

Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

WORK SESSION

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

Tuesday, September 15, 2020
4:30 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; Matt Miller, Executive Director – CEDC; William Cochran, Cochran Group; Sandi Saville

I. BALTIMORE STREET ACCESS PROJECT UPDATE

Mr. Miller provided an update on the Baltimore Street project, and advised that EADS has submitted 90% drawings, with 100% expected by mid-October. He stated that bidding can occur sometime in November, with groundbreaking starting sometime next summer. Mr. Smith clarified some points about the chain of events, advising that bids have to be submitted to the State Highway Authority (SHA), and they have 2-3 months to give concurrence. He added after drawings are submitted, the SHA may need to make changes, and said he wouldn't be surprised if it was more than once. Mr. Smith further advised that after the SHA, the drawings go to the Office of Federal Aid for their concurrence, which he expects will be in the winter, then 30 days until bidding, then 3 months to get concurrence. He stated that he's looking at a spring/summer time-frame. In answer to a question from Mr. Miller, Mr. Smith stated that if talking about doing the full project, it could be an 18 month period.

Mr. Miller provided an update on last month's discussion on the creation of a steering committee, and advised that he has comprised one with different stakeholders: Himself; Sandi Saville, Doug Schwab and David Romero, DDC; Melinda Kelliher, DDC Executive Director; Becky McClarran, DCBA; Robert Smith, City Engineer; William Cochran, and M&CC representatives Mayor Morriss and Councilwoman Marchini. Mr. Miller advised that the group meets every other Wednesday, and meetings will take place until the project is completed.

Mr. Cochran stated that the next few months will be critical to the process, adding that every decision made has potential to bring great benefits to Cumberland, or to reduce them, depending on how they are made. He pleaded that everyone's focus be on this project in the next few months, adding that he thinks it will open up investments in Cumberland in the

coming decade, and will help change its trajectory. He asked everyone to listen with an open mind on each decision that needs to be made, as this is such a sensitive phase of the project. Mr. Cochran discussed the design process, saying it's not an extravagant design, but a well-designed project that can pay off incredible dividends. He discussed the visionary aspect of the project, saying the design can't have any changes made to it at this stage, and that it needs to be followed in every detail. He added that the wisest decisions possible need to be made now, and they will pay off for a very long time.

Mayor Morriss agreed, saying that this is a critical junction going forward with the design, and stated that he firmly believes the next couple months are critical, in that we work on the design and get it the best we can. He stated that Mr. Cochran has done an extraordinary job of setting the vision for the City's downtown, and the M&CC will do everything they can to keep that design intact.

Ms. Saville advised that the DDC is anxious to keep Mr. Cochran involved in the process, and to work with him and see if his contract needs to be extended in terms of the scope. She stated that this is the time to keep moving forward, and that changes can be made if needed after they see the bid costs. Mayor Morriss stated that as a team they will work their way through it to keep the vision as close to the design as they can, and said hopefully the bid packages come back at the right price so not so many tough decisions have to be made.

Mr. Miller stated that the key role of the work group is to preserve as much of the design's integrity as possible, and said they will work through any issues that arise. He added that he thinks the right people are at the table early enough in the process to navigate through this.

There was more discussion on the timeline and sources of funding. Mr. Smith advised that he's not aware of any delays putting existing money in place in jeopardy, and added that the funding sources just want to be kept informed.

Councilwoman Marchini discussed the impact this project will have on the City, which she stated could be wonderful or negative, and about keeping this on the forefront and not on the Consent Agenda, and flushed out publicly so that they can be kept abreast of changes. All Council agreed that it should be a transparent process. Mr. Cochran agreed that no decision should be made using Consent Agenda. Mayor Morriss agreed that everybody needs to know the process and how decisions for funding and spending are being made.

II. UPDATE ON LSA COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING ANALYSIS

Mr. Miller advised that the housing analysis final draft was submitted to them on August 10th, and has been reviewed and accepted. He stated they will convene with their steering committee next Tuesday to allow the consultant to provide their presentation to the group, and questions and concerns will be raised one last time as a final vetting session. He advised that the steering committee is comprised of 22 different people with a direct interest in the

housing industry. He recommended adoption of the strategic implementation plan within the housing analysis at the next work session on October 13th.

III. UPDATE ON EASTSIDE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Rhodes advised that the deadline for comments regarding the zoning hearing was last Friday, and stated he believed there were no comments, so they should be getting their setback clearance, which should help move the process along.

