppression and fiber available via vaults in front of each building, and has contacted Maryland Broadband to hash out the details to pass on to property owners. He added that they will also get information from business owners on what they want and need, and if they don't want it at this time, it will be

made easily accessible for later on. Mr. Smith provided more details regarding the sprinkler systems, and said he would highly recommend business owners be interfacing with a fire suppression engineer now to have all the details worked out. He advised that he sent a recommendation to the DDC last week to consider a co-op or some means of soliciting one contractor to do all the work with the foundations, which would make it easier for Engineering and the contractor, and would save having to tear up bricks at a later date.

Mayor Morriss concurred, saying he would encourage all building owners to make that decision and get with the DDC and Mr. Smith to see what's available and work towards installation. Mr. Smith added that they need to consider their current use as well as their expected use, as existing conditions may not be sufficient for future use. The Mayor suggested that Councilwoman Marchini, being Council Representative, help with the DDC in understanding their need to coordinate with property owners.

Mr. Miller asked if cost savings could be estimated if building owners take this opportunity now while the street is torn up, rather than later. Mr. Rhodes advised that the City has looked at some of the costs, depending on a lot of variables, and gave one example of some work that had been done in 2016 regarding running a 4" fire line to a building downtown, which cost the City \$12,500. He said that job involved street work before and after, and materials. Mr. Rhodes stated that the Baltimore Street project is unique in that the street will already be exposed, and manpower and materials are available. He added that some standardization will help, but it's hard to tell exactly what the cost will be. He said hopefully they can flush out the variables in the next couple months.

Councilwoman Marchini stated that one of the questions that had come up at the last DDC meeting was if the City could help the business owners with reduced tap fees, etc. Mr. Rhodes discussed the hard cost to the City for materials versus what the cost is for a 4" water meter, and advised on the expense to building owners for the sprinkler system, which could be significant. Mr. Rhodes added that the City has some latitude and flexibility in what it sets as the cost because this project is unlike anything they have done. He also mentioned the City's tax credit program specifically for adaptive re-use; with sprinkler systems one of the eligible uses, and suggested Community Legacy funding.

In answer to a question from Council, the Mayor stated that he believes there's a broad range of knowledge among property owners, with some knowing what the costs can be, having been through this before, and others that have heard some information but really don't know. He said the DDC and CEDC will need to help educate them. Mr. Kelly advised that the CEDC has been pushing information out, with the plan to do one final push to all property owners through email, door-to-door, etc., to make sure everyone knows of the opportunity and to take advantage of it. Mr. Rhodes stated if the City could get some funds through grants it could be a game-changer in terms of getting fire suppression in buildings, to help push down costs and entice people to take advantage of it. In response to a question from Council, Mr. Miller stated that this could be a good use for some of the allocated Covid-19 relief dollars, of which approximately \$56K remains. Mr. Rhodes discussed the buildings

downtown that do and don't have fire suppression access, adding that a grant of \$3-4K for those that need it could be useful.

II. TRANSITION OF CEDC DIRECTOR - DISCUSSION

With Mr. Kelly stepping down from the CEDC, and Mr. Miller assuming the position of Executive Director, Mr. Kelly stated that he had asked Mr. Cochran to prepare a check-list of old outstanding business to share with Mr. Miller so that there can be a seamless transition. He thanked Mr. Cochran for all his participation, and gave him the floor. Mr. Cochran stated that he has been working with Mr. Kelly for three years, said what an outstanding job he thinks he's done on this project, and is looking forward to working with Mr. Miller. Mayor Morriss also expressed Council's thanks and appreciation for all the work Mr. Kelly has done with the CEDC and on the Baltimore Street project.

Mr. Miller asked to get some feedback from Mayor and Council on their thoughts about the monthly meetings. He asked if there was something more they wanted from the meetings, and if there were certain items he should focus on more. Mayor Morriss said from his perspective the monthly meetings have been very productive and they give the public the opportunity to see what the City is doing with economic development. He stated that monthly updates should be on the following topics:

- Baltimore Street Access Project
- Maryland Avenue Redevelopment Project
- Business Retention
- New Business Attraction

Mayor Morriss then led a discussion on business retention and attraction, and said there's a lot that goes into getting new businesses and jobs in Cumberland. Mr. Miller added that 95% of what's been done in the past 3-4 months has been retention and trying to alleviate hardships from the pandemic.

Councilman Bernard addressed negativity about the City that has come from the community from time to time, and stated that whatever the CEDC thinks the public needs to hear is what they should be hearing. He added that a large part of the Council's role is to be the vessel to communicate to folks what their tax dollars are going towards.

Mr. Kelly stated that one of the regrets he has is that he didn't do as good a job on a daily/weekly/monthly basis publishing press releases about all the things the CEDC was doing, which he said is a host of stuff that the public doesn't know about. He added that he and Mr. Miller had discussed doing a better job of external communication at this transition point. Mayor Morriss discussed the contract with McClarran and Williams, and about broadening that going forward. He added that what the City does itself, and with the things Ms. Layton from Community Development has done with the City's Facebook page can be seen as a shining star and something they need to work more with internally, and in coordination with the DDC and the CEDC. The Mayor also stated that although he prefers

in-person meetings, he believes live-stream is giving people an access to their government that they didn't have before.

There was discussion on Code Enforcement, with the Mayor stating that great things are being done towards blight removal. Mr. Miller advised that he had an opportunity to ride around town with Mr. Thacker and Mr. Tressler to see and discuss blight issues and how they relate to the housing analysis. He added that the amount of blight removal is fantastic and commended the City for spearheading that project.

There was discussion on the new DDC director, Melinda Kelleher, with the Mayor saying that she will be collaborating with the CEDC, but not as contractual. He stated that it's absolutely key that these organizations are on the same page. Mr. Miller stated how much he's looking forward to working with Ms. Kelleher, and said she will be a huge asset for the downtown community.

Council asked Mr. Miller if there was anything they could do to help him at this point in time. Mr. Miller replied that he would like to have communication with Mayor and Council even outside of the meeting setting, and have interaction and open dialogue so that he can be prepared for meetings or any questions posed by citizens. He invited each member of Council to come and visit the CEDC anytime to sit down and talk. Mr. Miller asked for Council's full support and open ears, and wanted to make sure they are all on the same page working collaboratively going forward. He also asked for open lines of communication with City staff.

III. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business at hand, the meeting adjourned at 6:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie A. Woodring
City Clerk

Minutes approved October 6, 2020