

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
February 13, 2018

The following are the minutes of the Growth & Redevelopment Committee meeting, which was held on Tuesday, February 13, 2018 at 6:36 p.m. in the Lawrence Township Municipal Building, Lower Level Conference Room.

Statement of Adequate Notice:

Adequate notice of the regular meeting of the Lawrence Township Growth & Redevelopment Committee has been provided by filing an annual meeting schedule with the Municipal Clerk and by filing the agenda with the Municipal Clerk, posting prominently in the Municipal Building and mailing to the Trenton Times and the Trentonian.

Roll Call:

Present: Frank Comstock
Lovette Love-Stevens
John Conroy
Robert Pluta
Joan Brame
Maria Connolly
Teresita Bastides-Heron
Peter Ferrone
Nina Reeder
Melissa Clark

Absent: None

Excused Absence: Charles Lavine
Tushar Patel
Susan Snook, Secretary

Also Present: Andrew Link, Liaison
Christopher Bobbitt, Council Liaison

Welcome of New Member:

The Committee members introduced themselves stating their profession and where they reside in the Township.

Election of Officers:

Mr. Link opened the floor to nominations for Chairperson. Peter Ferrone nominated John Conroy for Chairperson and seconded by Maria Connolly. Nominations were closed and approved per unanimous vote.

John Conroy nominated Maria Connolly for Vice Chairperson and seconded by Joan Brame. Nominations were closed and approved per unanimous vote.

Minutes:

The December 12, 2017 minutes were unanimously approved.

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Public Comment:

Ms. Connolly stated that Max Ramos stepped down from the school board and need another school liaison. Mayor Bobbitt commented that the school will have to do that and Ms. Connolly asked how we do that, by reaching out to them. Chairperson Conroy asked Mr. Link to send him the contact person for the School Board.

Committee Goals:

Mayor Bobbitt asked what happened with the signage research and stated Ms. Connolly did a presentation. Ms. Connolly stated she met with Mr. Parvesse and Mr. Krawczun and made one change to the ordinance. Ms. Connolly stated she made other types of recommendations and she is not aware if the changes have been made. Mayor Bobbitt stated from the last conversation with Mr. Parvesse, who is the Township Engineer and Planning Division, he has not said anything.

It was with regard to lawn signs, A-frames signs in Eldridge Park and the Shopping Center. Chairperson Conroy comments stated the A-frames was squashed. The committee felt pretty strongly about that because it could help businesses. This is something we should look at again and advising Council. Ms. Connolly stated there was a technical issue with the Ordinance, it was confusing when you read it so the recommendation was made to Mr. Parvesse and Mr. Krawczun, and they both agreed that was a mistake in the ordinance; and not sure if it was ever fixed.

The A-frame and temporary signs allowing a bigger sign during sales were the other issues. Chairperson Conroy asked Ms. Connolly to reach out to Mr. Parvesse to see if they amended the one issue and to revisit the A-frame signs. Ms. Brame thought we made specific recommendations and Ms. Connolly stated they were not accepted. Mayor Bobbitt stated let the Committee look at it again and see what happens; he continued that it was not about signs on buildings, it was the gray temporary area where businesses wanted to put a sign at the Shopping Center. Ms. Connolly stated they were temporary signs. Chairperson Conroy stated we would like to see the temporary A-frame signs that you must take in every night and it included sizes.

Mr. Pluta asked if there was a way to make a tax abatement program to attract businesses into the Township, where you get a discount on property taxes, from Texas Avenue to the Brunswick Circle. Mayor Bobbitt stated it is tricky because you are taking away revenue so you have to balance that in our budget and not sure, but he thinks the property owners are still paying the taxes. Mayor Bobbitt continued that there has been talk about a redevelopment area extending it to the Shopping Center and trying to help to allow for different things that the Township can do. It is difficult if you are going to take away the revenue from taxes on one hand and have to make it up somewhere else. Mayor Bobbitt suggested maybe the Committee could look into tax abatement and how pilots work, and how redevelopment area could happen.

Ms. Connolly stated she believes this is the only way a tax abatement or pilot works if you are in a redevelopment area. Mayor Bobbitt stated the redevelopment area was from the circle to Whitehead Road. Chairperson Conroy stated it included the Quik Check. It started at Whitehead Road at the junction of Route 1 all the way up to where the new circle is and to the Brunswick Circle and went up to McDonald's and where Quik Check is. Ms. Brame stated maybe a goal for this year will be to focus on discussion, not just tax abatement, but to attract new businesses to the Township. Mr. Ferrone stated some of the problems are parking and access to get there and certain locations are not conducive for that. Ms. Brame stated there is going to be a major face lift for the exterior at the Shopping Center.

