

MINUTES
CITY-COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
VIRTUAL WORK SESSION
April 22, 2021
4:30 P.M.

MEMBERS PRESENT: George Bryan, Melynda Dunigan, Clarence Lambe, Chris Leak,
Mo McRae, Brenda Smith, Jack Steelman
MEMBERS ABSENT: Jason Grubbs
PRESIDING: Chris Leak

I. DOWNTOWN WINSTON-SALEM DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Jason Thiel, President of the Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership, updated the Planning Board on new construction projects that have begun around the city, such as on Fourth Street and in Innovation Quarter, as well as new businesses that have recently opened. There has been apartment growth throughout the city, and viable storefront space has increased. Jason added that vacant buildings around the city need massive infrastructure to rebuild, and that it takes four to five years to recuperate that money. Bars, breweries, and restaurants around the city that were previously closed due to the pandemic are now experiencing a rapid increase in visitors, and Jason also spoke about the reopening of Salem Parkway/U.S. 421 (formerly Business 40).

Jason discussed a new *Downtown Plan* for 2023, which should be a collaboration of many different groups. He outlined the scope of the plan and asked for staff's support and involvement in the planning process. Aaron King added that our Work Program includes allocated time for staff to participate in the *Downtown Plan*.

Chris Leak commented that he receives a lot of questions about the changing face of Downtown and the affordability of living downtown, and he asked Jason if rental rates and affordability are a focus of the Partnership. Jason responded by stating that affordable housing is very much an issue and that part of the concerns over housing costs are related to design and materials. He felt everyone should have the opportunity to be downtown, if they choose, no matter their income level. He gave several examples of projects that required inclusion of workforce housing units and discussed expansion of the homeless shelter. Jason further stated that the *Downtown Plan* could better identify some goals that could encourage Downtown affordability.

George Bryan shared his excitement about the Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership incorporating West End in the next *Downtown Plan*, and he stated that he will continue to push Winston-Salem to work on Downtown affordability. George also mentioned his concerns about the status of Merschel Park. Jason explained some of the cost factors contributing to the delay of Merschel Park, noting that we should be seeing acceleration of the project within the next year.

Mo McRae asked Jason if there were any efforts on the Downtown front to get a grocery store in the area. Jason indicated that they are reaching out to grocery store owners, and he explained the different aspects of how the grocery market determines where stores are located. Mark Owens, the President of Greater Winston-Salem, Inc., echoed what Jason

shared and added that there have been two grocery stores that have explored sites in the Downtown area, and that interest remains.

II. FORSYTH COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Mark Owens shared rental market comparison data to give the Planning Board and staff an idea of what Winston-Salem's rental market shows in comparison with other cities; he then explained the goals laid out in the *Strategic Plan* for 2030. Mark spoke at length about recruiting industries and his organization's rate of success.

Mark showed the Planning Board sites that are under consideration for new development or that could provide opportunities for new development. He emphasized the importance of speed to market and how it makes our community more competitive.

Chris Leak asked Mark for his professional opinion of what the three main attractions are to Winston-Salem. Mark answered that those attractions are geography, big-city amenities with small town charm (without sacrificing quality of life), and access to talent. He also spoke about sewer being crucial to development opportunities and explained how his team has been working with the Utilities Commission to study the sewer infrastructure throughout the community.

Melynda Dunigan asked Mark what he sees as the biggest challenges to recruitment. Mark answered that the number one challenge is the perception that Winston-Salem does not have talent. He gave examples utilizing different industries and their supposed matches in North Carolina.

Clarence Lambe asked whether most of Mark's inbound calls were related to manufacturing, industrial buildings, or transportation. Mark stated that during the pandemic, distribution and logistics were popular. Industries are leaning towards manufacturing again, a few on the RND side, as well as lab space. Office has been a part of that trend, but not as much as the industrial sector.

Brenda Smith asked Mark if there were key factors in the speed to market that make Winston-Salem better than other communities and whether those could be improved. Mark commented on how our community is beating other communities in getting permits out in a timely manner. He noted that being able to meet with Aaron and his staff to walk through process is critical. Brenda asked if permitting fees are reasonable compared to other communities. Mark responded that he has never heard of permitting costs being a factor in the permitting process in Forsyth County; however, expediting fees have been discussed as a part of getting buildings off the ground more quickly.

III. DEBRIEFING PUBLIC HEARING MEETING OF APRIL 8th

Chris Leak stated that he received a lot of compliments about the last meeting and thanked everyone for the flow of the meeting and the spirited conversation.

Melynda commented that GMA5 needs to be more carefully considered when preparing the next comprehensive plan. Aaron stated that he believes the GMA5 conversation will

be front and center for the next plan, where the availability of utilities actually matches with the large vacant pieces of land that are available.

IV. STAFF REPORT

UDO-CC8 (Cottage Courts) came back for a second reading at City Council and was approved by a vote of 5-3.

The Community Development, Housing and General Government Committee has asked staff to prepare a report on best practices for accessory dwelling units, after which the Committee directed staff to draft a text amendment for accessory dwelling units. That item will be on the next Work Program. The committee also directed staff to draft a text amendment dealing with the sign ordinance, which will be coming to the Board before the accessory dwelling units amendment.

The department has started a college outreach program to increase awareness about the planning profession. Aaron and Samuel Hunter had an opportunity to speak at East Carolina's graduation in April and will be going to other campuses this fall. Aaron stated that it is possible that Planning and Development Services will be able to include paid internships in future budgets, which could open doors into planning and local government.

V. FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER