

CITY OF COLONIAL HEIGHTS, VIRGINIA

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City of Colonial Heights Minutes of the Meeting of the Economic Development Authority Thursday, October 23, 2015

1. Call to Order

Karen Epps called the meeting to order at 8:35 A.M.

In Attendance:

Mr. Tyler, Mr. Kester, Mr. Blaha, Mrs. Comstock, Mrs. Epps, Mr. Fisher, Mr. Hoogenboom

Absent:

Mr. Wrenn, Mr. Whiting, Mrs. Halbert

2. Determination of Quorum

A quorum was determined.

3. Adoption of Agenda

A motion was made by Mr. Tyler and seconded by Mr. Kester to adopt the agenda as presented with all Economic Development Authority members present in favor.

4. Strategic Plan Discussion – Stakeholder Meetings

Mrs. Epps said she was very pleased with the initial turnout with 36 participants in the first meeting and 25 participants at the second meeting.

At the first meeting, there was a large discussion about education. Participants had little knowledge of programs available at the high school and Technical/Vocational Center. At the second meeting, we had the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent and Principal attend to clarify a few things that were discussed previously. Dr. Cox offered a tour of the High School and Technical Center to bring awareness to the programs they offer to students.

Mrs. Comstock commented that the workforce readiness piece was misunderstood in the meeting between the administrators and the stakeholders.

Mr. Blaha agreed that administrators are relying too heavily on state mandated courses and that the school board needs to have discussion about going above that standard.

Mrs. Epps stated that there is a huge disconnect when the workforce investment board representative is steadily saying that they are looking for specific skillsets and graduates to have soft skills. Employers are looking for graduates that are ready to start work.

Mrs. Epps concluded that the stakeholder meetings were the second phase of the Strategic Plan. She has surveys completed by several citizens. The next step is to have an article broadcast on the website so we can reach more residents with the survey included. She also has a list of points from the discussion of stakeholders as a SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) analysis that will be a portion of the Strategic Plan document and wanted the Authority's feedback on additions/deletions.

Mrs. Epps continued the discussion of the city not marketing itself to the younger generation through festivals/events due to some form of a Blue Law. An ordinance prohibits the sale of alcohol on Saturday nights after midnight, which limits our restaurants when there is a sporting event or other televised event.

Mr. Fisher stated that City Council voted against changing the law 2-3 years ago. He also confirmed that alcohol was prohibited on city owned property.

Mrs. Epps commented that a prime example is the Kiwanis Shrimp Feast holding their event outside of the city. We are missing an opportunity for people to see the city as a great place to visit, to shop, and to live. These types of events create a strong sense of community and right now, we do not have many things to bring people together. There are ways to control the nuisances that festivals and events would bring to the city and the police chief was in favor of it.

Mrs. Epps continued by saying that in the Capital region, there are educational marketing plans that assemble fact sheets and broadcast them to the business community and their partners. Advisory committees pumped with information about the schools go back out in to the community and they were able to explain the school districts' credentials. Colonial Heights has a very high graduation rate and very low drop-out rate, second in both categories to Hanover County. We need to get the word out about our great school system because in turn, other localities are profiting from new residents skipping over Colonial Heights because of the lack of this type of information available here.

Mr. Blaha was curious about Colonial Heights having information areas that tell residents about the city.

Mrs. Epps informed the authority that the department was working on a restaurant brochure that we will advertise at the local hotels. We want to target and focus on local restaurants. As a member of the Petersburg Area regional Tourism group, we will promote these dining options to them and surrounding counties.

Mr. Kester was interested if we were tapping into resources like Trip Advisor or Yelp to offer smaller restaurants similar services. The smaller restaurants aren't great at using location services and it's important to help them use those tools.

Mr. Tyler suggested that fliers are somewhat old-school. In attracting millennials, we need to market using digital tools.

Mr. Fisher said that one disadvantage we have is from an aesthetic standpoint. The school system's infrastructure is very aged and there is little from a curb-appeal position that is positive for the City. Tussing is the most recent school built in 1975 and a reality is the school board has not been able to add new science labs because they are waiting for proceeds from the Kroger development.

Mr. Tyler said that the City has not been aggressive enough with our money. There are multiple schools that have invested in the physical improvement of their schools, such as Harrisonburg High School.

Mrs. Comstock also pointed out that Dinwiddie High School and Colonial Heights High School were designed by the same architect with a similar layout. They have completely redone Dinwiddie and that contrast is a prime example.

