

Downtown Commission Meeting
Minutes of December 9, 2016
8:30 a.m.
1st Floor North Conference Room - City Hall

Present: Vice-Chairman Michael McDonough, Presiding; Mr. Jack Bebbler, Mr. Dane Barrager, Mr. Brent Campbell, Mr. Byron Greiner, Councilman Brian Haynes, Ms. Ruth Summers and Ms. Pamela Winkler

Absent: Chairman Adrian Vassallo, Ms. Franzi Charen and Mr. Jimi Rentz

Vice-Chairman McDonough called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and informed the audience of the public hearing process.

Administrative

- Vice-Chairman McDonough asked that second paragraph of the Downtown Commission Membership topic in the November 11, 2016, minutes be amended as follows: "A discussion took place about the importance of having a representative that was actively involved in both organizations. There was not support to take a vote on amending the ordinance. Vice Chairman McDonough said that Chairman Vassallo would remain in his seat until the resolved; it was suggested that the Commission convene a subcommittee to review and provide a recommendation to City Council."

Updates

Pritchard Park Improvements

Mr. Steven Lee Johnson, from Sitework Studios, updated the Commission the improvements to Pritchard Park, which will consist of improvements to landscaping and maintenance, landscape protection, lighting and safety, and general appearance of the park. He said that they anticipated construction early next year with final completion in May. He did note that sections will be closed as needed but that it would not be closed at any point entirely; and said the community can look forward to a lush, urban park that everyone can enjoy.

Ms. Sue Rollins, representing DARN, said that they will renegotiate with the City as far as their assisting with ornamental maintenance, maintenance of flower boxes, etc. once the improvements are completed.

In response to Ms. Winkler, Parks Planning & Development Manager Al Kopf said that they are exterminating for rats weekly in Pritchard Park, and also investigating other humane options. Also, it was noted that the Asheville Police Department has been reaching out to the organizations who feed the homeless in Pritchard Park to help them identify possible alternative sites.

Downtown Infrastructure Priorities

Downtown Development Specialist Dana Frankel provided an update on the identified priority categories from the Commission's 2016 retreat. Items identified were sidewalks; parking and parking alternatives; South Slope; housing; supporting local businesses; utilities; mixed-use at Haywood Page property; cleanliness and beautification; and connectivity with East End community. She then identified priority projects associated with the top three categories: (1) sidewalks; (2) parking and parking alternatives; and (3) South Slope.

Ms. Frankel then provided a status update on the three priorities as follows: (1) sidewalks (a) Lexington Avenue brick repair/replacement; (b) Broadway Avenue; (c) Haywood Street; and (d) proposed grinding services to remove tripping hazards; (2) parking and parking alternatives (a) trolley or other transportation alternative; (b) south slope parking; (c) improving/replacing aging parking structures; and (3) South Slope (a) place-making/gateway; (b) reconfiguration of Coxe Avenue (complete streets); (c) adding sidewalks where they do not exist; and (d) redesign at Church Street and Banks Avenue.

Other notable projects include (1) median improvements and maintenance (2) increased trash collection in summer/fall; (3) downtown winter lights; (4) trash and recycling bins in south slope; (5) Pritchard Park improvements; (6) sidewalk litter collection and pressure washing; and (7) Downtown Master Plan update - 2017.

Asheville Downtown Association

Mr. Greiner shared with the Commission some activities from the Asheville Downtown Association (ADA): successful holiday parade; ADA looking at assisting or funding the \$13,500 to replace 160 smoking bin locations; waiting for parking study; and upcoming elections. He commended the City staff for the quick turn-around for siting new trash/recycling bins in South Slope.

Downtown Design Review Committee

Vice-Chairman McDonough updated the Commission on the Downtown Design Review Committee's projects which included (1) a revisit with the design team on the proposed hotel at 193 Haywood Street; (2) design of adding two stories to the former Bank of America building across from Pritchard Park at 68 Patton Avenue (which may include a request for air rights to hang their balconies over the sidewalk); (3) apartment project proposed near McCormick Stadium on McCormick Place.

Continued Business

Commission Membership and Nominating Committee

Vice-Chairman McDonough said that the following three seats will be coming open at the end of December, 2016: (1) Ms. Summers (County appointment) is interested in reappointment; (2) Mr. Bebbler (County appointment) said that he would not seek reappointment (but would continue to serve until his successor is appointed) due to his work commitments; however, he felt that an attorney should be appointed to his seat; and (3) the seat for a member of the board of directors of the Asheville Downtown Association (ADA), which ADA will discuss after their January election. It was noted that Chairman Vassallo will continue to serve in the seat until the issue is resolved.

It was the consensus of the Commission to have staff provide the Commission with a matrix of the Commission's current make-up to help inform what skills/representation is needed. That information will be discussed at the January meeting and then staff can share those recommendations with the County. Anyone interested in applying should submit their application to the County Clerk.

Public Comment

Ms. Susan Eggerton explained that due to the amount of building renovation on her property on Coxe Avenue, she must upgrade the existing gravel parking lot to comply with the City's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), which prohibits gravel lots in the Central Business District. Because she wants the gravel parking lot to remain, she will be asking for a variance to

the UDO standard due to (1) her being fundamentally opposed to paving; (2) Asheville talks about being "green" and there is nothing "green" about asphalt; (3) significant water runoff issues on Coxe Avenue (even though the gravel from his lot has not been washed out onto the street); and (4) safety. She did note that a 50 feet portion of the lot closer to Coxe Avenue will be paved and will protect any potential wash of the gravel to the sidewalk, bike lane or street.

There was considerable discussion regarding Ms. Eggerton's request to keep the existing gravel lot gravel. Given that (1) gravel tends to wash out into the roadway, over the sidewalk and into the stormwater system; (2) the UDO specifically states that gravel lots in the Central Business District are prohibited; and (3) there are other materials (other than asphalt), it was the consensus of the Commission not to direct staff to begin an amendment to the UDO.

The Commission advised Ms. Eggerton that in order for a variance to be granted, she must demonstrate the physical hardship of why she cannot comply with the code requirement.

Announcement

Downtown Development Specialist Dana Frankel announced the 2017 Downtown Commission meeting schedule.

Adjournment

At 9:54 a.m., Mr. Greiner moved to adjourn the meeting. This motion was seconded by Mr. Barrager and carried unanimously.