

MINUTES

COUNCIL DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE

Thursday, October 21, 2021 - 3:00 PM

City Hall Council Chambers

Members Present: Maureen Copelof, Chair, Council Member
Gary Daniel, Vice Chair, Council Member
Jim Fatland, City Manager
Paul Ray, Planning Director
Nicole Bentley, Heart of Brevard Executive Director (left at 10:05 am)
Billy Parrish, Heart of Brevard Representative
Dee Dee Perkins, Citizen Member
Susan Threlkel, Council Appointed At-Large Member

Staff Present: David Lutz, Public Works Director
Denise Hodsdon, Executive Assistant

Guests: Mark Burrows, Blue Zones Project

Media: Jeremiah Reed, *The Transylvania Times*

A. Welcome & Call to Order

Committee Chair Maureen Copelof welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM.

B. Certification of Quorum

Quorum was certified by Executive Assistant Denise Hodsdon.

Ms. Copelof presented Certificates of Appreciation to outgoing Committee members Susan Threlkel and Dee Dee Perkins in recognition of their 6+ years of dedicated service on the Downtown Master Plan Committee. The Committee enjoyed refreshments compliments of the Heart of Brevard.

C. Approval of Agenda

Ms. Threlkel added an item to report on the meeting with Rebecca Suddeth re Clemson Plaza history. Motion by Ms. Bentley, seconded by Mr. Daniel to approve the agenda as amended. The motion carried unanimously.

D. Approval of Minutes of October 14, 2021 Meeting

Motion by Mr. Daniel, seconded by Ms. Threlkel to approve the minutes of the October 14, 2021 meeting as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

E. Update re Tree Wells

Ms. Bentley said she has done some extensive research on best practices for tree wells. She has also met with John Wayne to talk about a good plan for our trees downtown. Public Works did put in some smooth river rock at the trees in front of the old Transylvania Times building. John Wayne agreed that those look great and that's a good practice as it feels natural and allows for water and fertilizer.

Other things that are being used in downtown are porous recycled rubber that looks like brick chips and is really absorbent so they are not as easily washed away with stormwater. There is something called flexi-pave, which looks like concrete but is very flexible and porous and allows for the tree to grow each year and has a lifespan of about 8 to 10 years, depending on the type of tree. Another option would be to go with a metal grate. Ms. Bentley feels this would be the most attractive option, as well as it helps balance any issues we have with stormwater. Mr. Ray said he liked the idea of the grates because it allows pedestrians to be able to walk across it easier and widen our usable space. Mr. Parrish added that the grates would be a solution to prevent the random planting that we have in the tree wells right now with various stages of maintenance.

Ms. Bentley said with all of these options being more of an investment than we want to make right now, it was John Wayne's recommendation that we should definitely wait to see what happens with the RAISE grant in terms of investing in all of downtown. Ms. Copelof noted that we should hear about the RAISE grant in mid-November, which is only a month away. If we don't get it, we come up with a plan on what we can do budget-wise to get some uniformity in our tree wells and it sounds like we've got some good options for materials. Ms. Bentley will research the cost of the various options and report back to the committee.

Mr. Lutz explained that what we are calling a tree well is not a true well. It is just a hole with a tree in it. In front the Transylvania Times building is where we put in the Silva Cell system, which makes it more porous and allows the roots to stay down vs. to come to the top. Ms. Bentley said that John Wayne was quite pleased by the health of those trees and the way they look, so the investment in the cells is a wise decision in terms of moving forward with new planting.

F. Update re Wayfinding Signs on Signal Boxes

Mr. Ray reported that we have received approval from the State's Arts in the Public Right of Way Commission and we have received an encroachment permit from NCDOT, which was a separate process.

Ms. Bentley reported that Signs and More provided us with a basic design for all of the boxes but we did take it to our designer who helped work on the map for this project and she is working on incorporating all of the changes. We are hopeful that we will have all of her changes back by next week and as soon as those are good to go, we will need to meet with Clark Lovelace and sign off on those. She thinks that by the first week in November, we'll be able to send these out to Signs and More to print. Mr. Ray added that every map will be different, but they won't have the names of businesses on them as NCDOT say that as advertising. He hopes that all the signs will be installed by early winter.

