

MINUTES

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

January 13, 2022

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chris Streett, Chair
Jay Ellenby
Bill Kelly
Todd Boyle
Donna Dickey

IN ATTENDANCE: Trish Heidenreich, Director of Economic Development
Rowan Glidden, Senior Planner
Patti Parker, Community & Public Relations Manager
Angela Robertson, Economic Development Coordinator
Jenny Falcone, Bel Air Downtown Alliance
Robert Andrews, Harford County OECD
Elizabeth Janney, *The Bel Air Patch*
Catherine Butrim, Recording Secretary

The meeting was called to order at 5:02 p.m. at the Bel Air Armory, 37 N. Main Street, Bel Air, MD 21014.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

Approval of Minutes – September 9, 2021

Ms. Dickey moved and Mr. Kelly seconded the motion to approve the minutes of the September 9, 2021 meeting.

The motion carried.

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Mr. Ellenby moved and Mr. Kelly seconded the motion to reelect Mr. Streett as Chair of ECDC for 2022.

The motion carried.

Mr. Boyle moved and Mr. Ellenby seconded the motion to reelect Tucker McNulty as Vice Chair of ECDC for 2022.

TOWN BUSINESS UPDATE:

General Business News – Openings, Closings, Moves

Ms. Robertson reported the following:

- Jabz Boxing opened at 520 Baltimore Pike in Bel Air Town Center.
- &pizza opened at 625 Belair Road in Tollgate Marketplace.
- Access Benefits Community Services opened at 336 S. Main Street.
- Omninoct Properties opened at 539 Rock Spring Road.
- Kindred Spirits Vintage opened in the former REB Records location in Armory Marketplace.
- Ferrari Frame and Design moved to 302 N. Main Street from Armory Marketplace.
- Berkshire Hathaway received a U&O for 353 S. Main Street.
- Cigar Leaf received a U&O for 542 Baltimore Pike in Bel Air Town Center.
- Allison Hecht Psychology received a U&O for 602 S. Atwood Road.
- Target received U&Os for interior demo and remodeling.
- Ledo Pizza received a U&O for 331 Baltimore Pike.
- A community volunteer set up his train garden in the suite formerly occupied by Ferrari Frame and Design during Winter Wonderland. He had approximately 5,000 visitors. The Economic Development department is in the process of selecting a new business to occupy that suite.

Building Permits, Development Projects

Mr. Glidden reported the following:

- The Planning Commission approved an extension of the Site Plan approval for the expansion at Bel Air Assisted Living located at 144 N. Hickory Avenue.
- The Planning Commission approved a conversion of a building at Bel Air Autobody located at 230 Gateway Drive.

Subcommittee Updates

Ms. Heidenreich advised that she forwarded the notes and updates from the individual subcommittee meetings via email to all the ECDC members.

Ms. Heidenreich reported that the **Burns Alley & Office Street Pocket Park Subcommittee** has not met; however, she provided a Planning Dept. report on these projects.

Ms. Heidenreich reported that the **High Density Housing Subcommittee** has not met. Ms. Heidenreich advised that she attended a virtual legislative session for the Maryland Economic Development Association, and one of speakers discussed the migration from cities into other areas due to the pandemic, and it is important to bring some of those people migrating from city centers into Bel Air.

Mr. Streett reiterated that the Town needs to be proactive, as businesses and firms also are seeking to move from Baltimore City into Bel Air and Harford County; and the Town needs to be receptive to amending some codes and to stimulating redevelopment projects. He advised that the Town Commissioners need to be proactive in offering potential incentives because the cost of construction has risen exponentially in the past 18 months and Bel Air needs to ensure it does not lose these opportunities to other parts of the County.

Ms. Dickey inquired what kinds of codes are preventing these projects from moving forward. Mr. Streett advised that some of the codes are related to building heights, parking requirements and setbacks. Ms. Dickey inquired who can start to make changes. Ms. Heidenreich advised that as Mr. Glidden and Kevin Small are finalizing the Comprehensive Plan, the next phase will be Development Regulations. Mr. Glidden advised that there is a certain urgency to getting some rezonings completed first, so they have reversed the schedule to complete those first and then to begin the Code rewriting phase. Mr. Glidden advised that any property owner may submit a request to the Town Board at any time to modify any part of the Town Code. He advised that the Town Board also may recommend changes to the Town Code. The Planning Department periodically may do some housekeeping and accumulate things that need to be clarified and corrected in the Town Code and then correct those items all at one time.

