



**BOARD OF MAYOR AND COMMISSIONERS
STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT
FEBRUARY 25th, 2021
VIA ZOOM**

MINUTES

Members Present: Jonathan Elmore, Mayor
Brian Fisher, Mayor Pro Tem
Lisa Shortell, Commissioner
Lionel Laratte, Commissioner
Dee Merriam, Commissioner

Staff Present: Patrick Bryant, City Manager
Paul Hanebuth, Asst. City Manager
Shannon Powell, Asst. City Manager
Rebecca Long, Communications Manager
Gina Hill, City Clerk
Stephen Quinn, City Attorney

Guest: Bill Floyd, Facilitator

THURSDAY

Meeting Called to Order/Adoption of Agenda

Commissioner Shortell moved to adopt. Commissioner Merriam seconded. All ayes.

8:30-8:45

Introduction

Bill Floyd gave an overview of the responsibilities of being on the Board of Mayor and Commissioners (BOMC). He also talked about how unusual the past year has been because of the pandemic. Commissioner Merriam praised city staff for their work during the pandemic. There was more discussion about the unique challenges of the covid pandemic.

8:45-9:45

Recap of 2020

City Manager Bryant gave an update on the largest projects underway, such as the US278 improvements and stormwater management. Commissioner Merriam voiced concern for traffic in the residential area that will result from the US278 construction. The group spoke more about traffic calming. Mr. Bryant told Mr. Floyd about new hires in the past year and other staffing issues. There was discussion about staff having a maximum number of projects at the moment and being stretched thin. Mr. Bryant talked about making priorities and finances. Mayor Pro Tem Fisher noted that the BOMC has always been supportive of adding staff when it's been requested. Mr. Bryant responded that staff

is limited by space and money for expanding the workforce and they have to be very strategic about how staff is added. Updates turned to the public works building renovations. Mr. Floyd asked Commissioner Merriam about her first year on the BOMC. She responded that it's been a learning curve but she's enjoyed it. Mr. Floyd said the BOMC should be proud of the past year's progress.

9:45-10:30

Tax Digest/Revenue Projections

City Manager Bryant explained there has been an increase in the tax digest since the arrival of two mixed use developments – The Willis and The Alexan. He added that revenue will continue to increase as the tax abatement periods end. He didn't want to speculate about future development. Assistant City Manager Hanebuth said the digest for single family residential properties has remained static. He gave more details about trends in the tax digest. Mr. Hanebuth fielded questions from the BOMC and Mr. Bryant talked about how the coronavirus has impacted tax collection. There was also discussion about how tax revenue has changed in the past few years. The group talked about the county's system of revaluating properties when they sell and how that's not consistent. Mayor Elmore posed the question of how to get the county to revalue properties without angering the property owners for causing their taxes to rise. Talk about future tax revenue continued with Mr. Bryant wanting to be conservative about any predictions. Commissioner Shortell said leaders need to be consistent in their message that the growth is in the downtown area and taxes from that will help relieve the residential tax burden. Commissioner Merriam agreed.

10:30-12:00

DDA/BOMC joint priorities

The discussion started off talking about the relationships and dynamics between a BOMC and Downtown Development Authority (DDA). City Manager Bryant said the relationship has strengthened now that they share some staff. He added a big question is whether the BOMC wants to influence how the DDA spends proceeds from the sale of the Department of Juvenile Justice Building (DJJ). Building consensus and deciding on investment priorities are both very important, Mr. Bryant said. Assistant City Manager and DDA Executive Director Shannon Powell added more. DDA and BOMC member Lisa Shortell weighed in on how the two groups could work together. Talked turned to the DDA's revenue streams past and present. Ms. Powell gave a presentation on priority projects for both groups to work on together, such as the town green and stormwater. Mayor Pro Tem Fisher noted that the commercial development portion of the city-owned four acres should be a topic of conversation between the two groups. Mr. Bryant also mentioned stormwater as being a high priority. Ms. Shortell said the DDA is also looking at other projects, such as renovating the 90 North Avondale Road property. The group discussed the need for a joint meeting between the BOMC and DDA. Mr. Floyd said the BOMC should agree on their project priority list and focus as well on communication between the groups. Mr. Fisher suggested that the priority project, in his opinion, is the city-owned four acres and they may consider not even having

other priorities until that's underway. More conversation on this topic and associated priorities followed. The group touched on the street grid and whether or not the DDA could have a role in that. The DDA's role in the future of 90 North Avondale was also discussed. The consensus is that it needs to be determined what the DDA's role will be in the commercial portion of the development of the city-owned four acres before anything else. Mr. Fisher included 90 North Avondale in that equation. The group talked about what the DDA would be allowed to do with the property should they buy it from the city. Ms. Merriam thought other properties were worth exploring. Mr. Bryant and Mr. Fisher both thought the commercial area adjacent to the town green should be the biggest priority right now and the DDA's role in that needs to be figured out first. Mr. Floyd gave a recap before breaking for lunch. The group hoped to have a joint session with the DDA after the bids come in for the park at the middle of March.

