

Downtown Commission Meeting
Minutes of May 12, 2017
8:30 a.m.
1st Floor North Conference Room - City Hall

Present: Chairman Michael McDonough, Presiding; Vice-Chairman Byron Greiner, Mr. Dane Barrager, Ms. Franzi Charen, Councilman Brian Haynes, Ms. Ruth Summers, Ms. Sage Turner, Mr. Tobias Weas and Ms. Pamela Winkler

Absent: Mr. Brent Campbell and Mr. Jimi Rentz

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

Administrative

- Vice-Chairman Greiner moved to approve the minutes of the April 21, 2017, meeting. This motion was seconded by Ms. Summers and carried unanimously.

Updates

Asheville Downtown Association

Mr. Turner updated the Commission on some of the following activities of the Asheville Downtown Association (ADA): Downtown After Five, ADA Host Speakers, Voluntary Social Mixers, Downtown Heroes at the State of Downtown. Next Coffee with a Cop, and Walkable Wall Street.

Haywood Street Temporary Use

Downtown Development Specialist Dana Frankel said that staff is working on planning and implementation of temporary uses for the City-owned sites at 68 Haywood Street and 33 Page Avenue. Temporary uses recommended by the Haywood Street Advisory Team were: mobile food vending, vendor markets, interactive public art, designated performance space, raised garden beds and movable seating.

Following an implementation plan provided to Council, staff is proceeding to prepare the site to be used for temporary uses such as those proposed. An update will be presented to Council on May 23.

Site improvements to be initiated include: clearing gravel from portions of the surface, repairing the concrete, installing electricity, and placing trees and seating on the Haywood Street site. The Page Avenue site is being included as one of four community garden sites in the Office of Sustainability's recently launched Edibles Initiative.

Access and maintenance at the Haywood Street property will be managed by the City's Parks Department. Rules will be consistent with other spaces managed by the Parks Department, including open hours of dawn to dusk and the prohibition of smoking.

Timeline update:

Complete site improvements - summer 2017
Open to public access and programming – summer 2017
Phase I temporary use – one year (through summer 2018)
Phase II temporary uses – two years (through summer 2020)

Their goal is by initiating “Phase I” improvements and accommodating various uses on the site, the community and City can learn more about what works, what doesn’t, what’s needed in terms of further investment or engagement, and how to maximize success of the site both temporarily and for the long term.

Ms. Frankel responded to various questions/comments from the Commission, some being, but are not limited to: approximately how much, and where are the funds coming from, for the Phase I site improvements; how many, and what type trees, are being used; will water be installed on the site; what restrooms will be available; will the fences remain; what improvements will be made in Phase 2; what type of seating arrangements will be made for mobile food truck patrons; suggestion to reposition the fence as a way to soften the pedestrian experience; will the Craft Guild vendors be able to use this space; who will manage programming the space when there is no set programming; and make sure we communicate to stakeholders who have been involved in this process.

Regarding long term use for this property, staff is working on an RFQ for design services to create design options and management practices based on the community advisory team’s recommendations.

Downtown Update Report

Downtown Development Specialist Dana Frankel updated the Commission on the following activities for May, 2017:

Budget Process FY 17/18- The City Manager’s budget was presented at the May 9th Council Meeting. Downtown projects in the Capital Improvements Program include: Thomas Wolfe and US Cellular Center renovations, Asheville Art Museum upgrades, turf replacement program for Pack Square Park, replacement of vaulted sidewalks on Broadway (currently underway), Coxe Avenue feasibility and design (Patton to Southside), S. Lexington Feasibility and Design (Patton to Southside), Greenway Connectors design.

There will be a public hearing on the proposed on May 23rd. Council is scheduled to adopt the budget on June 13th.

Pack Square Park - Both the lawn and Splashville are open.

A Pack Square Park Master Plan is underway, commissioned by the NC Arboretum (with Pack Square Park Conservancy funds). Staff will provide an update on that project and discuss use of downtown parks, including maintenance needs in June. At the suggestion of Vice-Chairman Greiner, Ms. Frankel said that the Parks Department could discuss any considerations for artificial turf for Pack Square Park.

Pritchard Park - Pritchard Park landscape improvements began in April. Programming has and will continue throughout the construction period. The project is slated for completion by the end of July, pending factors such as weather. A new project page is available with updates.

Sidewalk and Street Work

- College Street Sidewalk - The sidewalk is being replaced on the north side of College Street between N. Lexington and Rankin Avenue. Work began on May 1st and will be completed by the end of the month. There will be a new sidewalk, curb and gutters, and approximately 1 foot of additional sidewalk width is being added. The work is being done in 20 ft. sections.

