

Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

WORK SESSION

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

Tuesday, June 11, 2019
4:20 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 Cohen, City Solicitor; Marjorie Woodring, City Clerk; Paul Kelly, CEDC Executive Director; Matt Miller, CEDC Economic Development Specialist, Dave Williams and Becky McClarran of McClarran & Williams

I. MCCLARRAN & WILLIAMS

Mayor Morriss opened the meeting saying that the Mayor and City Council and staff, as a group, needs to get better at communicating to its citizens. He stated that people are interested in getting updates, and there needs to be a process to let them know what's going on.

Dave Williams spoke on the type of communication the City wants, which is marketing – not PR or spin. He mentioned that McClarran & Williams has been doing this in Cumberland since 1985, and provided references.

Mr. Williams said strategically, they look at this as three channels:

1. First Channel
 - a. Fill the channel with positive communication that informs and encourages
 - b. Make sure email, Facebook, press releases, etc. all come out in a smooth way and stories from each of the departments gets out there in a consistent fashion
2. Second Channel
 - a. Business development and programming downtown
 - b. If there is an event, make sure it's driven by the outcome you want, and makes sense
3. Third Channel
 - a. Partnership issues – a lot of partnerships come from the neighborhood level
 - b. A city is only as good as its neighborhoods

Mr. Williams then turned it over to Ms. McClarran, who spoke of several things she's involved in downtown. She stated that she collects what's best from other organizations and communities, and gave examples.

Ms. McClarran gave an example when there had been miscommunication about why a street light was flashing downtown. She stated that shared information is appreciated. She added that she talks to a lot of people downtown, including visitors, who tell her how much they love Cumberland. On the other hand, she said people in the community complain that Cumberland is not the way it used to be, and they never hear the positive stuff. She added that the community needs to be engaged, and what is positive and good needs to be promoted if the City wants its tourists to become residents and its businesses to grow.

Mayor Morriss mentioned that press releases go out to the media, newspaper, website, etc., and when the actual work on a street begins, everyone acts like they never heard about it. He added that the City needs to get more creative with getting the message out. Ms. McClarran responded that people are visual, and the City needs more visuals to emphasize the message and promote a more positive outlook.

Mr. Williams was questioned about partnerships and went on to speak of how their partnership with WMHS began, saying that they find people that matter in the communities, those who know the most people, etc., and that leads them to others. He added that they don't have to reinvent a program; if somebody is doing something good they just partner with them. Mr. Williams also stated that the City needs to find the people making a difference in the community, and mentioned David Smith in South End, saying that the best ideas often are out there; the people that are the most active and busiest in the neighborhood are the people getting the most done. He said the City needs to engage them and ask them what they need.

Councilman Cioni discussed being proactive instead of reactive and Ms. McClarran stated that they can work with the departments to get messages out. Mr. Williams added that the tone needs to be consistent. Councilman Cioni asked if a piece can be devoted to City employees, with Mr. Williams agreeing that it would help to let people understand what it takes to provide a service.

There were several questions asked by Council, Mr. Cohen, and by Greg Larry from the Times-News. Ms. McClarran and Mr. Williams answered and provided information on being engaged with CEDC goals, time period involved, social media consolidation, the importance of connections being made with City departments, and developing relationships. Mayor Morriss stated that employees will appreciate this giving them a vehicle to get information out and reduce complaints.

Mr. Williams advised that their company has very strong creative services, great graphic artists, and templates designed for business to business. So within 24 hours' notice, they can have a finished, smooth proposal ready to present to a corporate customer, adding that when the City needs to pitch something, they are available to do that. He also advised that with support of the City's departments, they could potentially act as an intermediary with third-party questions regarding technical issues, but also stated that they don't plan to be the City's spokesperson. Ms. McClarran added that they are always behind-the-scenes people, not in front.

II. CEDC ADMINISTRATION UPDATE

Mr. Kelly provided an update on the CEDC annual audit and advised that it will be wrapped up soon. He also advised that he had spoken with Mr. Rhodes regarding hiring an administrative assistant, which will be advertised in the following week, and is funded well within the CEDC budget. Mr. Kelly stated that the position will hopefully grow from a traditional office assistant job to something more; for example, analyzing, data input, reaching out to the public, etc.

III. PROGRESS UPDATE: BALTIMORE STREET ACCESS PROJECT

Mr. Kelly advised that following the last project update meeting, he met with Engineering and Cochran to discuss gaps between the streetscape plans, and what would eventually become civil engineering drawings. He further stated that Cochran will work with them on a contractual basis moving forward, and he will be an important resource for the CEDC.

Mr. Kelly advised that after the last meeting he met with Mr. Rhodes and Mayor Morriss, just to make sure there was a discussion about all the various funding options at the City's disposal. Some options were: City borrowing with the State; City borrowing on its own; limiting the borrowing amount through the grant process; and matching funds. Mr. Kelly advised that he and Mr. Rhodes were invited to a meeting with Engineering and EADS the next day. EADS had made a request to look at the scope of work, with questions about the Liberty and Mechanic Street parcels.