G. Plan for Pedestrian Count on Main Street

Mr. Ray reported that Melanie Spreen is helping to coordinate the pedestrian count and has reached out to the Blue Zones group and Mark Burrows has offered his services with that group. He is pulling together volunteers to mobilize them this Saturday out on Main Street. The exact hours is still being worked out, but it will be somewhere around 7am to 7pm with 2-hour shifts. The counting will take place at the mid-blocks and we will need 4 people per shift for a total of 24 shifts.

Mark Burrows said he is working with Dan Burden with Blue Zones, LLC to provide examples and input as to what other states and communities are doing. They are trying to show NCDOT that having a count really isn't needed and that this is something that is standard practice and would actually be really good for the community. Mr. Ray said he has talked with Melanie Spreen and in this case, after we do our major count on Saturday, she is going to follow up with some spot counts during the week, like only 2-hour blocks to be able to further supplement and strengthen our application. We won't need to mobilize a lot of volunteers for that.

H. Financial Report

Mr. Fatland reviewed the Downtown Master Plan Project Fund's financial report for the period of July 1 to September 30, 2021 (copy attached). He noted that the Council had approved increasing the transfer from the General Fund from \$180,000 to \$208,000.

He reported that City Council did approve the recommendation to take down the Clemson Plaza sign. He noted that the cost of the sign is already included in the contract amount and with the additional amount to take it down, and if that were to delay any of their subcontractors doing their work, there could be additional costs. He suggests charging that additional cost, since it wasn't in the original budget, to the streetscape design line item and bring back that cost to this committee once we get it. He asked if the committee was okay with that.

Following discussion, motion by Ms. Copelof, seconded by Mr. Daniel to authorize the City Manager to execute purchase orders up to \$8,000 to be charged against the streetscape design line item, for removal and storage of the sign and repair of the building. The motion carried unanimously.

I. Report of Meeting with Rebecca Suddeth re Clemson Plaza

Mr. Parrish reported that he and Ms. Threlkel met with Rebecca Suddeth yesterday. Following the meeting he and Ms. Threlkel came up with a list of recommendations and there are some decisions we need to make. He said there are two directions to take on the interpretation of the Clemson site: 1) we either just barrel ahead with whatever we think we have decided over the last many years and hope for the best; or 2) we take a moment and make sure that how we're interpreting that site is clear and something we can all stand behind. Mr. Parrish said their recommendation today is that we actually hit the pause button, not on the hardscape or the work that is already underway, but specifically how that site is interpreted until this committee makes a clear decision on that interpretation. He said that if we really want to ensure that we are interpreting it in a way that really resonates with the African American community, then we're going to have to take time to make sure we're doing that and it will take 6 to 8 months in terms of process. Ms. Threlkel added that there are two reasons that this process will take that long. The first being that it is important for them to understand the format under which they are working – what are the limitations; where can they express themselves; where can they not; do they have the whole park to use or just a section? She said we need to figure out what the parameters are before we go and ask. The second is deciding who should be part of the process and Rebecca will help with that. Mr. Parrish said if the committee chooses to engage the African American community, then we are going to try to work up a process recommendation and bring it back to the committee, hopefully at the next meeting.

Following discussion, motion by Mr. Parrish, seconded by Mr. Ray to continue with the hardscape project currently underway and to engage membership and leadership from the African American community to assist this committee in developing the interpretive plan for the Clemson Theater site, with a process recommendation coming to this committee at the next meeting. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Daniel will work on the process recommendation with Mr. Parrish, and Ms. Threlkel will help in an Ex-Officio capacity.

Closing Remarks of Susan Threlkel and Dee Dee Perkins:

Ms. Threlkel said she has had a huge interest in history since she moved here and she knows that every space downtown has a history. Some are much more significant than others, but they have a story to tell and she thinks we are missing the boat in lots of ways. She said Clemson can be an example of how to do that on a bigger scale maybe than we're talking about in the middle of town, but I do believe there are many places and many ways that we could explore to tell the story of what happened downtown.