- *Broadway Vaulted Sidewalk* - Work is underway to replace the section of sidewalk on Broadway between Walnut and the alley next to Strada. The section of sidewalk is closed.

When Ms. Turner was advised that some businesses were not notified of the date for street and sidewalk work, Ms. Frankel said that there was an unfortunate miscommunication where the contractor started early. She assured the Commission that businesses were notified as soon as staff was made aware of the change.

Walkable Wall Street - Walkable Wall Street is scheduled for Saturday, May 13th and is being planned in collaboration with Strive Not To Drive. The street will be closed to vehicles from 2 PM to 12 AM. Businesses will offer special promotions and activities in the street, a passport program will be offered and Asheville on Bikes will start and end their Bright Light Biker ride on Wall Street. This is the third in a series of events to test Wall Street as a pedestrian-only street. The goal is to support businesses while promoting walkability, pedestrian safety and place-making.

New Business

Discussion of Design Review Procedures

Urban Planner Sasha Vrtunski provided the Commission information on downtown design review procedures. Said information starts out with the purpose of design review, followed by the role of the Design Review Committee, the process, voting, and some questions that are appropriate or inappropriate to ask during design review.

She outlined the following Downtown design review procedures: (1) Opening of the Item; (2) Staff Report; (3) Design Team Presentation; (4) Design Review Discussion; (5) Public Comment; (6) Pre-Vote; (7) Vote; (8) Follow-up Discussion; and (9) Closing of the Item.

Commission members were very appreciative of Ms. Vrtunski providing this information for them to use as a guide.

Chairman McDonough felt that if the Commission grants a variance request that it be a separate vote and the Commission needs to be clear on why the application deserves to have the variance. Assistant Planning & Urban Design Director Alan Glines said that the Downtown Commission provides the recommendation on the variance, and provides the minutes of the Downtown Commission, prior to moving it forward to the Planning & Zoning Commission and/or City Council.

Regarding public comment, Ms. Turner questioned the allowance of ten minutes for a spokesperson for a group. Chairman McDonough said that they are following Council's public comment rules. They are not bound by them, but it is a good practice.

Vice-Chairman Greiner stressed the need for complete submissions prior to review by the Downtown Commission.

In response to Chairman McDonough, Mr. Glines explained that the applicant has the option of moving forward in the review process with a negative vote by the Commission. However, the applicant can request additional time if they would like to have a positive recommendation moving forward. Most applicants would like to have a favorable recommendation by the Commission.

Old Business

Parking & Transportation Subcommittee - Temporary Use of Unimproved Lots for General Parking

Ms. Tuner briefly updated the Commission on the Parking & Transportation Subcommittee's review of the an amendment to the Unified Development Ordinance regarding temporary uses of unimproved lots for general parking in the Central Business District. At the Commission's April meeting, it was the consensus of the Commission to refer this item back to the Parking & Transportation Subcommittee, with them specifically revisiting the time period for the interim use zoning permit and any extensions; and the maximum allowable area of .25 acres for the lots used for interim general parking.

She said the Subcommittee discussed opportunities for opening up additional monthly spaces or possibly a grant based program that has a point system for prioritizing monthly spaces. The Subcommittee supports a one-year time period for the interim use zoning permit with a one-year renewal process for non-compliant lots. They also discussed the maximum allowable area be limited to .25 acres, and felt a map will be helpful when this is discussed again. They also discussed a parking crawl to consider locations downtown where additional parking could be accommodated. They will return to Downtown Design Review Committee for more guidance on minimum landscaping requirements that should be considered for the allowance of temporary parking on unimproved lots.

The text amendment will return to the full Commission in June, and would then proceed to Planning and Zoning which will be meeting in mid-June.

Public Comment

Mr. Timothy Sadler recommended reaching out to the African American community to invite them to apply for a seat on the Downtown Commission.

Chairman McDonough said that three City appointments to the Downtown Commission will transition off at the end of December, 2017. He encouraged the Commission to reach out to individuals to apply for a seat on the Commission, noting that diversity is what the Commission and City Council look for in appointing members.

Mr. Barrager said that the visitor center at Pack Square Park has little, if any, signage of it being a visitor center and has restrooms. Chairman McDonough said that this Commission has talked about the need for that signage for years, and suggested this be a topic at the next Commission meeting.

Adjournment

At 9:40 a.m., Vice-Chairman Greiner moved to adjourn the meeting. This motion was seconded by Ms. Summers and carried unanimously.