Mr. Kelly also advised that the timeline for the receipt of EADS final product to the City is basically unchanged since the last meeting, which is set at August 15th. Other specific dates include:

~2019~

November 15th - SHA review of plans complete

December 1st - City issues an RFP

~2020~

February 1st - Recommendation for award by City to SHA

March 1st - SHA concurrence and award, and notice by City to proceed in April

Mr. Kelly warned though, that this is an aggressive timeline, and it can be affected by any number of contingencies. He also advised Council that in addition to these meetings, he would email them the timeline dates and information on acquisition of funds so that they could readily have it.

Mr. Kelly went over in more detail what is expected to occur on each date of the timeline, and discussed final plans by MDE for storm water management. He advised that Bill Atkinson will be following up on that. Mr. Kelly then went over the Cost Estimate. He stated that when John DiFonzo first looked at this, the range was \$5M - \$7.5M originally. He advised that the hard cost estimate of the project now came in at \$7.3M, which includes a "worst case scenario" with contingencies built in, as well as an escalator for cost of materials, which adds about \$1M on top of the projected estimate.

Mr. Kelly advised that the funding to-date, without any City match, is \$3.3M, which is \$2,040M TAP and \$1,250M ARC, and further added that TAP requires a 20% match. He also stated that this creates a gap of about \$5M, and advised they need to reach out more to State and Federal for grants.

Mr. Kelly advised that he has send a letter outlining all of this data and an executive summary to the Western MD Delegation, and said he is optimistic that they will close that \$5M gap.

There were questions on Allegany County contributions being a consideration, with Mr. Kelly advising that he has not had any formal or informal discussion with them; however, he stated that after construction has begun, with using cash on hand to get through several months, and they continue to go through the grant cycles, that would be the point at which to approach the County.

Mr. Kelly then discussed “value engineering”, gave some examples of deduct alternates, and advised that Council will determine if depreciation of aesthetic design is worth it. Mr. Rhodes stated that at some point they will have to commit to how much to borrow, and advised that if value engineering results in more money than is needed they will write the bond issue to include other projects that could be applied. Mr. Kelly added that those making value engineering decisions includes the Engineering Dept., Cochran, the Co-op, the CEDC and the SHA, as well as the design committee being involved if it’s something material.

IV. M&T REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT – 118 BALTIMORE STREET

Mr. Kelly advised that after the last meeting they received an appraisal for a grant request, valued at \$2.3M, with the purchase price for the building being \$500,000 per the contract. He added that it demonstrates how great a community partner M&T has been, in partly giving the building at a greatly reduced cost, and shows that they believe in the project.

Mr. Kelly advised on an issue he wanted Council and Staff to consider, which is the contract requires closing on or before June 30th, and he believes the capital grant money won’t be issued before then. Mr. Kelly advised that the money will most likely come in by the first week of August, and provided details why. He said one option would be to go back to M&T for an extension, which he would prefer not to do; the other option is to come to M&CC with the City advancing the \$500,000 at closing and receiving reimbursement within 60 days. Mr. Kelly advised that he has touched base with Mr. Rhodes, Mr. Cohen, and Mr. Tressler regarding the options. He went on to add that the title review has been performed, and closing will be relatively simple.

After discussing the pros and cons of the second option, Council and Staff seemed to agree the option is something they ought to do. Mr. Kelly advised he is really optimistic about 8 solid inquiries he has gotten back from folks who have received the information and design studies, several of which are equity investors. He added that there’s a group that are hotel developers, and some local owners looking to expand. Mr. Kelly spoke on the RFP, saying it should be opened up to anyone, as long as they let the City know what they can do for us, but putting emphasis on a boutique hotel. He added this would not be precluding other options.

Mr. Miller advised that he has been getting hotel inquiries for 2-3 years, a lot of interest from local developers to flagship chains, and said it's kind of on everybody's radar right now. He added that there's the potential for the hotel development to coincide with the street development, which will be a shot in the arm for downtown.

There was also discussion about Allegany College and FSU's hospitality management programs being included in the RFP.

Mr. Kelly questioned Mr. Rhodes regarding the option of mortgage for the hotel development. Mr. Rhodes advised that through emails, he thinks Mr. Cohen could go either way, but thinks it's prudent for the issue to be discussed between Mr. Cohen and Mr. Kelly, to tie up the legal aspect. Mr. Rhodes stated that they need to think about how to properly process the mortgage as a loan, and Council will have to vote on it. Mayor Morriss suggested trying to have it ready by the next Tuesday meeting's agenda. Mr. Rhodes agreed that the documentation will need to be done soon. After more discussion, there was a consensus from Council to go with this option.

