

Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

WORK SESSION

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

Tuesday, October 22, 2019
4:38 p.m.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Michael S. Cohen, City Solicitor; Marjorie Woodring, City Clerk; Police Captain Chuck Ternent; Paul Kelly, Executive Director-CEDC; Matt Miller, Economic Development Specialist

I. LOITERING

Mayor Morriss discussed the reasons for the Work Session, mentioning the downtown issues of code enforcement, loitering, people's behavior, and the City looking for ways to make the downtown safe and family friendly. He stated some issues have started to get worse lately, adding that a lot of the people downtown are disenfranchised, and the City is trying to figure out ways to get them the help they need, while acknowledging that people have certain rights and the City needs to be cognizant of that. He asked for comments from the people attending the Work Session regarding solutions for making the downtown safer, as well as ways to make the downtown businesses successful. Mayor Morriss then opened the floor to Council, who were all in agreement to let Captain Ternent speak first.

Captain Ternent stated that the CPD also shares the M&CC's concerns, saying that the problem comes and goes, sometimes getting worse, sometimes getting better. He advised on facts about the downtown homeless population, which is currently about 25 regular people, with 10-12 of the people being downtown since the beginning. He spoke about the downtown civilian patrols, the foot and bicycle patrols, and said they have written both municipal and criminal citations, with 68 alcohol citations written during the last year. He stated that though they are cited and fined, the indigent people downtown usually get out of court due to their lack of money. Captain Ternent added that with the activities of pan-handling and soliciting, the CPD needs witnesses, saying that although panhandling are not against the law, aggressive panhandling is and the CPD can take action, but needs witnesses to help at court. He stated that they cannot take action from anonymous callers. He also stated that the CPD cannot take action on the way people look, and that they have to be careful in discriminating against the poor or homeless. He did add, however, that the CPD has zero tolerance for alcohol consumption downtown.

Captain Ternent spoke about the CPD and social services teaming together to try to get some of the people help and get them off the street, and using referral services, but added that doesn't always work because you can't force people to get help. He spoke about the main areas where the CPD

knows the regulars, downtown and Canal Place, and said the police department does go undercover to try to pick up some of the people dealing in solicitation or prostitution.

The Captain spoke about the CPD's taxing work load, the shortage of police officers across the entire country, and said the CPD is still trying to get up to speed. He mentioned officers being assigned to special events, and stated that they do require officers assigned to the downtown to get out and walk the area. Captain Ternent mentioned looking into getting the non-working surveillance cameras downtown working again, and said at peak there were 38 cameras around the City, but few work these days. He stated that he would support getting the cameras fixed, especially downtown, and said that even though they can't be monitored 24/7, as word gets around it would help deter criminal activity.

II. COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Ryan Brenneman spoke about the availability of crowd-source cameras that can tap into Nest, a law enforcement resource, where downtown businesses acquire cameras for their storefronts and work together with the CPD. He added that officers would be able to pull the information up on their cell phones. There was discussion on if downtown businesses would be able to get a grant to buy high-quality Nest cameras in bulk, and the possibility of downtown design money being available.

John Buchanan, commercial insurance agent and responsible for CBIZ properties on Baltimore Street, advised that they recently installed cameras and worked with the CPD when they had a break in. He stated that their camera system is first-class, is set-up to a 180 degree view, and said they would share information from their IT Department with the City. Mr. Buchanan also discussed his employees concerns with the parklet at the end of the mall by Mechanic Street, and spoke about the plan to remove it, saying they've had a history of problems there – open containers, trash, clothing left there - and said his employees are scared about what's going on downtown. He also stated that the management at CBIZ is opposed to putting in bathrooms once the parklet is removed, saying that it will be a nuisance, and will continue to attract the disenfranchised. Mayor Morriss advised that there has not been a final decision yet on bathrooms.

Larry Jackson spoke about the area of Baltimore Street where his businesses are, saying that it's like ground zero, and has gotten really rough. He stated there are fights often and they have had to remove people from the music store 3 days in a row. He added that he doesn't want to make this a "poor" problem or mental health problem, saying that a lot of it is behavior problems. He stated that the language used creates a menacing, intimidating situation for customers, more so than panhandling. Mr. Jackson mentioned some ideas to Mr. Cohen and Mayor Morriss regarding leasing benches or planters to businesses to create private property. The Mayor said he would look into it. Mr. Jackson also spoke on the issue of ticketing tourists on bikes on the mall, and mentioned that parking needed to be free everywhere.

