

Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

WORK SESSION

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

Tuesday, October 8, 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. HOUSING STUDY UPDATE

Mr. Kelly advised that the American Planning Association for MD had held a conference at Rocky Gap recently and gave some background on the organization. He stated that the CEDC hosted an event for them at their request, and had Destination by Design give a presentation with a walking tour which was attended by 25-30 planners, administrators, etc. He added that the event got very positive feedback and was well-received, with Mr. Kelly and Mr. Miller attending sessions at the conference as well. He said that it appears city is ahead of the curve in terms of revitalization.

Mr. Kelly then advised on the housing study and the CEDC's most recent board meeting, and added they acquired authorization to hire LSA (Linda Sturdavant and Associates, LLC), with the cost of the study being \$43,886. He stated that the goal was to have an action plan and said he could provide the proposal if needed. He advised that they spoke with others but the board decided to hire LSA. Mr. Kelly explained the list of recommendations that LSA provided - right-size housing market, second story redevelopment, single-family/single story, specific neighborhoods, etc. Mr. Kelly advised that the recommendation process could take several months from when LSA is formally hired.

II. BALTIMORE STREET ACCESS PROJECT FUNDING UPDATE

Mr. Kelly could not provide an update on the funding for this project, but advised that a letter is expected from downstate that he hopes will be good news and asked to reserve comment until he receives it. Mr. Kelly did, however, advise on the timeline and stated that EADS had submitted the 30% drawings last week. He also advised that the SHA has performed their TAP analysis to determine what money can be expected, with the next step being to apply the ARC funding.

There was discussion on how businesses can thrive during construction, with Mr. Kelly stating that the topic does always come up at the DDC meetings, and is a point of emphasis for the CEDC as well as the DDC. He advised that there is no specific game plan yet as they need to look at the construction timeline.

III. INTERSTATE I-68 REGIONAL ALLIANCE UPDATE

Mr. Kelly provided background on the I-68 Regional Alliance and stated the CEDC and the usual Economic Development folks participate in this, as well as representatives from five different counties. He advised that the idea is to eventually have a county-wide entity for each county, with a group coordinated in regional development above that, and gave examples of how the coordination would work with each county. He added that the key would be to make sure everyone's goals are comparable. He advised, though, that this is all academic at this point, and they are still deciding specifics of governance about this entity. He added that this effort is spearheaded by Al Delia of FSU, asked if the M&CC was in favor of it, and no objection was presented.

IV. CITY/COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONSOLIDATION

Mr. Kelly advised that the CEDC and corporate counsel Mike Getty met with the County Commissioners, County Administrator and County counsel in closed session, with the CEDC board having already voted to consider the CEDC serving as economic development for the County. He stated that they walked away from that meeting with the impression that the County wanted the same, so they are in negotiations. He advised that there is no draft contract in place at this time, no agreement for terms, and it's all open for discussion. He said he will keep staff up-to-date.

There was discussion on if the proposal would involve relocation and where the home base would be. Concerns were also brought up regarding making sure Cumberland is well-represented, with a Memo of Understanding with the City being suggested by Mr. Cohen.

V. 400 N. MECHANIC STREET UTILIZATION UPDATE

Mr. Kelly provided background and specs on the former Canada Hose House. He advised that Mr. Miller has spoken with multiple people over the last year wanting to start or relocate a business, and the CEDC tries to find them a place downtown or in the surrounding areas. He stated that they proposed to the board to use 400 N. Mechanic St. as an incubator, to help those folks who cannot find a facility to fit their immediate needs. Mr. Kelly explained the various ways of incentivizing incubator space, and wants the City to consider transferring the premises to the CEDC when they begin their first incubator lease, saying the CEDC would procure insurance for the building. If the tenant wants to stay there, the CEDC would consider selling to them. Mr. Kelly advised

there would be full disclosure to the M&CC. Mr. Cohen suggested leasing the building to the CEDC, with the CEDC subleasing to tenants, which would give the City more direct control over the disbursement of the property. Mr. Kelly stated he was fine with that and they could certainly talk about and negotiate it.

There was discussion on the best way to vet a tenant, and if the CEDC, their board, or the M&CC decides. Mayor Morriss and Mr. Rhodes agreed it was a conceptually good idea. Mr. Kelly advised that they have honed-in on one entity they have in mind that wants to get into the building yesterday. Mr. Cohen stated that as far as vetting, the M&CC don't need to micromanage, with Council seeming to agree. Mr. Rhodes stated they probably need to look at capitalization of companies as far as vetting.

The basic concept and timeline of lease/sublease was discussed, with Mr. Cohen stating they don't need too many details - it can be moved along, and Mayor Morriss saying specifics can be worked out in the initial agreement.

VI. UNION RESCUE MISSION

Mr. Kelly provided information he received from his recent visit to the mission, and after speaking with Pastor Ziler. He stated that the mission wants to expand their services, specifically regarding women and children's sheltering. He advised about the mission's difficulties because of where they are located, their proximity to the tracks, and their lack of room. Mr. Kelly said it seems to be an opportunity for them to relocate, with the CEDC partnering with them, and to also look at the repurposing of that area, given what is going to be done with Baltimore Street and the Maryland Avenue corridor. Mr. Kelly stated that he went out of his way to make sure that the mission knows that the City understands that they provide a very valuable service, and in no way is this to be thought of as the CEDC wanting them out of the area.