Mr. Kelly advised that it would be helpful to have an accumulation of properties that are relevant to this issue, and he inquired if there is a problem preventing reinvestment and rehabilitation because there are a number of dilapidated buildings in the Town. Mr. Streett noted that one issue is there are buildings that are not suitable for rehab or redevelopment projects. Mr. Glidden advised that while there is a mechanism to force demolition of dangerously dilapidated buildings, there is no mechanism to force a property owner to improve their property to make it more marketable. Mr. Kelly inquired if Eminent

Domain might apply in these cases. Mr. Glidden advised that Eminent Domain is a mechanism by which a government unit can take private property for the public use if there is a defensible reason why; however, the economic progress of the Town would not be a defensible reason.

Mr. Streett suggested that the Town reach out to some of the owners of the unoccupied properties to enquire what they envision for those properties. Ms. Heidenreich advised that the Economic Development Department has sent a number of very interested parties to some of the owners of those properties, and that the Planning Department and Public Works Department have also been in touch with those property owners regarding maintenance issues.

Ms. Heidenreich reported that the **Route 24 and Route 1 Subcommittee** met and discussed incentives. Mr. Kelly reported that there is no mechanism in place in the Town of Bel Air for tax incentives. Ms. Heidenreich advised that the Town is investigating whether ARPA money could be used for water and sewer hookup as an incentive for future developments. She explained that the Town's accounting is based on a General Fund that is preset, and the key is to look at how to create an incentive program that is a separate Special Revenue Fund from the General Fund. Ms. Heidenreich stated that she will investigate how a separate fund can be created for incentives allocation. Mr. Streett advised that the Town needs to get creative to make itself as marketable as possible because it is an extremely competitive market now and incentives could be a tipping point.

Mr. Kelly suggested that an individual be assigned to spearhead this issue and speak to the stakeholders and get these ideas in front of the Town Commissioners.

Ms. Heidenreich reported that the **Traffic Safety Task Force** has not met.

Ms. Heidenreich reported that the **Main Street Focus Group** did meet. Ms. Heidenreich reported that Jesse Bane advised that the Main Street Focus Group speak with the Town Commissioners about purchasing Main Street before speaking with any representatives from the County or the State delegates.

Ms. Heidenreich advised that she spoke with the new State Highway Administration (SHA) representative, Kimon Johnson. Mr. Johnson informed that he only recalls a situation when a block or two was given back to Baltimore City many years ago. She stated that she will follow-up with Mr. Johnson for more information about that situation. Ms. Heidenreich advised that Mr. Johnson informed her that another State highway road would have to be designated if the Town were to buy back Main

Street since the highway can't be intermittent, and new mapping would have to be created for commercial transportation on SHA's end.

Mr. Ellenby requested that parklets/pedlets be on the agenda for the next Main Street Focus Group meeting. Ms. Falcone reported that Town business owners have questions about whether business owners or the Town are the ones utilizing parklets and pedlets, and they have questions about who is paying for them and how they will be stored when not in use.

Comprehensive Plan – Development Regulations Update

Mr. Glidden presented the Economic Development component of the Comprehensive Plan update and reported the following:

- The Town updated, with the assistance of the Economic Development Department, the map (as displayed in the presentation) identifying properties that are underdeveloped or underutilized as commercial or residential and identifying public land.
- The Town identified five (5) areas of focus, including the four (4) corners area (Routes 1 and 24) and Harford Mall, Main and Bond Streets, the industrial area around Ellendale, UM Upper Chesapeake, and the south side of Baltimore Pike just west of Bond Street.
- The limits of the Sustainable Communities area were displayed on another map.
- The low-to-moderate income area was displayed on another map.
- The Main Street Maryland program map was displayed.
- The map of the A&E District was displayed.
- The list of Goals and Objectives was reviewed.

ORGANIZATION UPDATES:

Harford County OCED

Mr. Andrews reported the following:

- 2021 was a banner year for Harford County.
- There was enormous activity in the industrial sector. In Baltimore east through Cecil County, there was only a 3.3 percent vacancy rate in industrial properties. The Harford/Cecil vacancy rate was 4.4 percent; however, some recent activity will put that rate below 3 percent.

- Eight (8) deals representing 4 million sq. ft. have been conducted in 2021 in Harford County with all but one (1) bringing new companies that will bring about 1,000 new jobs into Harford County.
- Frito-Lay is moving into the old Saks Fifth Avenue warehouse on Route 40.
- Wayfair is moving into the last building in Eastgate.
- Fanatics, a sports paraphernalia retailer, is taking over 5,000 sq. ft. in the Aberdeen Logistics Center.
- Webstaurant, a national restaurant supply e-commerce business, is taking over a vacant space in Eastgate.
- Elite Comfort Solutions, a manufacturer of foam products, is moving into the old Dart Container Corp. facility in Havre de Grace.
- Harford County is expected to maintain its AAA bond rating.
- The Annual Growth Report was published and will be available online by 1/14/22.
- The Grove is on winter hiatus and will reopen in April because the building is not heated.
- Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG) is operating on HPCON Bravo with the workforce at 40 percent capacity on post. Gatherings are limited to 50 percent capacity. Proof of vaccination is required to conduct business on post, and masks are mandated.
- The demand for industrial and manufacturing warehousing is increasing enormously with 1.2 billion sq. ft. of warehousing is expected to be needed worldwide over the next 18 months.

Bel Air Downtown Alliance

Ms. Falcone reported the following:

- The Downtown Alliance is working on its Strategic Plan for the next two (2) years, and they will work in conjunction with the goals of the Town's Comprehensive Plan.
- The co-working space, Work Ally, has two rented out two (2) designated office spaces with one (1) designated office space available. The Alliance is considering these spaces as incubator spaces.
- Music on Main went live in November. Ms. Falcone is working with the various Alliance committees to decide what kinds of music to play at various times of day and times of year. Eventually music will be playing everyday from 10:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m. Currently

music is playing on weekdays from 5:00-10:00 p.m. and weekends from 10:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m.

- The Alliance will be restarting conversations with Harford Mutual regarding the MOU for the pocket park on Bond Street.
- The last First Friday event was very successful, and the Alliance is hoping to add more First Friday features in 2022.
- Roll Out the Barrell went very well with a sold-out event at the Armory.
- The Alliance added lights to the archway at the Armory. The lights were donated by the Chesapeake Cancer Alliance.
- The BBQ Bash had a record-breaking Friday this year, although the rain put a damper on Saturday with the headliner cancelled that day.
- The Belle Aire Market ended strongly in 2021 and will continue in 2022.
- One of the drive-in movies to complement Winter Wonderland was cancelled due to high winds, but the other went very well on the Risteau lot on Bond Street.
- The Alliance retired Sip and Shop and the Summer Steak Showdown. The Alliance will host one summer movie rather than a full series. The Growler Gala will be organized by Harford Artists this year.
- There is \$35,000 in façade improvement funding available. Businesses may apply for a matching grant up to \$10,000.
- The Alliance has \$2,500.00 in remaining funds from Keep Maryland Beautiful. Mr. Glidden advised that there are spots available for tree plantings on S. Main Street.
- The Alliance was not awarded funding from the Main Street Improvement and Technical Assistance Grant for FY22.

NEW BUSINESS:

Town Code Updates

Ms. Heidenreich advised that she emailed the members with proposed amendments to the Town Code regarding the ECDC's role as an advisory committee reporting to the Town Administrator and Town Commissioners and regarding term limits. She requested that the members contact her by 1/25/22 with any comments or recommendations regarding the Code changes.

Town Stakeholders Event – Commercial Real Estate and Stakeholders

Event Planning

The members present agreed to hold the Town Stakeholders Event on the morning of April 27 pending Armory availability. The members present agreed that the event should be opened up to all community stakeholders, including the Harford County Council and the State delegation.

Presentation Content:

- a. Status of commercial real estate and retail activities
- b. Main Street Focus Group
- c. Incentives and other projects

ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Dickey moved and Mr. Ellenby seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:53 p.m.

The motion carried.