

Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

WORK SESSION

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

Tuesday, November 10, 2020
4:30 p.m.

This meeting was held via Video-Conference

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

ALSO PRESENT: Jeffrey D. Rhodes, City Administrator; Michael S. Cohen, City Solicitor; Marjorie Woodring, City Clerk,

I. UPDATE ON EASTSIDE SCHOOL SITE DEVELOPMENT

Mayor Morriss advised that the PILOT for the East Side School site project was being finalized. He stated that the developers are very anxious to get started, and hopefully we will be seeing something soon. He added that he thinks it's a pretty good deal for the City, and advised that it's 40 units of housing for residents of Cumberland. Mr. Miller said he was glad it was progressing and thinks it will be a great development for the City.

II. UPDATE ON CUMBERLAND GATEWAY PROJECT @ MARYLAND AVE.

Mayor Morriss advised that he, Mr. Miller, and Mr. Czapski had a meeting today with Ed Scott from Gateway, LLC. The Mayor asked Mr. Miller to fill everyone in.

Mr. Miller first welcomed aboard new CEDC member Stu Czapski, who began on November 2, 2020, and then spoke about the meeting, saying it was very productive. He advised that the developer has been making significant progress, and has secured two more sites in the area. Mr. Miller also advised that they anticipate beginning physical site work before the 1st of the year, and maybe as soon as the week following Thanksgiving. Mr. Miller stated that Mr. Scott has reached a partnership with Sean D'Atri to assist locally with the project, as Mr. D'Atri has ownership of some of the property in the area, and said Mr. Scott would like to include D'Atri's Subs in the first phase of the project.

Mr. Miller also advised that they anticipate having a groundbreaking ceremony, and said he will keep everyone up to date on that. Councilman Frazier asked if one of the newly acquired properties was one that he had worked with the owners to call Mr. Miller. Mr. Miller said that yes it was, and thanked the Councilman for pushing them to the CEDC. The Councilman said hopefully this will let the public see that something is happening, and will get more people on board. Mr. Miller stated that it's been a priority to push this project

forward, and has been frustrated at the lack of progress. He said he's pleased that there will be action, and citizens will be able to see the final product of what all this was about. Mr. Miller added that he sees it as a very catalytic project for the area, and the City needs to be proud of the great amenities it will add to the community.

There was discussion regarding outstanding properties in the area, and that there has been no pressure for anyone to sell in that area for quite some time. It was noted that Mr. Scott has been very negotiable and favorable to resident's terms, and Mr. Miller said he would invite anyone in that area to entertain a conversation with Mr. Scott. Mayor Morris added that with the groundbreaking, people will start to see the project come to fruition and some of the remaining holdouts will want to sell.

There was discussion on Mr. Scott looking into more development in that area, with the possibility of Martin's plaza. Mr. Miller stated that Mr. Scott is, in fact, interested in other areas of the City, but he had asked him to not divert his attention elsewhere until this project gets moving, and to be focused.

III. UPDATE ON BALTIMORE STREET ACCESS PROJECT

Mr. Miller provided an update on the project, advised that the workgroup has been meeting weekly on Wednesdays, and said they have been very productive meetings. He advised that right now the focus has been on the engineering of the parklets on Mechanic and Liberty Streets. He stated that there are certain aesthetic elements that could interfere with technical aspects of the project, and because of that there are decisions to be made that may alter the design to accommodate technical aspects of the project. He said the workgroup helps with that, in reviewing each option. He said the group is comprised of a lot of like-minded and productive individuals who want what's in the best interest of the downtown area and the community.

Mr. Miller advised that they are aiming for early December for final drawings to be ready to be submitted to the SHA, and said there are a lot of moving parts to this project, and different things tend to pop up. He said they are very much aware of the time constraint, and they are working together as best as they can to push the project through in a timely manner. Mr. Miller advised on a couple things the workgroup is spearheading:

- Hire an artist to do renderings of three different locations in the project site, to provide an actual visualization (not conceptual) of what the street will look like when done.
- Subcommittee has been formed out of the workgroup for a marketing effort and mitigation efforts of adverse effects on downtown businesses.
- Make sure the project is portrayed in a positive light; inform folks of what opportunities exist; work to get the community behind the project.

