

MINUTES

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

January 14, 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chris Streett, Chair
Tucker McNulty, Vice Chair
Todd Boyle
Donna Dickey
Jay Ellenby
Bill Kelly
Gil Kennedy

IN ATTENDANCE: Trish Heidenreich, Director of Economic Development
Angela Robertson, Economic Development Coordinator
Kevin Small, Director of Planning
Patti Parker, Community & Public Relations Manager
Jenny Falcone, Bel Air Downtown Alliance
Robert Andrews, Harford Co. Economic Development
Elizabeth Janney, Bel Air Patch
Catherine Butrim, Recording Secretary

The virtual meeting was called to order at 5:02 p.m. via GoToMeeting (722105285)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

Approval of Minutes – December 10, 2020

Mr. Kelly moved and Mr. Ellenby seconded the motion to approve the minutes of the December 10, 2020 meeting.

The motion carried.

TOWN BUSINESS UPDATE:

General Business Update and ED Dept. Update

Ms. Heidenreich advised that the meeting with the Town’s landlords has been rescheduled for March 31 and will be held at the Armory. This meeting will be added as an item on the agenda for the February ECDC meeting.

Ms. Robertson stated that IQL Behavioral Health Services has opened at 108 N. Bond Street.

Ms. Robertson stated that Advanced Contracting received their U&O at 522 N. Hickory Avenue.

Ms. Robertson stated that Brittany Welsh is the new owner of Country Britches at 113 S. Main Street. The new business name will be Mannequin on Main, and the grand opening will be held during the first week of February.

Ms. Robertson stated that Kelly Sorenson Salon at 110 S. Main Street has new signage up and is now operating as Bei Capelli. She relocated her business from With Love Beauty Salon at 331 Baltimore Pike.

Ms. Robertson stated that Skylight Creative is completing some interior and exterior work at 113 N. Main Street and plans to open in March.

Ms. Robertson stated that Visit Harford Restaurant Week will be held January 22-31. She advised that nine (9) Bel Air restaurants, five (5) of which are located downtown, will be participating.

Ms. Heidenreich reported that Harford Artists earned \$7,000.00 in sales in December, and they now have 318 members. She reported that Harford Artists and all the incubator tenants in Armory Marketplace were very pleased with the Winter Wonderland activities, which created a large uptick in activity and foot traffic.

Ms. Heidenreich stated that the incubator tenants wanted to thank the Winter Wonderland Committee and the Bel Air Downtown Alliance for coordinating all the activities that brought so many visitors to the area.

OLD BUSINESS:

Main Street Focus Group – General Update

Mr. Streett advised that he received some preliminary budget figures from Steve Kline regarding the potential cost if the Town purchased Main Street from Charm City Run down to Lee Street. He noted that Joe Snee plans to reach out to State High Administration (SHA).

Burns Alley – Update from Planning

Mr. Small advised that there were plans in the past to make Burns Alley a back door Main Street, but those plans assumed that the Sheriff's Department building would have been demolished and rebuilt or sold and developed. Mr. Small noted that he can forward that plan to ECDC. He advised that the thought was that some parking in front of the garage could be developed into businesses, which would have to be front loaded. Mr. Small advised that there is some property owned by Oddfellows Hall and

property owned by Harford County. He advised that one of the problems for a pedestrian mall would be affected, at least in the near future, by the gas pumps. Mr. Small advised that there is some funding in this year's budget to survey the area, so the Town can develop some better concept plans. He added that there are some opportunities for grants.

Ms. Dickey advised that developing Burns Alley is a must-do in her view, and she inquired if plans to improve the area could be phased in since the plans sound like they will be expensive to complete.

Ms. Falcone advised that the Downtown Alliance is interested in utilizing Burns Alley to grow First Fridays.

