

Downtown Commission Meeting
Minutes of June 9, 2017
8:30 a.m.
1st Floor North Conference Room - City Hall

Present: Chairman Michael McDonough, Presiding; Vice-Chairman Byron Greiner, Mr. Dane Barrager, Mr. Brent Campbell, Ms. Franzi Charen, and Ms. Sage Turner

Absent: Councilman Brian Haynes, Mr. Jimi Rentz, Ms. Ruth Summers, Mr. Tobias Weas and Ms. Pamela Winkler

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

Administrative

It was the consensus of the Commission to approve the minutes of the May 12, 2017, meeting.

Updates

Parks & Recreation Activities in the Central Business District

Assistant Parks & Recreation Director Debbie Ivester updated the Commission on Parks and Recreation activities downtown, including the Pack Square Park Master Plan, noting that the consultants will be making recommendations in the maintenance plan, landscape plan at the Pavilion Area, and the overall management policy plan. One question the consultant will discuss with stakeholders is if they want it to be signature park in an urban setting or an event venue. She updated the Commission on the turf, Splashville, mid-block fountain, replacement of plant material, stage floor and stage steps.

Regarding Pritchard Park, she updated the Commission on the improvements which began in April, 2017. They are about 50% complete and are on track with the tentative completion date of July, 2017.

She then updated the Commission on Grace's Garden; and the three parking garages (Rankin, Wall Street and Civic Center), noting they are primarily landscaping projects.

In Triangle Park, we have a partnership agreement with Just Folks. They produce a series of events during the summer and help us keep the Park clean. In return, the City waives their event fees. In addition, the City will be installing some new benches.

Regarding public art in downtown, we will be bringing back the lighting on the Vance Monument, and install the lighting on the Day Dreamer Mural on Aston Street.

Ms. Ivester responded to various questions/comments from the Commission, some being, but are not limited to: has the Shindig-on-the-Green group been consulted on the stage decking at Pack Square Park; will the Visitor's Center usage be part of the overall Master Plan; will there be signage on the Visitor's Center; will the Master Plan study include how the Visitor's Center will be used; regarding the turf, perhaps we should limit the amount of events on the turf and move the other events to different locations; will we hear a recommendation from the consultants on different turf options; is there an option to just not repair the mid-block fountain; will the Master Plan study process include some long-term financial performance; how old is Splashville; is there any consideration to include the maintenance of the park in the event fees; how long will the status quo be in place regarding the Visitor's Center; when is the Pack Square

Park Master Plan expected to be complete; and until the Visitor's Center can be addressed through the Master Plan, can the Downtown Commission recommend some enlivenments, like graphics on the walls and windows to show the public the building is open.

Asheville Downtown Association

Ms. Turner updated the Commission on some of the following activities of the Asheville Downtown Association: (1) Pritchard Park Summer Series; (2) Downtown After Five; (3) Independence Day Celebration; (4) Annual membership meeting and Heroes Award Ceremony on August 23, 2017; (5) Keep American Beautiful Grant project started to fund the new cigarette butt dispensers; (6) first in the Speaker's Series; (7) Continuing to work with other community groups; and (8) Working on a Position Statement that focuses on the need for affordable, accessible, timely and efficient transportation for workers and employees of downtown.

Design Review Committee

Chairman McDonough said the Design Review Committee met and updated the Commission on their review of the following three projects (1) renovations to 51 North Lexington; (2) building addition to Mt. Zion; and (3) 145 Biltmore Avenue.

Downtown Update Report

While Downtown Development Specialist Dana Frankel updated the Commission on the following activities taking place downtown, she responded to various questions/comments:

Haywood/Page – Short Term Use - Staff is proceeding with implementation of temporary uses for the City-owned sites at 68 Haywood Street and 33 Page Avenue.

Improvements to 68 Haywood Street are underway to accommodate temporary uses. Those improvements include: clearing gravel from portions of the site, repairing the concrete surface, installing electricity and the purchase/placement of trees and vegetation in planters, tables, seating and shade sails. We are currently under budget for these improvements. The site is expected to be open to the public for general access beginning July 1.

A Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) was released on Friday, June 2nd, to seek ideas for temporary programming at the site to take place between August 2017 and August 2018. The RFEI is an initial mechanism for reviewing, selecting and scheduling programs and activities on the site. Once that process has concluded, the site will be made available for special event permitting through the City's existing application process for outdoor special events on public property. The deadline for submissions is June 26.

There was a poll on what to call the site as its being temporarily programmed. There will likely be a naming in the future, which will ultimately be voted on by City Council.