Mr. Miller said he thinks this is going to be a great final design and will be the necessary "shot in the arm" for folks downtown, and will create a lot of buzz and interest for vacant

buildings as well as current businesses. He stated that once the renderings are complete, they're shooting for the beginning of next year. He said the renderings will be unveiled publicly through a marketing campaign, and stated that he will keep all apprised of that as it evolves.

Mr. Smith advised that his entire staff is working on this project in some form to support the engineers. He said they are shooting to have a deliverable product for the City to review by the end of the month. Mr. Smith advised that they had run into some roadblocks that can hopefully be addressed in a timely fashion, and said some changes might have to occur within the design. He added that they hope to have the drawings done in November, and are working as hard as they can to meet the schedule.

Mayor Morriss thanked Mr. Smith and his team and said this is very complex work, and we want to make sure we get the design we want. He said he was glad to see all the groups working hard on this, and commended everyone. He thanked the DDC and Downtown Manager Melinda Kelliher for their work and communication with downtown business and property owners. The Mayor also wanted to thank Julie Nixon for the work she's doing with resources from the Allegany Arts Council, and the grant to help pay for the artist's renderings. He said that when people see what change this project will bring about they will get on board, and said it will give the City tremendous opportunities for retail space downtown. The Mayor added that with the broadband and fire suppression capabilities it will add a lot of second floor residential opportunities.

Mr. Miller added that through the work group and Ms. Kelliher, they are having a meeting on November 19, 2020 to update all the building owners, and advise them on how to take advantage of the opportunities.

Councilwoman Marchini said it's really critical that communication is kept open with building owners regarding the sprinkler systems and especially broadband, which is needed very much downtown. She advised that there have been some issues with design where some things can't go as planned, but said there have been good communications all around.

IV. DISCUSSION RE: POTENTIAL BALTIMORE ST. BUSINESS INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT

Mr. Miller advised the CEDC had implemented a small business Covid-19 relief loan fund that was mildly utilized, with a large amount of funds leftover. He wanted to propose to the M&CC to reallocate a portion of those funds into a grant fund program that would allow building owners on Baltimore Street to apply to supplement the cost of the infrastructure opportunities of fire suppression, water capacity, and fiber connectivity during the construction phase of the project. He stated that Mr. Smith had given an estimate of \$3000 that building owners would assume, and could pay for about 33% of their costs. Mr. Miller advised that there are currently 29 buildings downtown that do not have fire suppression capability due to not enough water capacity. He stated that the real incentive is to entice upper story redevelopment of these properties to activate a lot of unused space downtown, and said this grant would directly incentivize action to be taken by the owners.

Mr. Miller discussed the importance of having fire suppression, and fiber connectivity to expand building uses and increase marketability. He advised on the importance of building owners taking advantage of these opportunities now, before construction begins, so that the street doesn't have to be dug up again once the project is complete. He stated that the owners just need to have the infrastructure done up to their building, then they can do what they want afterwards. Mr. Miller said they finalize the final grant amount once cost estimates are received, but said it will be approximately \$3-5K each. He added that the CEDC would administer the grant.

Mayor Morriss stated that this idea is definitely worthy of discussion, but said they need a little more meat in the details of how exactly the program would work, amount for each building, etc. He asked Mr. Miller to provide a hard copy for review of how he thinks the grant would work. Mr. Miller advised that he will draft a formal proposal, and will send to Mr. Rhodes. Mayor Morriss stated that Mr. Rhodes, Mr. Tressler, and Mr. Smith will take a look at it and make recommendations to M&CC. Mr. Rhodes stated that \$3K will go a long way in helping people get access, as it's not a big distance to cover. Mr. Smith stated that he generated the \$3K estimate, based on some assumption on thickness of walls, and said he's fairly confident in that number. He stated, though, that if every owner does it, there could be more savings due to group rates. Mr. Miller advised that he wants to get a list of owners that are interested, and put out a bid packet for property owners as a collective group to get better pricing.

There was discussion on having examples to show property owners regarding the improvement opportunities. Mr. Miller said fiber is basically going to be new to everyone for the most part, and said they have invited the MD Broadband Co-op to speak at the meeting on November 19th about what this capability will mean to property owners, what they can expect, competitive pricing, etc. Mr. Miller also discussed the benefits of fire suppression capabilities, and said it is a huge investment into properties, as well as saving on insurance costs.