She said she hopes that we continue to work to meet the tree standards that we talked about before. The ordinance is a step in the right direction but it is not everything. She suggests that we create an urban forestry manual, or take the one we did before and update it. That would tell you when to fertilize and trim, etc., based on the types of

plants you have and the area of the city that you have them. Downtown should be the core and you end up with 5 distinct areas: east, west, north, south and downtown. You treat each of those areas in a rotating way. She thinks that would meet the standard about having an organized approach to taking care of the trees and hopefully that will still come under a Community Appearance Commission, if that ever happens, to be the tree board that they say you need to have.

She encouraged demonstration of a bigger concern for maintenance of the sculptures, for example they are supposed to be oiled every year. She wonders what is going to happen to the butterflies currently in Clemson Plaza and the ravens in Times Arcade Alley. She also feels it is time to have the sculptures reappraised.

She noted that in the earlier days of this committee it was all about getting people to downtown. It was pointed out to us that the corridor was actually your first impression in your gateway and that led to signage. That's when we named this committee Gateways, Corridors and Downtown and when we did Focus 2020 we divided that focus group in half and half worked on downtown and half worked on corridors. We kept trying to make the corridors more important and now that you're getting a number of roundabouts between here and Pisgah Forest, there is some aesthetics and all sorts of stuff that needs to be dealt with on the roundabouts.

Lastly, she believes we should start putting an emphasis on climate change, other than what City Council is already doing. As we look at the Downtown Master Plan, what can we do within that plan that addresses climate change? Is it as simple as getting the dark sky approved type of lightbulbs? They are little things, but there are some other areas where we might be able to address that.

Ms. Perkins said it has been a pleasure to serve on this committee and be part of a large vision for our downtown as well as an impact on the community as a whole. She said I have enjoyed serving with all of you in many different ways on many different projects.

Ms. Perkins said so much weight has been placed on getting the RAISE grant and every single day I know we all are hopeful that the word comes that the City of Brevard is awarded that grant. However, if we don't get the grant, I also want to speak to how we can use those dollars that Council agreed to have designated for downtown. The beauty that happened was when we didn't have funding to do the entire downtown master plan, we looked at it and said what small components can be pulled out of that plan and try to push that forward. One of the most important components was the signage program and we presented to Council at that time the value of having a wayfinding program in our community. That wayfinding program had phases and we decided to focus on Phase 2, which was the parking signs and close-in signs. As we did our assessment through downtown this past winter, one of the elements that came out of that is that the condition of some of those wayfinding signs now are not so great. Some of those 2-hour parking signs are starting to peel and some are fading. It is an ongoing program and to make sure that while we have a wayfinding system that we keep it updated and fresh and fix some of those elements. One of the key components that we

identified was Phase 1, which are the gateways and entry signs that come into our community. With the roundabout that is coming into Pisgah Forest, I know that that has been talked about as part of that roundabout, but there are still other gateways into our downtown, which is coming in from Rosman and coming up from South Carolina. I would like for this committee to continue to be mindful that that project which was started 10 or 12 years ago still needs to be completed.

She noted that Clemson Plaza was also part of that Downtown Master Plan where we took a pocket and said we can't do it all, so let's pick and choose what are those priorities.

Regarding the sculptures, Ms. Perkins said that while the Tourism Board has done a brochure on the sculptures, she suggests making an interactive website so that people can create their own walking tours. It could be the same tour, but could be crafted to be placed into different interactive options for those people who prefer to use their phone. She said those sculptures have a great value to the City and people see the sculptures, but I don't think they really appreciate how many we have, how valuable they are and what the stories are behind each of those. She recommended that this committee ask the Transylvania Tourism Board to consider a future grant for this type project.

Lastly, Ms. Perkins said if by chance, we don't get the RAISE Grant, we have tree wells that have been bricked over and that continues to be a concern for me. She would like everyone to be mindful that we talked about those bricked over places being temporary and not permanent. But as people move off of committees, people forget those earlier decisions that have been made and she just wants to say that trees are important for what they provide in so many ways as an enhancement for downtown and the community. We need to make sure we are planting those trees back.

J. Set Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council Downtown Master Plan Committee will be on Thursday, November 4, 2021 at 9:00 AM in the Council Chambers at City Hall.

K. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:18 PM.

Minutes Approved - November 18, 2021

X Maureen Copelof
Maureen Copelof
Chair, Council Member

X Denise Hodsdon
Denise Hodsdon
Executive Assistant