Gail Hall, owner of Mountainside Bike Tours and The Inn on Decatur talked about tourists being a captive market, with bikers coming off the trail with no place to go. She mentioned she has been sold out every night this past summer, and her customers are spending a lot of money downtown. She said that lately, though, she's getting a lot of questions about safety. She added that she no

longer lets her guests walk at night – she picks them up. Ms. Hall stated that though Decatur Street has gotten better, there's so much going down on the mall coming through to her street that it's embarrassing. Mayor Morriss agreed and said the extended area from the mall needs to be made safe as well, and understands what tourism brings to the community.

Ryan Brenneman, owner of Allegany Media in the Lila Building, talked about the frequent shouting behavior on the mall, and stated that he has to go down and ask people to be quiet, because he is recording. He said if Code Enforcement is not taking action, then we need to rethink what code enforcement is. He stated that we need to think outside the box. He also agreed that parking fees need to be abolished. He added that we need ambassadors in the City more than code enforcement. Mayor Morriss said they will evaluate how code enforcement is being handled, and will discuss the parking aspect. Mr. Buchanan and Ms. Saville discussed code enforcement as well and agreed with playing up the ambassador aspect and having the officers dress more like that, and mentioned the problem of code enforcement being cut off in the afternoon.

A smoking ban for the downtown area was discussed, with Mayor Morriss advising that he has heard a lot about property owners downtown being in favor of it, although it would be difficult to enforce. Mr. Cohen advised that smoking is not allowed in parklets downtown at any time.

There was discussion regarding the overgrown trees on the mall, keeping the lights in the trees, the benches on the mall being taken out although the farmer's market is requesting to keep them for their patrons, and loitering being prohibited at Rose's.

There was more discussion on a possible smoking ban, with Mr. Cohen advising that the DDC has the ability to pass its own rules and regulations. He added that it would help if they would adopt their own smoking ban and post it so that code enforcement can help enforce it. Mr. Cohen also spoke on the futility of bringing homeless folks into court, saying that officers can in fact keep taking away their addictions, whether it's drugs or alcohol, which can be a deterrent to returning to the area. Mr. Cohen also advised that when it comes to enforcing laws, police are reactionary. He stated that it's incumbent upon business and property owners to call the police when groups are congregating in front of businesses. Mr. Cohen advised on the smoking ban at all parks and parklets in the City, and the hours they are closed. He added that to be proactive, when you see people committing crimes, to step up and call, charge them, and be willing to come to court.

There was discussion on creating a long term plan to get people the help they need, and utilizing them for community service in lieu of taking them to court and fining them when they have no ability to pay.

Paul Kelly, CEDC Director, stated that there is a perceived issue downtown in terms of peoples' behavior and not being a warm and inviting place. He stated that in some instances it's true, and the City needs to reverse that perception considering all the resources that are invested into redevelopment. He suggested that the City's marketing services have a survey taken of visitors from metropolitan areas, in terms of their perceived level of safety and feeling of welcome from the City, and have the same survey for local folks to see the different areas of concern. Mr. Kelly also suggested gauging the City's local health resources to figure out who all the players are, to see if

they are communicating, and if they have the resources to help the City with those folks that have slipped through the system, to those that just have no respect. He stated that the CEDC has heard unanimously that people want an officer downtown – that just the appearance of an officer would deter most, if not all. He added that the CEDC supports the City’s redevelopment efforts downtown and moving the Union Rescue Mission to give them a bigger opportunity to expand their services. He asked to please consider appointing or designating someone, perhaps a member of staff or an entity in the community, to own this issue and make it their problem, to attend meetings to talk about solutions, and not get sidetracked.

Mayor Morriss agreed that the City needs an action plan, and stated that a lot of good ideas were mentioned this day. Council thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and sharing their thoughts and concerns, agreed they need to work together to find answers, and said if the police need resources it’s the M&CC’s job to help find a way to make that happen. Captain Ternent stated that more manpower would be great, and the Police Dept. intends to put a permanent officer downtown someday, when they get back to full staffing, but it won’t happen overnight. He added that they are putting together a better recruitment and retention plan – get officers, keep officers. He stated that he will try to put an officer downtown whenever possible, and mentioned to everyone again that if they see violations, please call them. He also mentioned that he will look into the camera project.

III. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business at hand, the meeting adjourned at 5:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie A. Woodring
City Clerk

Minutes approved _____