V. PROGRESS ON CONNECTIVITY & URBAN DESIGN PLANNING

Mr. Kelly advised they had met with the design committee, and said the goal is to increase and make more efficient the auto/bicycle traffic in the corridor, and to have plans in place to grow efficiently, with an eye towards what piece of the puzzles will fit down the road. He also reiterated that they are not planning on taking large swaths of land from people at this point, but looking forward, if a building becomes available it will be ranked if it's a priority now or later.

Mr. Kelly advised that they hope to have another committee meeting June 26th, and a tentative presentation to M&CC on July 9th from Destination by Design. He added that Council will receive a packet ahead of time, and he will create a Dropbox for the plans so that they are readily available to them. Mr. Kelly gave some quick bullet points from the recent meeting:

- General consensus on a new road grid on Maryland Ave.
- Alter the route of the GAR, so that it comes closer to the Mechanic/Baltimore St. intersection
- Potential future development of the Times-News area

Mayor Morriss added that the meeting was very functional, and was a good mix of citizens, business owners, property owners, and the arts community. He said the group was able to give their input, and Destination by Design was very open to listening to them. He added that it will be interesting to see what they come up with as their final "aspirational design" for the present, as well as going forward to the next 15-20 years.

VI. PROGRESS UPDATE ON COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING ANALYSIS

Mr. Kelly spoke on their application for the \$50K Technical Assistance Grant from the DHCD, with Mr. Miller working on getting letters of support from the County, Chamber of Commerce, Greater

Cumberland Committee, CHG, DDC, etc. They didn't have one from the M&CC, so requested that as an Action Item.

Mr. Kelly advised that they will be meeting with Secretary Holt on July 10th, seeking support for the \$50K grant, and added that the budget could be as much as \$100K. They coordinated with Lee Borrer to match up with CDBG requirements. He advised that they have an ARC application that is pending, that was coordinated with Bill Atkinson and Special Secretary Peters, who are both supportive. Mr. Kelly stated that they hope to pay for the housing study through those two funding sources, but may have to come back to the City to ask for funding. He added that this study will be expensive and very comprehensive.

Mr. Kelly spoke on what he calls a paradox, in that Cumberland has affordable housing, but the homes have a lot of deferred cost, and a lot of homes are not attractive to a certain section of the work force – and that needs to be answered.

VII. PROGRESS DISCUSSION: OUTSTANDING ACTION ITEMS

Mr. Kelly spoke about wanting the creation of a flow chart, or customer service tool, for developers that will be a simple spreadsheet:

1. Document to identify permit, approval or license needed
2. Identify the Release Agent
3. Provide document you must supply to get that
4. Supply with cost of permit itself
5. Code reference

He added they want to stay competitive with other jurisdictions and to fast-track. Mr. Rhodes advised that they had assembled the check-list needed and provided it to Mr. Kelly. Mr. Rhodes wanted to point out that the City has done big projects and have some experience, and advised that flow charts are difficult, and the sooner the City can talk to the developer, the better. He said, for example, with Love's Truck Stop they had three pre-development meetings before they even put a shovel in the ground, which helps them adapt to the rules they will be playing by in the processes. He added that the most important things in the information assembled for the developer are the site plan and sub-division check-lists.

Mayor Morriss suggested a staff-level liaison, with Mr. Rhodes stating that the City has that ready to go, and reiterated that other than engineering, the biggest challenges with this project will be the site plans and subdivision plans. He added that although the project will be complex, as far as building permits it will be relatively easy. He cautioned that one thing that may be an issue that was not on the document he gave Mr. Kelly, is stormwater management, which may be more of a challenge than initially thought. Mr. Rhodes added that Paul DePalatis is working on updating a check-list for that issue. He said that there is no particular liaison, but they will have all hands on deck.

There was discussion on who potential developers would speak to in Community Development, who greets them, what information will be provided to them, which Code Compliance officer they would get assigned to, etc. Mr. Rhodes advised that they have a conversation with them first, find out what they want to do, then provide the information they need, as well as setting up meetings with other departments. He further advised that the County uses a similar process. He added that Love's raved about the City's process, and there were no problems with WMHS. This led to a discussion about the newer Code Compliance officers in Community Development, as well as applicants for the open Code Compliance officer position.

Mr. Rhodes stated that the main contact person for Code Enforcement right now would be Dave Cox, with the next in line being his replacement when he retires. Mr. Rhodes said to keep in mind that Community Development is small, and though the City has seen large projects before, the City doesn't often need a lot of staff because it's not often there's a project of this size. He added that he is not concerned there's a problem, saying the City will get dedicated professionals that know what their job is and they will coordinate with them and work their way through the project. Mayor Morriss added the key is to see the site plan, and then the City will make sure to do its due diligence and coordinate what it needs to.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

With nothing further, the meeting adjourned at 6:04 p.m. into Closed Session pursuant to Section 3-305 (b) (4) of the General Provisions Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland to discuss the potential location of new businesses in the City.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie A. Woodring
City Clerk

Minutes approved September 3, 2019