Mr. Kelly advised, however, that that block area is part of, and was incorporated into, the aspirational plan, it being close to the AMTRAK station, with a potential repurposing of the area as a transportation stop, at least on a small scale, for now. He added there is a County study pending on whether or not transportation service would be better located at Canal Place.

Mr. Kelly advised that after speaking with the CEDC board today, they wholeheartedly want to partner with the URM to help find them a new location, with possible relocation areas being the Methodist Church, or Columbia St. He also advised that the URM's board had also met and agreed to look into relocating. Mr. Kelly added there is no doubt that relocation will be complex because of the mission's needs and what they do, but it will be worthwhile. He stated that he is asking the M&CC for input and a decision as to whether they support the idea of partnering with the CEDC and the URM, and if they would like to see this become one of the CEDC's projects.

Mr. Cohen asked the M&CC to table any discussion until he's had the opportunity to brief them, with Mayor Morriss agreeing, and adding that it was good to note that the URM were looking to relocate themselves, with no prompt from the CEDC. Mr. Cohen added that the URM has other alternatives, or backups, that the M&CC should know about as well, and he wants to discuss those before any commitments are made.

Mr. Kelly discussed the Brunswick property, in conjunction with the relocation discussion of the URM, as it is adjacent to the mission. He stated that as the Brunswick is up for foreclosure sale, it can affect what the CEDC does in regards to the mission, and noted that zoning needs to be addressed. He also stated that if no options are available to the mission, Pastor Ziler has indicated that they will do their best where they're at. Mr. Kelly stated that M&CC and staff will have to decide what they ultimately want to see happen over the next 5-10 years, and whether they want to direct the CEDC to make it happen.

Mr. Cohen provided details on the Brunswick property regarding ownership, foreclosure, tax liens, title, etc., and discussed with M&CC. He advised that with foreclosure sale all liens against the property would be stripped, and added that the bank held the mortgage and assigned it to the City, so the City holds the title to the mortgage.

Mr. Kelly stated that now may be a good time, in partnering with the URM, to take a pulse of what we do in terms of resources for the URM, and who it helps out. He added that Pastor Ziler had indicated it might be nice to figure out who helps out in this realm and whether services are coordinated, and if there are any gaps. He also asked about how to help out certain demographics.

Mr. Rhodes advised that the City had to take emergency demo action on the Brunswick property because of structural safety issues, which cost approximately \$80K. Mr. Cohen stated that the City's interest lies in being able to transfer the property to someone who will improve or utilize it in a way to foster investment and return it to the tax rolls. He also advised that the URM would like to buy the property, but they have a price in mind that they won't exceed. He added that the City and the URM are probably the only two entities that have an interest in the property, other than the CEDC.

Council seemed to agree that it would be in the best interest of the City to acquire the property considering what it has going on in the area. Council discussed the debts owed on the property and costs related to acquiring it, and agreed to talk more extensively about it in Executive Session.

VII. ADJOURN INTO CLOSED SESSION

At approximately 5:15 p.m., the meeting adjourned into Closed Session pursuant to Section 3-305 (b) (4) of the General Provisions Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland to discuss proposals for the development of the East Side School Site and proposals for the relocation of various businesses in the City.

VIII. RECONVENE INTO PUBLIC WORK SESSION

At 6:00 p.m. the meeting was reconvened into Public Work Session

PRESENT: Mayor and Council, except for Council Member Richard Cioni, who was absent for this portion of the Work Session.

ALSO PRESENT: Jeff Rhodes, City Administrator; Michael S. Cohen, City Solicitor; Marjorie Woodring, City Clerk; Leslie Willing, Twigg Realty Property Manager; and Jose Taylor, Western MD Property Management

IX. LOCAL PROPERTY MANAGERS DISCUSSION – VARIOUS HOUSING ISSUES

Leslie Willing, Property Manager for Twigg Realty advised that she had asked for this meeting and had spoken with council members before. Also attending with Ms. Willing was José Taylor, owner of Western MD Property Management, and several local property owners.

Multiple topics were discussed, which included:

- Making sure tenants are responsible for paying their own water bills so property owners don't have to be responsible when tenants can't or won't pay.
- Waivers/Adjustments – once every two years – even on multi-unit buildings; property owners should not have to ask for adjustments on tenants' behalf.
- Tagging shut-off notices stopped once the City went to monthly billing, with the notice now being on the bill.
- Water leaks in multiple units with one meter – how to charge.
- Suggestion from managers for City to collect security deposit to reduce risk to property owners.
- Suggestion from M&CC to raise rents to cover the cost, as a solution.
- Water service policies of Fort Ashby – look into.
- City will not take the business risk from property owners.
- Follow up on City's own 45-day cut-off policies – work to enforce to reduce high water bills; set priority for rental units to shut off on 46th day of delinquent bill.
- Look into notification of fees for tenant meter tampering.
- Look into system capability of electronic copies of bills in order to monitor tenants.
- Discussion on some of the current clientele (prison inmate relatives/drug dealers), different environment now; how to rent to people that Cumberland wants.
- Low rent housing issues; HUD vouchers; upgrade properties to attract a better demographic.
- See if system is capable of generating copies of water bills for property owners/managers, so owners can take action before enormous bills occur.

- Turn water back on with an outstanding bill so property can be rented again, and work out a payment plan.

At closing, there was discussion about regular landlord meetings and how best to share information and updates to topics going forward and to have a City Hall representative attend landlord meetings to help with electronic bill lookup.

X. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business at hand, the meeting adjourned at 6:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie A. Woodring
City Clerk

Minutes approved _____