Access and maintenance of the site will be managed by the City's Parks Department. Rules will be consistent with other spaces managed by the Parks Department, including open hours and the prohibition of smoking.

33 Page Avenue is now being managed as a temporary community garden, as part of the Office of Sustainability's recently launched program. An official kick-off for the community gardens program is scheduled for June 10 at the Southside Community Garden.

Haywood/Page – Long Term Use - Staff is drafting a Request for Qualifications for planning/design services to be released later this summer, informed by the community vision developed over the past year. The work of that contract is expected to be completed by late 2018. Any plans would ultimately be adopted by City Council, with implementation to follow.

Budget Process FY 17/18 - The City Manager's budget was presented at the May 9th Council Meeting. A public hearing on the draft budget took place at the May 23 Council Meeting. Council is scheduled to adopt the budget on June 13th.

Comprehensive Plan - A draft of the City's Comprehensive Plan is now available, and community input is sought this month through Open City Hall.

In addition to providing feedback through Open City Hall, Stacy Merten, Project Manager in the City's Planning and Urban Design Department, will present an update to the Downtown Commission at the July 7 meeting. She will also join for Downtown Open Office Hours on Thursday, July 20th (3-5 PM in the Pack Square Park Pavilion).

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 project page is available on the City's website.

Street and Sidewalk Work

College Street Sidewalk - The section of sidewalk on the north side of College Street between N. Lexington and Rankin Avenue was replaced last month. The bricks in disrepair were replaced with stamped concrete (the downtown standard "running bond" scored concrete pattern), historic granite curbing and new gutters. Sidewalk width was extended about 1 foot.

This month, beginning on Monday, June 12, the City's concrete crews will repair the section of sidewalk on the north side of College Street between N. Spruce and N. Market Streets. This section will also feature the running bond pattern, with new historic granite curbing and new cutters. Two trees will be replaced, installed in new (larger) tree pits. Sidewalk width will be extended about 6 inches. The intersection and crosswalk at College Street and N. Market Street will also be improved to meet ADA accessibility standards.

In sections, the sidewalks along College Street are being completed. The section completed by the AC Hotel will be open soon. The section between Rankin and Haywood Street will be next for the City's concrete crew. Once construction on the Arras is completed, the north side of that block will also be replaced, completing the north side of the corridor.

Broadway Vaulted Sidewalk - Work began on April 24 to replace the section of vaulted sidewalk on Broadway between Walnut and the alley next to Strada. The contracted work will be completed by July 24 at the latest, but they are on schedule to complete it sooner.

Ms. Frankel said that she would talk to the Public Works Department about coming to the Design Review Committee before major sidewalk replacements.

Downtown Open Office Hours - On the third Thursday of every month, staff is available at the Pack Square Park Pavilion from 3 – 5 PM to share information, answer questions and discuss ideas about downtown with those interested from the community. On June 15, Cathy Ball, Assistance City Manager, will join Dana Frankel, Downtown Development Specialist.

Lexington Avenue Public Art - Today is the deadline for this initiative, partnered with the Asheville Downtown Association.

Cigarette Butt Bins - The City is replacing all of the cigarette butt bins on all trash and recycling receptacles downtown. **Old Business**

Zoning Amendment to Allow Temporary Use of Unimproved Lots for Parking in the Central Business District

Downtown Development Specialist Dana Frankel said that in response to property owner requests and at the direction of City management, recommendations are being considered to allow vehicular parking on lots with gravel surfaces on a temporary basis in the Central Business District (otherwise prohibited).

This consideration was informed by meetings with the Downtown Commission's Parking and Transportation Subcommittee on April 4th, May 2nd and June 6th as well as meetings with the Downtown Commission's Design Review Committee on April 18 and May 15. It was also discussed at the April 21 and May 12 full Downtown Commission meetings.

Goals identified include:

- Maximize (temporary) utilization of unused downtown property
- Encourage higher and better use of downtown property generally
- Provide opportunities for additional parking, including monthly spaces, while other solutions are being planned and implemented to address current needs
- Provide a mechanism for lots currently non-compliant to be permitted for this use

For consideration is an amendment to Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) Section 7-14-2(e)(2) Interim parking and construction staging. The detailed standards for this use is found in 7-16-1(41) and would be consolidated back to Article 14 for ease of administration.

Existing Ordinance - Vacant parcels may be used on an interim basis for temporary uses such as, but not limited to: construction staging or parking needs related to construction, or temporary uses on a property that has been approved for development but delayed in starting construction.