Mr. Rhodes suggested that the November 19th meeting may also be a good forum to discuss the adaptive tax credit program that the City offers. Mr. Miller said that he believed the minimum expenditure for that is \$25K, and said this part of the project probably wouldn't qualify, but said if the owner implemented fire suppression throughout their entire building, it could possibly qualify. Mr. Miller also mentioned the Historic Tax Credit, and advised that he had reached out to Kathy McKenney.

V. REVIEW OF DRAFT AGENDA FOR NOVEMBER 17, 2020 PUBLIC MEETING

Mr. Rhodes reviewed the Agenda for November 17, 2020, and advised that aside from a few basic things, such as minutes and departmental reports, there will be a Public Hearing to receive comment on the proposed Zoning Map Amendment (ZMA #20-02) to rezone five parcels of land at the intersection of Maple Street and East Oldtown Road to correct a mistake in their zoning designation. He advised that this was an oversight, and the Planning

Commission has recommended the correction of changing the zoning from Local Business to Urban Residential.

Mr. Rhodes reviewed Ordinance #3878 up for its second and third readings which will amend the official zoning map (ZMA #20-01) to correct it by removing thirty properties located along the Canal Parkway, which were incorrectly included in the Canal Place Historic Preservation District.

Mr. Rhodes reviewed Ordinance #3879 going for its first reading that will change the City Code to uniformly provide that Boards and Commissions members terms be extended until successors are appointed.

Mr. Rhodes reviewed the Consent Agenda:

Order 26,731, authorizing the Chief of Police to enter into an agreement with the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Agency (HIDTA) to receive grant funding in the amount of \$16,435.00 for specific drug enforcement activities, through their partnership with the Allegany County Narcotics Task Force.

Order 26,732, authorizing the Chief of Police to accept the FY21 Maryland Center for School Safety (SRO) grant in the amount of \$49,052.00 in funds that will be used to provide adequate police coverage in and around City schools, as well as pay officers overtime, to supplement school resource activities, which include providing additional officers to patrol schools and interact with children during school days as well as during extra-curricular activities.

Order 26,733, accepting the proposal from Turnbull, Hoover and Kahl, P.A. to audit the financial statements of the City for FY20 in the amount not-to-exceed \$154,800.

Order 26,734, authorizing a Special Taxing District Exemption for the 2020-2021 tax year for 33 N. Centre Street (Sasaki/Gusella) in the amount of \$625.39.

Order 26,735, rescinding Order No. 26,718 which referenced an incorrect business entity, and authorizing execution of a contract with the Housing Authority of the City of Cumberland dba Cumberland Housing Group regarding the use of \$149,000.00 in Maryland Community Parks and Playgrounds grant funding for upgrades to the playground located at 635 East First Street.

In answer to a question from Council, Mr. Rhodes advised that the audit amount for the audit is usually that high, and stated that they receive a detailed list of costs and for Order purposes the City ups that amount in case changes occur, but said typically the amount comes in at less than the amount on the Order. He added that the amount on the Order is not a number that THK gave them, it's a staff generated number to provide room if there are some other reports that need completed.

There was discussion and congratulations to Chief Ternent for acquiring the recent grants. Mr. Rhodes said that over the last 10 years, they are coming up on \$100M worth of grants and forgivable loans that the City has been able to acquire across the full operation, and said all departments are aggressive in looking for outside funding.

There was discussion on mask-wearing, with Mayor Morriss advising everyone to wear their masks, as Governor Hogan has stated repeatedly. The Mayor said it's about protecting yourself, your family, and it's about showing respect for your neighbors and those you're around. He advised on social distancing, and said that quite frankly, staying at home is the best way.

Mr. Rhodes advised that a Press Release will be going out today soon, which notifies that the City is modifying work environments again by closing City Hall to the public, with utility payments being taken through First United, and advising on numbers to call for alternative ways of making payments. He said the safest thing to do is to go back to the mode from the spring, and said they will also be modifying Public Works, staggering crews, etc. He added that Fire and Police are also taking extra precautions, and said these are the things the City needs to do to keep employees and the public safe.

Mayor Morriss asked to share all information, and suggested posting the press release on the City's Facebook page and on the website and Council's personal pages as well. He said everyone needs to use every precaution they can.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business at hand, the meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie A. Woodring
City Clerk

Minutes approved January 19, 2021