

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

Present: Chairman Adrian Vassallo, Presiding; Vice-Chairman Michael McDonough; Mr. Dane Barrager, Mr. Brent Campbell, Mr. Byron Greiner, Mr. Jimi Rentz and Ms. Pamela Winkler

Absent: Mr. Jack Bebber, Ms. Franzi Charen, Councilman Brian Haynes and Ms. Ruth Summers

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

Administrative

- Chairman Vassallo asked for a moment of silence for all the lives lost recently.
- Mr. Barrager moved to approve the minutes of the May 13, 2016, meeting. This motion was seconded by Mr. Greiner and carried unanimously.

Updates

Introduction of Dana Frankel, Downtown Coordinator

Chairman Vassallo was pleased to introduce and welcomed the new Downtown Coordinator Dana Frankel. Ms. Frankel said she was really excited to be here and gave a brief background of her experience.

Asheville Workplace Challenge

Sustainability Technician Haley Mahoney briefed the Commission on the Asheville Workplace Challenge, which is an on-line self assessment tool that gives local businesses ways to save money and reduce their environmental impact. The Challenge is open to all businesses and organizations throughout Western North Carolina. She then explained how businesses can participate.

Wall Street Lighting Project

Sustainability Analyst Kerby Smithson briefed the Commission on the Wall Street Lighting Project. The LED street light replacement began in Fiscal Year 2011 and there was an annual savings of the City of \$500,000/year. We are now looking at the City-owned street lights on Wall Street. He then explained the three different phases: Phase I (the lighting assessment) is currently underway; Phase II is pole structural assessment, wiring testing and design; and Phase III will consist of construction/upgrade. He then provided fixture information, noting there is a wide variety of LED decorative fixtures. He said that he will report back to the Downtown Commission for their input of the decorative fixtures. Other considerations are dark skies, outdoor lighting ordinance, color temperature, pole type, advanced controls capabilities (dimming and color changing), and possibly turning over Wall Street lighting to Duke Energy Progress (explaining the pros and cons of the possible turn-over).

Asheville Downtown Association

Mr. Greiner updated the Commission on the Asheville Downtown Association activities, some being, but are not limited to the 4th of July Celebration (well over 10,000 attendees), Downtown After Five and Oktoberfest. He also reported that the Issues Committee has noted

that there are not as many transients in downtown Asheville. He also noted that tourism in downtown is down.

Chairman Vassallo urged the Commission and the public to view the Julian Price documentary currently showing in some downtown venues. He also updated the Commission on the Lexington Avenue Art Project (with projected installation date in Spring of 2017), and the Urban Trail.

Downtown Design Review Committee

Vice-Chairman McDonough updated the Commission on the following two Downtown Design Review Committee projects: (1) new hotel on College Street; and (2) Microtower for cell service at two downtown locations.

Joint HRC/Downtown Committee on Downtown Design Review Guidelines

Ms. Winkler updated the Commission on the first joint HRC/Downtown Committee. She said that the Committee is looking at ways for new methods to manage growth in downtown for community benefit. They reviewed two ways (1) neighborhood conservation overlay district; and (2) small local historic districts. The consensus of the Committee was to move ahead with the neighborhood conservation overlay district. They also discussed the role of the Downtown Commission and possible ways of increasing their influence on the process. The next step will be to focus on ways to strengthen and define the Design Review Guidelines. Staff has been requested to evaluate all options and bring forward the pros and cons of each option.

Pack Square Update

Director of Planning and Urban Design Todd Okolichany updated the Commission on downtown public space management forum. One result of the well-attended forum is to look at options to increase pedestrian flow and enhance public safety in three high impact areas. Another result from the direction of the City Council Public Safety Committee was to look at the intersection of Biltmore Avenue at Pack Square in terms of relocating benches and increasing the public realm of sidewalk space in order to improve the pedestrian flow in the area.

Haywood Street Visioning Process

Director of Planning and Urban Design Todd Okolichany updated the Commission on the Haywood Street Visioning Process. Asheville Design Center held a workshop series to gather input from the public and stakeholders on what people want to do with the space (not what they want to see there) and will continue to gather feedback. He said that every option is on the table and they look forward to creative input. The Advisory Team also has an upcoming meeting.

New Business

Downtown Coordinator Dana Frankel updated the Commission on an engagement process to consider potential temporary vehicular closures of Wall Street. Direction was given from the Public Safety Committee to gather feedback and look into programming opportunities. Discussions have started internally, with the Police Department, Fire Department, Transportation Department, etc. She will then begin meeting with representatives from stakeholder groups, e.g., Asheville Downtown Association, Asheville Downtown Commission, Busker's Alliance, etc., and then engage with the merchants and property owners along Wall Street. A survey tool will be used. She plans on taking all feedback to the City Council Public Safety Committee in late September with an update on their progress.

Regarding the issue of solutions to address the number of delivery trucks that are blocking streets or crosswalks, taking into account traffic safety and the ability for merchants to get their deliveries, a meeting will be scheduled with appropriate City departments.

The Commission requested an overview at their next meeting on the potential General Obligations Bond referendum currently being considered by City Council, and specifically any bond funds related to downtown.

Public Comment

Urban Planner Sasha Vrtunski invited the Commission to a worksession on infill housing on Thursday, July 14, 2016, at the U.S. Cellular Center.

Adjournment

At 9:30 a.m., Mr. Greiner moved to adjourn the meeting. This motion was seconded by Mr. Rentz and carried unanimously.