

# Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

## WORK SESSION

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

Tuesday, May 12, 2020  
4:30 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Raymond M. Morriss, President; Council Members: 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; Sandi Saville, DDC

### I. 400 NORTH MECHANIC STREET

Paul Kelly advised that he met with the CEDC Board this afternoon and asked them to consider if they wanted the CEDC to be property manager for the property, and all that entails. They voted, and Mr. Kelly said that they have elected not to enter into a lease or sub-lease, and does not want the CEDC to act in a property management capacity, saying it's not consistent with what they want the CEDC to do, and it would detract too much from Mr. Kelly's and Mr. Miller's time.

Mayor Morriss stated that if the prospective tenant is still interested to have them get in contact with Mr. Rhodes, and if they can work out a lease with them directly, the City will consider doing that. Councilwoman Marchini inquired if the business was still interested, and Mr. Miller replied yes, that they were interested in moving forward if terms are similar, and stated that they are working out of their home right now due to the pandemic. Mr. Rhodes indicated that he will follow up with them.

### II. COVID-19 UPDATES

Mr. Kelly advised that the Cumberland Covid-19 Small Business Loan program went live on Friday, May 8, 2020, and was advertised on various media. He stated that only about 8 applications were received, with one of them not being eligible. He said he was shocked at the low response, and said that he and Mr. Miller were going to look into it, and advised he would go back and visit area businesses and ask why the disinterest.

Mayor Morriss stated that people are aware the County will be reopening their grant program, and he thinks businesses are looking for grants rather than loans. He said that maybe once the County is out of money we will see an increase in interest. Mr. Kelly advised that there is no deadline for the City loan – it's there essentially until the money runs out.

### Allegany County Loan Program

Mr. Kelly provided an update on the County's loan program, advising that the County would be receiving \$12.3M, which will flow through the Health Department, and is meant for health-related expenses on a reimbursement basis. He stated that the money would come in two bundles of approximately \$6.1M each. Mr. Kelly stated that the first bundle was earmarked for the Health Department, and then provided information on how the second bundle of money would be utilized by the County, which would include micro-grants, small business relief, and rebates for hotel/motel tax payments. He also touched on two programs the County has down the road. He encouraged all to be aware that those moneys are available from the County.

Mr. Rhodes stated that they were encouraged to submit reimbursement figures related to the Coronavirus and that it's been completed. Mayor Morriss stated that the City figured out what the hazard pay would be as well as PPE expenses and said the grant will supplement costs such as that. Mr. Rhodes advised that they were also looking at a number of different funding sources to support Covid-19 costs.

There was discussion on the City's loan program, and if it should be revisited and changed into a grant, and details on the applications the CEDC received. Mr. Miller advised that he thought all but one of the businesses had less than 15 employees, and stated that most were bars, restaurants and hair salons. Mr. Kelly advised that they will see what they have at the end of the week, and then touch base with Mr. Rhodes and Mr. Tressler to see how to proceed.

### Re-open Cumberland Program

Mr. Kelly advised that a group of folks - the Downtown Development Commission, the Downtown Cumberland Business Association, McClarran & Williams, tourism, etc. - are working together to assess what Governor Hogan's phased-in approach to re-opening will mean. He stated that there are no specific dates yet, but the minute they get dates they want to have a coordinated effort to disseminate information. He said most importantly is marketing the locals, and that opening up is being done in a safe way. He said a key takeaway from this information today is that it's well underway, it involves stakeholders, and it needs a coordinated process.

Mayor Morriss stated it's a good start on creating a strategic plan on re-opening, and having everything ready. He advised that initially this is for the citizens of Cumberland, and can grow out as time goes on. Mr. Kelly stated that Chief Ternent is also involved, particularly with the Farmer's Market. The Mayor said that although there weren't a lot of folks out, it was well managed and everyone was compliant with masks and social distancing. Ms. Saville said that she and Chief Ternent worked together to make sure the Farmer's Market worked well, and it went very smoothly.

Jeff advised that a question came in from Greg Larry at the Times-News: How can people and stakeholders provide input on the re-opening plan? Mr. Kelly responded that they can reach out to any member of the informal group he mentioned earlier, stating that there will be a more formal process eventually.

### III STATUS UPDATE: MAIN ST. MANAGER/DDC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Mr. Kelly advised that they all need to get on the same page on whether or not a new person will be hired for the existing position of DDC Executive Director/Main Street Manager. He said it's important to do it sooner rather than later, as it needs to be a full time position, particularly with the Covid-19 pandemic and Ms. Saville has only been filling in part-time. Mr. Kelly stated that they should have a person spearheading the informal group he spoke of, working with businesses, and helping them get through the different phases of re-opening. He stated that if the Mayor and Council want that person to be assigned to the CEDC, his board approves that unanimously.