High Density Housing – Continued Discussion

Mr. Streett advised that the Bel Air Academy project is fully leased and extremely well received, and it could be a litmus test and stimulus for other projects within the Town limits, including the Hickory lot across from the garage, and the tire lot located at the corner of South Main Street and Churchville Road. He noted that ECDC needs the Town and the commissioners to put some pressure on Harford County because the economic benefit of having a mixed-use project at one the most visible corners in Bel Air is exponential, in terms of the jobs that would be created along with higher assessed land values.

Mr. Streett advised that he reviewed the Bel Air Market Study completed by the Camoin Associates in 2017 and extracted the privately owned or County-owned properties that were recommended for potential selling or surplus for mixed-use, commercial or high-density redevelopment. He advised that he will send the study to the members.

Ms. Dickey stated that ECDC should move forward and begin discussions with the commissioners.

Stoltz Pavilion – Continued Discussion

Mr. Streett inquired if there were any other thoughts about the having a structure like the Stoltz Pavilion installed at a location such as the Liriodendron parking lot in order to hold more outdoor events in Bel Air.

Ms. Heidenreich inquired if the structure should be as large as the Stoltz Pavilion because a structure that size would take up much of the parking on the Liriodendron lot. Mr. Streett advised that he would like to see the Town emulate the concept in general and make it fit for the space that is identified.

Ms. Parker advised that Harford Mall would be a good location for a pavilion because the Mall already has all the required ADA. Ms. Heidenreich stated that she can set up a conversation with Laurie Altmann.

Ms. Dickey suggested that the Town consider a concept with drive-in concerts at a location like Harford Mall.

Mr. McNulty advised that he feels it is best that the Town identify as many locations as possible for outdoor venues. He advised that the Society of Italian-American Businessmen is planning to have a heritage festival in October, and they are trying to identify outdoor venues to hold the event.

Mr. Small advised that the Town does have the Humbert Amphitheatre and the Schlehr Pavilion available for events and questioned if there is a need to add another pavilion.

Mr. Small advised that ECDC should concentrate on Harford Mall and helping it to evolve into something else. Mr. Kennedy advised that this would be a good time to reach out to Harford Mall since they have filed for Chapter 11, and they need to present a plan for the property. Ms. Heidenreich stated that she will set up a meeting with Laurie Altmann regarding the Pavilion issue. Mr. Streett advised that ECDC will need an update from the Mall about the Chapter 11.

Ms. Parker advised that the Town should make sure it has the correct zoning in place for whatever Harford Mall would like to evolve into in the future. Mr. Small stated that the Town is looking at having maximum flexibility for that to happen in the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Streett advised that a line item should be added to next month's agenda to discuss Harford Mall.

NEW BUSINESS:

Market Study & Comprehensive Plan

Ms. Heidenreich stated that it is time for the Town to complete a Comprehensive Plan, and the Town will be completing a Market Study that will gather all the demographic data that has been accumulated in the 2020 Census. She advised that the Town will send out an RFP in early March, and

the Town will then contract with a company that does market research. Ms. Heidenreich advised that the Market Study should kick off by July 1.

Mr. Small advised that the Town needs to wait until it has the Census data. He stated that there will be an internal meeting next week to kick off a schedule for the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Small advised that the Town would like to pinpoint some focal areas that have potential and may be areas of concern. He advised that he feels it would be a good idea to take advantage of the success Independent Brewing has had in the area around Ellendale.

Mr. Streett stated that Ellendale should be a focus and that the Town should encourage the County to do something with the tire lot.

Mr. Small advised that the Hickory lot was reviewed by some outside consultants, and its potential for development was not well-received. He stated that he would like to learn why it is not attractive to outside development.

Mr. Small advised that the County needs to find 150 parking spaces and not encumber the tire lot with their parking. Mr. Streett advised that the Town should encourage the County to make the Hays Street lot a parking lot.

Annual Awards – Amory Option and Date

Ms. Heidenreich advised that the interior of the Armory has been remodeled, and it might be a good idea to hold the Annual Awards there in 2021. She noted that the layout of the Armory can be turned into a space that would be inviting and conducive to social distancing.