1:00-2:00

Branding Initiative

Mayor Elmore said he wants the public to know about all the exciting work going on within the city. City Manager Bryant presented his proposal for a branding initiative. He mentioned that all members of the executive team have had experience in this area. Mr. Bryant added that he has a friend in this field who has offered to help them put together a request for proposal (RFP) to solicit bids to help with branding. The BOMC and staff should work with the DDA on this project as well. The steps of developing a branding campaign were outlined by Mr. Bryant. He felt the cost would be in the range of \$35,000 to \$50,000. He also added he thinks now is the time to start thinking about doing something like this. Mayor Elmore was supportive and asked Bill Floyd to share his experience from his time in Decatur and involvement with their branding initiative. Mr. Floyd said that he knew some people that the BOMC and staff should talk to before compiling an RFP. Mr. Bryant explained that to do this successfully, the group would have to hear from residents, business owners, and even surrounding communities to gauge the image of the city. He then explained how that was done at his previous job. Commissioner Shortell liked the thorough approach and she commented on targeting specific demographics. Mayor Pro Tem Fisher felt this was a good opportunity and talked about bringing several groups together. Assistant City Manager Powell described some of her experience in branding. Commissioner Merriam wondered if staff had enough time to handle this project. She mentioned that she knows many residents with branding expertise. Ms. Merriam also noted that the city landscape would soon change drastically with the building of the town green and US278 improvements and, because of that, maybe it would be better to wait until those projects were complete. Mr. Bryant responded that he would personally oversee the branding initiative. He added that there would probably be a steering committee. Mr. Bryant also felt that doing this initiative sooner would be better. Ms. Shortell and Commissioner Laratte agreed. Mayor Elmore asked the group if there was a concrete way to measure success. Ms. Powell, Mr. Floyd, and Mr. Bryant shared their experiences with some of the benefits they've seen from rebranding. Mr.

Bryant would like the go ahead to move forward with putting together an RFP. Ms. Merriam would like to discuss this in a work session first. Mr. Fisher recommended talking to the Avondale Estates Business Association as well.

2:00-3:00

Welcoming Committee

Mayor Elmore gave background on the Welcoming Committee. He felt that the committee is rudderless and may need some more structure and direction. Commissioner Shortell read the resolution approved to form the committee. She discussed how the pandemic preventing them from having events. City Manager Bryant offered that the committee would be more effective once they're provided one message to communicate. There was discussion about how the committee could work with the DDA and their promotion efforts and it must be decided to is the target audience. Mr. Bryant said all content should have a purpose. Commissioner Laratte said these efforts go beyond the business district. The group agreed. Assistant City Manager Powell felt that being welcoming should be incorporated in everything the city does. Commissioner Merriam asked about staff support and Mr. Bryant said that Sara Hempen and Rebecca Long are ideally suited to work with the Welcoming Committee (WC) as guidance and what they would do. Talk turned to someone to take responsibility for the WC. Mr. Bryant suggested that Mr. Laratte work with city staff to come up with a plan for the WC to bring back to the BOMC. Mayor Pro Tem Fisher felt the WC needed direction as far as their target audience. City Clerk Hill recapped her experience with the WC to this point and their current goals. Ms. Shortell reminded the group about all the tools that the national Welcoming America group offers to its members. Ms. Merriam mentioned that the WC wanted to do a directory of the city's civic groups. The group talked about exclusivity among some of the groups, specifically the Avondale Swim & Tennis Club. Mr. Laratte explained that there should be guidance for the WC without anything being forced on them. Assistant City Manager Hanebuth described that he's an apartment dweller but wouldn't have know a lot about the city if he didn't work at city hall. There is consensus that Mr. Laratte will meet with city staff to brainstorm concepts to pass along to the WC.

Adjournment

The retreat adjourned at 1:30pm.

APPROVED THIS 24th DAY OF MARCH 2021



Jonathan Elmore, Mayor

ATTEST:



Gina Hill, City Clerk