IV. UPDATE ON SMALL BUSINESS COVID-19 RELIEF GRANT

Mr. Miller advised that he worked with Lee Borrer regarding the CDBG funding for Covid-19 affected businesses, and stated that \$80K will be distributed to local folks. He added that given that it's through CDBG, there are certain stipulations to follow, and said he has reached out to the County to see if they have a process in place to use and tailor it to what they need. Mr. Miller said that he thinks this will be very much appreciated by the small business community.

In answer to a question from Council, Mr. Miller stated that this is not a loan, it is a 100% grant that the small business owners will not have to pay back, but added that there are certain parameters that have yet to be determined. Mr. Miller also gave an updated on the loan program, saying they have distributed a little less than half of the money available, and said this may be an opportunity to look at that funding for other purposes, such as businesses affected by the Baltimore Street construction when it takes place, businesses that may have to close for a period of time, façade upgrades, etc. He said he thinks it's going to be very important to get that money out to the business owners affected. Mr. Miller offered to get with Council on his ideas on how to be proactive with the funds.

V. UPDATE ON CUMBERLAND GATEWAY PROJECT

Mr. Miller advised that since the last work session two more properties have been razed, with both being on Park Street. He added that alley closures took place and were deeded over to the developer, Kline Scott Visco of Frederick, MD, who is now surveying the property to combine all the parcels to prepare for Phase I of development. Mr. Miller also advised that he hasn't been given any hard time-line, but stated that the developer hopefully expects to begin excavating before winter. Mr. Miller added that the engineering is nearing the completion phases; the developer visited the site last weekend, and was showing interest in other sites nearby, though Mr. Miller stated that he did clarify to him that this project takes priority. He said this project has been a bumpy road, but has spoken to the developer, who understands the magnitude and purpose of the project. Mayor Morris stated that he has been talking to the developer as well about getting some construction going, and mentioned that he thought they did a good job of getting the demolitions done in a timely manner.

VI. DISCUSSION REGARDING FUTURE OF MEMORIAL HOSPITAL SITE

Mr. Miller advised that in the original CEDC MOU, the M&CC were to provide this site to the CEDC for development purposes, and stated he wants to begin the process, and gave some ideas how the process will take place moving forward, saying that he would like to begin the formation of an MOU. He stated he has marketing material that he has shared with some of Council. He also mentioned the two parking structures that go with the property.

Mayor Morriss agreed that it's the time to begin that conversation, with the housing study, and the ramifications of Covid-19. He agreed on getting some of the details worked out and stated that now is the time to move on that property. Mayor Morriss advised that the housing study has a lot of good information that will be helpful to market not only the hospital site, but other sites in Cumberland as well, for good residential usage. He added that the citizens of Cumberland deserve good housing and there are lots of opportunities to make it happen. Mr. Miller stated that he has seen a tremendous turn in the City's housing market that he attributes to Covid-19, with people trying to move to more rural areas, and said it would behoove them to capitalize on that.

VII. DISCUSSION REGARDING FUTURE OF M&T BUILDING

Mr. Miller discussed the M&T Bank Building at 118 Baltimore Street that the CEDC owns. He said he has been putting a lot of thought into the property, and said that historically it has been talked about as becoming a boutique hotel, and added that use has been vetted multiple times through different avenues. He said, however, that given the current climate with the hospitality industry, he wondered what level of interest they will have. He stated that the property should be occupied by the time Baltimore Street is opened up, and said they need to start looking at other options. He said he believes an RFP would need to be publicized very soon so that construction coincides with the Baltimore Street construction. Mr. Miller added that he plans to vet the private sector in terms of best use for the building, and said he just wanted to bring it to Council's attention that there may be other uses for the property than a boutique hotel. Mayor Morriss agreed, saying it still may be a boutique hotel, but said Council is certainly willing to look at other options for its best possible use.

Mr. Miller advised that with the hospitality industry right now, what they're seeing is that it's hard to obtain financing for hotel projects, and there's a lot of risk involved. He stated that the building has a lot of potential, is in great shape, and has been calling different developers and bouncing ideas off them. He added that if any of Council wants to see inside he would be glad to show them and explain his ideas.

Mayor Morriss stated that they are open to whatever a developer feels will fit there, or at the Memorial site. Council agreed that it's really important that there is a plan, and to stay flexible, and wished Mr. Miller good luck and offered their support.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie A. Woodring
City Clerk

Minutes approved October 20, 2020