Mr. Fisher stated that during the School Board budget hearings in every other jurisdiction, there is a huge turnout. In Colonial Heights, there is very little to no discussion about passing budget items in City Council meetings.

Mrs. Epps sees the memorandum of understanding between school board and the City differentiates us. No one is held accountable for anything that is done in the school system with the budget. Normally, the superintendent meets with the City/County administrator to talk about expanding or shrinking areas in the school's budget. Residents get involved that way in other localities when those changes are presented to the board of supervisors.

Mr. Fisher says state law limits local government prescribing a certain amount of money to the school board, but cannot micromanage. That is the school board's responsibility. The school board receives 50.7% of City budget due to memorandum of understanding.

Mr. Tyler says that there is some budget overlap with Parks & Recreation as well, so they are receiving more money.

Mrs. Epps asked for additional comment on the SWOT analysis.

Mr. Hoogenboom stated that festivals/events that we are talking about could be held during the day, so we could avoid the Blue Law issue for the time being. Although we cannot hold these events on city property currently, we could consider holding some events in partnership with large private land owners, like the Southpark Parking lot.

Mrs. Epps described a possible Food Truck competition and to have vendors in certain area to bring the community together. There is the Fort Clifton festival and the Christmas parade, but they do not draw a younger crowd.

Mr. Tyler asked if we wanted to host a festival, where would we put it.

Mrs. Epps said that Roslyn Park and the boat landing are great places to hold a festival. There was a complaint that holding something at White Bank Park would cause a lot of traffic on Conduit Road.

Mrs. Comstock was interested in why regionalism was a strength of ours. Mrs. Epps stated that she participates with the Virginia Gateway Region.

Mr. Tyler was curious why the Virginia Gateway Region office was physically located in Colonial Heights if they weren't currently working on any projects in the City.

Mrs. Epps stated that because we are so retail-oriented, those developers do their due diligence prior to contacting the Economic Development director in the City directly. The Gateway Region works on advanced manufacturing, logistics and corporate headquarters and we do not have the land to accommodate those kinds of projects.

Mr. Tyler suggested that we need to work on mixed use properties and building upwards. The property on the Boulevard on the south end across from Cal's, there are topographical challenges, but has the opportunity to go up 4-5 stories.

Mrs. Comstock stated that a redevelopment of the Pickwick shopping center would incorporate some mixed use practices. She said that it is the only downtown area that we have in the City.

Mr. Tyler redacted that the area is all individual owners and that it would be difficult to assemble that area into one redevelopment. He commented on apartments at the corner of Brame Avenue and Cedar Avenue that are renting for \$1,100/month and have updated interiors. The city can

compete with surrounding areas with that type of unit at that price point. Citizens have to visualize the model to agree with it.

Mrs. Epps continued by saying that the trolley adds a community feel to Colonial Heights. It connects the City of Petersburg and gives the area a different feel. It seems like Petersburg is willing to work with us and there is a lot of inherent value in the program. There may be additional trolleys added to the system.

Mr. Tyler said that he has seen the trolley on Temple Avenue and as far as Buffalo Wild Wings, which is a hotspot on Sundays. He said that we need another restaurant that can compete with it when it comes to watching sporting events.

It was discussed that "dilapidated rental property" was changed to "dilapidated property" as there are multiple examples of this throughout the city. "Fort Lee downsizing" was also added to a possible threat to the city.

Mr. Tyler stated that he met with Kirk Cox regarding the multi-modal station and creating a political entity to support it. It was mentioned that the EDA would write a petition in support of the Boulevard location. Mrs. Epps stated that this is the most cost effective site.

5. Old Business
None

6. New Business

Mrs. Epps will reach out to Chairman Wrenn about his status with the EDA. The organizational meeting will be held the fourth Thursday of January.

Mr. Tyler asked if we should have a slogan to represent what we are attempting to do as a group. He is interested in whether the Authority can facilitate development contracts. Mrs. Epps confirmed that public-private partnerships can do this and we would be a part of that.

Mr. Tyler asked if the Authority could write a letter in support of the multi-modal station as well as broadcasting a statement of our support. Mrs. Epps alluded to the idea of writing a resolution to put before Council.

7. Adjourn

A motion was made by Mrs. Comstock and seconded by Mr. Kester to adjourn at 9:41 A.M.