

Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

WORK SESSION

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

Tuesday, September 17, 2019
4:30 p.m.

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; Paul Kelly, Executive Director-CEDC; Matt Miller, Economic Development Specialist

I. DESTINATION BY DESIGN PLAN

Mayor Morriss advised that the Destination by Design (DbD) plan was on the Consent Agenda for tonight's public meeting, and Mr. Kelly advised that there were no amendments to the plan, nor any discussion. He stated that the plan was presented to the CEDC Board last Tuesday and they are formally asking M&CC to adopt it as an Aspirational Plan. Mayor Morriss stated that the plan has not specific time frame, and he sees it as a very good plan that they can take to developers.

There was discussion on taking another look at the plan moving forward, and Mayor Morriss advised that the plan has a lot of flexibility for the future, and noted that the whole community was brought together in the development of this plan, with a wide variety of businesses, organizations and citizens.

Mr. Kelly noted that all of the plans were given to DbD to review, and with the CEDC asking the M&CC to do something formal, it sends a clear message for all involved that we can start doing project-based implementation plans, which includes Baltimore St., the boutique hotel, and Mr. Kelly added that the housing study can be incorporated into this plan as well. He said it can be looked at as a project-based plan.

II. BLIGHT REMOVAL AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Mayor Morriss discussed blighted properties within the City, as opposed to blighted properties in this the DbD area specifically, and mentioned a discussion he had with Mr. Rhodes about possibly funding two different "buckets", for general blight removal, and for the DbD plan area. He also brought up maybe taking some land bank opportunities, and discussed strategic

acquisition of blighted properties within the DbD plan area, and ultimately demolition, when opportunities present themselves.

There was discussion about if eminent domain would be used if a property won't sell. Mayor Morriss stated there had been no discussion about that, and Mr. Cohen advised that only government has the power to acquire by eminent domain – the CEDC doesn't have the authority. He further advised that M&CC has said in the past that they will not use eminent domain, and that's where it stands right now.

In answer to a question regarding land banks, Mr. Kelly explained his reasoning for putting the blight removal topic on the agenda was solely for discussion, and stated that there won't necessarily be any answers given today. He discussed the aspirational plan, saying to look at the things the City wants, and determine how to get to their goals, and discussed the option of pooling resources to achieve certain projects. He added that this wouldn't be to the exclusion of other improvement programs, but wanted the M&CC to think about policy proposals. In answer to a question, Mr. Kelly confirmed that if the aspirational plan was adopted formally, it would make the City more likely to acquire funds for acquisitions, demos, etc. He mentioned Secretary Holt, MD DHCD, saying that's what they paid for and that's what they want to see downstate.

III. HOUSING STUDY

Mr. Kelly provided an update on the most recent scope of work for a housing analysis for consideration, which included some work specific for CDBG, and advised that the CEDC has applied for a Technical Assistance grant in the amount of \$50K to cover the cost of the analysis, and has also applied for ARC funds in the amount of \$50K, which requires a match, and added that they will use the state money as the match.

Mr. Kelly explained that the housing study was being done because the CEDC hears from manufacturers that they have trouble attracting employees to the area due to housing issues. He added they have vetted two consulting firms; RKG Associates, and LSA (acquired through MD Economic Development Association). Mr. Kelly said the housing study needs to be started as soon as possible to meet CDBG requirements, with the goal being to have the data up front, and finish up over the next 4-5 months.

IV. SITE SELECTOR

Mr. Kelly went over what a Site Selector is and how they are more advanced than a realtor, as they look at demographics, areas of growth, labor force, etc. He added that there are multiple platforms used by them to get the data. He stated that they wanted to get the insiders' grasp of industry to tell them what they're looking for, with the goal being to use the Site Selector as a consultant to advise the CEDC, then to begin tailoring what we do, how we talk, what we address, etc.

V. 400 N. MECHANIC ST. INCUBATOR SPACE

Mr. Kelly advised on 400 N. Mechanic St. and provided a background for the building that is being proposed as a Business Incubator space. He stated the building is owned by M&CC, has been vacant for approximately 2 years, and said the CEDC has fielded numerous calls from people looking for this type of space. He added that he has pitched this suggestion to the CEDC Board, to have an entrepreneur come in that needs the space, negotiate a lease, pass along costs, and help them grow their business, with the Board wanting preliminary research. He stated that alternately maybe it would be just the right home for a business and the City could allow them to obtain the building and put it back on the tax roll. He added that the CEDC is doing their due-diligence now, and will come back with a specific proposal, and stated that they do have a candidate that is ready to get in as soon as possible.

There was discussion on the building itself, and taxes. Mayor Morriss agreed it would be a good use of the building, and Mr. Kelly discussed variations on incentives that could be offered.

VI. CEDC CONSOLIDATION WITH COUNTY

Mr. Kelly advised that the CEDC Board voted on August 20, 2019 to pursue an MOU, or contract, with the County, whereby the CEDC would become the County's Economic Development Implementation Agent, which is akin to what they do for the City. He added that the CEDC met with the Commissioners in closed session on September 12, 2019 and discussed the idea, with the Commissioners agreeing to pursue it. Mr. Kelly stated that after the meeting all agreed that there were lots of benefits to consolidation – cost saving measures, reduction of redundancies, integration and cohesion as a county, etc. He added that it promotes a modern economic entity with appropriate duties for personnel, focus, and funding.

Mr. Kelly said the goal will be to move toward negotiations, and ensure M&CC that the CEDC is not seeking to minimize what they do for the City. Mayor Morriss stated that these negotiations are moving toward the original RKG goals of a consolidated City/County Economic Development. He added it's a natural step headed in the right direction, and stated that this would be creating an entity that's beyond the politics of the day.

Mr. Rhodes noted that the City has been through this with the County before, and agreed it's the direction to be heading, but cautioned that it does have to be done right, or it will go away in another 30 years if not structured correctly.

Mr. Kelly suggested using an objective outsider with expertise in structure, duties, personnel, etc. Mr. Rhodes added that Al Delea of FSU could also be a good resource. Mr. Kelly advised that he has spoken with Mr. Delea, and he has agreed to help out.

VII. GLENWOOD ST.

Mayor Morriss said that although it's called a "parking issue" on Glenwood, in review he thinks it's more of an issue between 2 neighbors, which has reached the point of them looking to the M&CC to fix their situation. He added that he doesn't know if whatever the City does will fix it for both sides, because it's not just about a curb cut and parking – it's in some ways about courtesy and respect for one another. He noted that's been lost in the parties involved.

There was discussion with staff and council about the first day the issue was brought to City Hall, with Mr. Rhodes going over what happened that day regarding the curb cut that was asked for, which all agreed seemed reasonable at the time, but subsequently became unreasonable when another property owner didn't want the curb cut due to parking issues.

There was more discussion at length on the topic of curb cuts and property, and whether or not they are kept or moved. It was agreed that this entire issue was really about something else; more of a neighborhood issue than parking, and that maybe there was never going to be a happy solution. Mayor Morriss stated that the solution that was originally proposed can be continued, and the job can be completed.

There was a suggestion of creating policy or code as to what the City can or can't do in terms of solving neighborhood quarrels that stem from curb cut/parking issues, but it was noted that no matter what is written, there can always be an exception. Mayor Morriss stated that the policy should be set by the Traffic Group, with there being a consensus to have them look at the issue.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

With nothing further, the meeting adjourned at 5:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie A. Woodring
City Clerk

Minutes approved November 19, 2019