Mayor Morriss said we all see a need to have a downtown manager, and sooner rather than later. He stated they will need to talk about whether the person would be a part of the CEDC, but regardless, they need to get someone in position. He added that the Baltimore Street construction project makes it even more critical to have communication with businesses.

Ms. Saville discussed the various issues concerning having enough funding for the position, having the position in the CEDC with Mr. Kelly as supervisor, and said it's not realistic to have the position in the bottom of City Hall, as just one person, trying to do a wide variety of things going forward. She added the position is way more involved than before, and needs to be collaborative, working with Mr. Kelly and Mr. Miller.

Mayor Morriss said everyone has to understand that the position always has to be here – helping coordinate businesses with the CEDC, tourism, etc., and on different levels. He added that whether it's a City or CEDC position, it needs to be filled and operational all the time, and said it should be active for the long term. The Mayor said we need to concentrate on what's in position today, and not worry about what's in position next year. He said he sees the position continuing whether it's a part of the CEDC, DDC, or the City, and said side discussions about consolidation are irrelevant right now. The Mayor added that it needs to be acknowledged that this position will not go away in the foreseeable future.

There was discussion on the DDC's budget, and whether or not the special tax will be eliminated. Ms. Saville said there is money in the DDC's budget for next year, but after that it depends on whether the special tax goes away. In answer to a question about there being a rush to make a decision on the special tax, Mayor Morriss stated that they were looking at it, but everything had been put on the back burner until they can figure out what the real revenue flow is. He said he wants to keep it on the table, but off to the side.

Mr. Kelly thought there seemed to be a consensus that there needs to be a high-qualified, sophisticated person downtown, that they will be a City employee, and stated that who they will report to as the main boss is clearly the DDC. He added that there may be tweaking or changing of the position down the road and the applicant needs to be apprised of that.

Mayor Morriss thought there seemed to be a consensus on getting someone hired. Mr. Rhodes agreed, but said he didn't want to lose track of the big picture. He said there's a lot of moving parts – tax rate, everyone's responsibilities, maintenance responsibilities, who reports to who, etc. He said

time needs to be spent looking at that and the direction they want to move, but agreed we need to start. Mr. Rhodes said the vacancy should be advertised, but said we need to continue to look at the big picture for downtown, and what we really want, so we don't sell ourselves short.

Mayor Morriss advised Ms. Saville to take a look at the job description and salary range, and get with the DDC Board to see if we can't get something rolling. Mr. Rhodes advised that the City's first step with these kinds of jobs is going back and making sure the job description is updated and offered help if the DDC needs it.

#### **IV. STATUS UPDATE: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONSOLIDATION**

Mr. Kelly provided a background on the negotiations of the consolidation of the CEDC & County, which he stated lasted 2-3 months, and advised that the M.O.U. was signed in January 2020, with a deadline of April 1, 2020, extended by the City and the CEDC to June 1, 2020. Mr. Kelly stated that at that time they were consolidated, but when the County tabled the issue, the M.O.U. terminated, and they were no longer consolidated. He advised that the County provided the CEDC with another M.O.U. that was passed the third week of April 2020. He said that after consideration, the CEDC Board met today to formally vote to reject it, with Mayor Morriss abstaining. Mr. Kelly advised that the board thought that what the County proposed was moving away from a partnership and moving toward a County-controlled entity that would have a diminished private sector and City voice, so they voted to reject it, and there is no consolidation at this time.

There was discussion about the CEDC Board's decision, with Mayor Morriss saying he was disappointed, and thinks consolidation is still in the best interest of everyone. He said with all that's going on right now with the pandemic, we can take a step back, look at it down the road and figure out a path forward. He added that the City still has their relationship with the CEDC, and now they can get re-focused on City projects and assist the County when necessary. Councilwoman Marchini stated that she was not disappointed that the Board didn't pass this particular M.O.U., because the structure of it changed from what was initially agreed upon. She added that she thinks this is best right now, as it wasn't the best model for the community. She applauded Mr. Kelly and Mr. Miller for what they've done so far. Councilman Cioni said he was disappointed, but optimistic that something can be worked out.

There was discussion on CEDC projects, and Mr. Kelly said the board is in favor of consolidation, as long as it's done the correct way. Mr. Miller said there's no cookie-cutter approach – no perfect way – but one thing that's common is a more regional approach.

#### **V. CLOSE MEETING FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION**

On a motion made by Councilman Frazier and seconded by Councilman Cioni, Council voted 4-0 to close the session, with Councilman Bernard being absent at time of vote.

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business at hand, the Work Session adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie A. Woodring  
City Clerk

Minutes approved June 16, 2020