The members present agreed to hold the Annual Awards at the Armory on October 21.

Mr. McNulty suggested that the Town ask several downtown restaurants to cater the event.

OTHER:

Downtown Alliance Update

Ms. Falcone stated that the Main Street Social will be held at Black Eyed Suzie's on January 27, which will kick off the membership drive. The event will be held from 5:00-6:30 p.m.

Ms. Falcone stated that Sip and Shop will be held on February 18, and the Alliance is working with some of the businesses to offer workshops and more creative options to bring more people in to shop.

Ms. Falcone stated that the Chocolate Brew and Wine Tour will be held over eight (8) days, which will allow people to use drink tickets and vouchers for sweets at businesses over that extended time period rather than at a one-day pub crawl.

Ms. Falcone stated that she will send the members the full 2021 event schedule when it is finalized.

Ms. Falcone stated that the Alliance is still working with the Harford County Tourism grant, and much of that funding will go toward the Music on Main initiative. She advised that she is hopeful that the Alliance will be able to put the initiative into motion in late January or early February with wireless speakers on the light poles downtown. Ms. Falcone advised that it appears the Alliance will be able to do more than one phase with the funding. The speakers will play seasonal music, make announcements and could be used for emergencies.

Ms. Falcone advised that the Alliance requested \$500,000.00 from the MD-SERI grant; and if they receive the grant, micro-grants in the amount of \$5,000.00-\$15,000.00 will be created for downtown businesses.

Ms. Falcone stated that the Alliance is working with the Town with funding from the Keep Maryland Beautiful grant. The funding was used to hang flowering baskets in the Town over the spring and summer, and the Alliance is working with DPW on some plantings for spring of this year.

Ms. Falcone stated the Alliance is working with the Jablon Group to create a co-working space downtown at 5 N. Main Street.

County Update

Mr. Andrews stated that the Bond Report meetings were held virtually last week, and it is anticipated that Harford County will retain its AAA bond rating going into the new year.

Mr. Andrews stated that the State of the County address by the County Executive is available online to view.

Mr. Andrews reported that he attended an event where Sheriff Gahler reported that crime statistics are down significantly in Harford County with a 54-56% reduction in violent crime from last year.

Mr. Andrews stated that the County has just rolled out a new State grant to assist hotels in the County.

Mr. Andrews stated that, in the first 27 working days of issuing grants, the County processed over 1,800 applications and awarded over \$5 million in funding. He noted that Harford County has been recognized as one of the model programs in the State. To date, the County has issued over 3,100 grants in the amount of \$20.2 million.

Mr. Andrews stated that the County is expecting another round of Cares Act funding directly from the federal government, and those new grants should be available by the end of February.

Mr. Andrews stated that over 2,500 businesses in Harford County with revenue under \$150,000.00 per year have participated in the PPP loan program, which amounted to just over \$93 million. An additional 480 businesses with revenue over \$150,000.00 per year applied for up to \$10 million. Mr. Andrews stated that County businesses were able to retain approximately 20,000 jobs due to PPP loans.

Mr. Andrews stated that income growth in Harford County is outpacing the State average, and the average household median income is expected to reach \$90,000.00 annually.

Mr. Andrews stated that residential building permits for 2020 exceeded permits for the previous year.

Mr. Andrews stated that Harford County continues to attract new companies, and Amazon has moved into the County and now accounts for over 1,000 jobs.

Mr. Andrews stated that APG is very healthy with over \$665 million in investment since BRAC.

Mr. Andrews stated that the County will be delivering another 2 million square feet of spec space in the industrial sector in the next 6-9 months.

Mr. Andrews stated that construction has begun at the Upper Chesapeake facility in Aberdeen and is expected to be completed by the end of 2022.

Mr. Andrews stated that The Grove facility successfully concluded its first three (3) months with eight (8) tenants, all of whom have re-signed through March.

ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Dickey moved and Mr. Boyle seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:15 p.m.

The motion carried.