Permitted uses may include uses such as parking for construction staff, construction staging and equipment storage areas, and employee or business parking where existing parking is displaced due to construction activity, or other uses authorized on a temporary basis by the planning and development director.

Site improvements related to landscaping and paving shall not be required as the lot is being used on an interim basis.

All other local, state and federal regulations shall be complied with including driveway, grading, stormwater, handicap accessibility and sign regulations.

The city engineer will determine if sidewalks will be required during the term of the interim use.

The zoning permit for any such interim use will be valid for a period of two years but may be extended for additional two-year periods in conjunction with a valid, open building permit on the lot or the location of construction.

Amendment for consideration

- Authorize general parking as a permitted use (not necessarily tied to an open building permit) on a temporary basis.
- The initial term for temporary use would be one-year (12 months from the date of permit approval) with a one-year renewal.
- The following would be required:

- a. Must be designed so as to prevent loose stone, aggregate or other materials from leaving the lot.
- b. All driveway aprons, which are defined as that portion of the parking lot entrance which abuts the street, shall consist of concrete, asphalt, or bituminous surface treatment for a length of at least ten lineal feet starting at the street and extending into the driveway.
- c. All driveways with an average grade exceeding five percent shall consist of concrete, asphalt or bituminous surface treatment.
- d. An unimproved surface area greater than 10,000 square feet should be separated from other unimproved areas of the lot with a pervious, vegetative area with a minimum width of 10 feet.
- e. Other improvements for landscaping, paving and ADA standards shall not be required by the City for this interim use, though any state and federal requirements relevant to stormwater and ADA accessibility must be met.

If the Downtown Commission supports approval, staff will proceed with text amendments, which will then be presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission for recommendation (June 22, 2017, meeting) and City Council for final consideration.

One amendment in the current Code recently discovered , but not discussed by the different Commissions and Committees, is that currently if lots are being used temporarily for construction purposes, the language states that "The city engineer will determine if sidewalks will be required during the term of the interim use." This is a discretionary statement and not a best practice. Discretionary language should not be in the Code. Staff recommendation is that the sidewalk requirement is waived for the interim use. If a sidewalk was required, it might mean it's a narrower sidewalk or there wouldn't be street trees or other improvements that would ultimately be good to have when those lots are developed for longer-term use.

Assistant Director of Planning & Urban Design Alan Glines clarified that the Commission should just make a decision on whether sidewalks will or will not be required during the term of the interim use.

Chairman McDonough opened the public hearing at 9:32 a.m., and when no one spoke, he closed the public hearing at 9:32 a.m.

Vice-Chairman Greiner moved to (1) approve the the UDO amendment outlined above, but exclude the language as follows: "The city engineer will determine if sidewalks will be required during the term of the interim use."; and (2) instruct staff to draft language something to the effect that the number of curb-cuts in the driveway apron will match the UDO standards found in the general section of the Code. This motion was seconded by Ms. Turner and carried unanimously.

Parking & Transportation Subcommittee

Ms. Turner said that the Parking & Transportation Subcommittee has met twice and is now trying to formalize the Subcommittee structure to include members of the community. The Subcommittee recommended a representative from the Asheville Independent Restaurants Association (AIR) and a representative from a developer focused in downtown. They recommended Jane Anderson, representative from AIR, and Karen Ramshaw, who works for Public Interests Projects that has downtown development projects. She brought forward those names to the Commission for approval. The Subcommittee also talked about who would chair the Subcommittee and she agreed to be Chair. Their meetings are the first Tuesday of each month at 11:00 a.m.

After discussion, it was the consensus that the the Subcommittee provide the names of people from the community they would like to be on the Subcommittee, up to three, and the Commission would vote on those names.

Vice-Chairman Greiner moved to appoint Jane Anderson and Karen Ramshaw to the Parking & Transportation Subcommittee. This motion was seconded by Ms. Charen and carried unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Greiner acknowledged Ms. Turner as Chair of the Parking & Transportation Subcommittee.

Ms. Turner said the Committee is going to do a parking crawl and she invited any Commission members to join them.

Vice-Chairman Greiner said that they are also encouraging employers that are not allowing parking after-hours on their lots to consider that as a revenue source.

Public Comment

There was a brief discussion, initiated by Ms. Charen, about reactivating the Subcommittee of supporting local business owners.

At the request of Vice-Chairman Greiner, Downtown Development Specialist Dana Frankel said that she would provide the Commission with the construction update of the Mountain Housing Opportunities' project on the Block.

Adjournment

At 9:55 a.m., Vice-Mayor Greiner moved to adjourn the meeting. This motion was seconded by Mr. Barrager and carried unanimously.