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Ms. Connolly stated a tax program for residents who shop local and get a discount; maybe we could try it, which is a reduction in your property taxes. Mayor Bobbitt stated he will look into it and not a guarantee it will happen and asked Ms. Connolly to research it. Ms. Clark made a suggestion on inviting guest speakers and invite some of the businesses and bring some food. Ms. Love-Stevens stated in the past we did go around to different businesses that hosted us and asked us questions, which was a pretty good program. Ms. Connolly stated that each member should bring a suggestion where we should go. Ms. Brame stated that might not be worth the time and effort because we have enough trouble getting us all here. Pastor Reeder asked what the goal to going to different businesses is. Chairperson Conroy answered you would get to know that business and what their needs might be. Mr. Ferrone stated we should have a business community day for businesses that want to get involved and participating. Ms. Brame wanted to know what the benefit, just to know the business is. Ms. Connolly stated maybe we would find out what they would like to see any changes, what would benefit them or how we can help them. Ms. Brame suggested inviting the businesses here.

Chairperson Conroy suggested using Facebook and doing a business day forum. Pastor Reeder stated a goal would be coming up with a better communication system for a way to reach out to people. The committee discussed ways for the members to use their Facebook page to reach out to businesses. Mr. Ferrone stated we also discussed about getting internships from the high school or Rider University and having a meeting at one of the schools to use them as a resource. Ms. Bastides-Heron stated you need to supervise them and only during the school year. Mayor Bobbitt stated you can't give them credit or pay them, so they are not interested. Chairperson Conroy stated what we are looking for is better communication with the community and would be the first sub-committee and for signage. Once we find a better way to communicate then we can invite them here to hear the plus and minuses of doing business in Lawrence.

Chairperson Conroy suggested enclosing a card in the tax bill stating there is a Growth & Redevelopment Committee stating when we meet and what our goal is. Pastor Reeder stated unfortunately no one reads anything more, it is all done through the computer.

Securing Sponsors for the 2019 Awards Program:

Chairperson Conroy stated one of the major things we do every year is an awards breakfast and we look for a series of seven to eight awards and it is one of the best ways we can promote new businesses in Town, existing businesses that are growing. It is done with the Mid-Jersey Chamber and it is the most successful thing we have been doing and have been doing it for 20 years. We used to do it all ourselves and the Chamber got involved and then the Chamber did it all and now we have a nice mix about it and we are doing a part of it and the Chamber is doing a part of it. We brought back last year was individual sponsorships for the awards. They are \$300 and \$350 and that means we have seven awards and fourteen businesses go up because the sponsor goes up and the business receiving the award goes up to speak.

We found out that one of the things that is difficult is to get sponsors. We should start to look for people to sponsor our awards now and start with the existing sponsors we had. If you sponsor now there is a discount for sponsoring now, if you wait, it is more expensive. The Chamber does not insist on every business being a chamber member. So if the committee members can start reaching out to the businesses to be sponsors. The amounts will be kept at \$300 (all others) and \$350 (Mayor's Award); however, if you pay before July or August it will be \$300 and after it will be \$350 or \$400. Last year it was held at Brio and a couple of times at Green Acres; Rider University; Collaboration Core and Boys & Girls Club. We try to rotate it around town and businesses as well.

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It is all about Lawrence, really good way to get Lawrence's businesses together. Ms. Love-Stevens asked about the cost of bowl and the sponsorship. Mr. Link stated the bowl is \$85.00 and that name plate which is another \$10.00. Ms. Love-Stevens stated we do not have it in our budget. Chairperson Conroy asked if we could use it for our slush fund budget. Mr. Link stated that anything extra does not go into this committee's budget instead it goes into the general account. Mr. Link stated the cost of the sponsorship goes to the cost of us sponsoring people to attend and the event.

The cost per person is \$25.00 and sponsors get free tickets. Chairperson Conroy will reach out to the Chamber to get a copy of the list. The business who won ask them if they would like to be a sponsor and reach out to the previous sponsors. Chairperson Conroy and Mr. Link will work on the wording to send out to the businesses to ask for sponsorships. Chairperson Conroy explained to the new members how the winners are selected; who submits in a nominee; when the awards ceremony is held.

Chairperson Conroy stated we are going to have to discuss a venue and usually have at least 100 people. We will also have to discuss having a speaker. Pastor Reeder asked what type of facility we will be looking for. Chairperson Conroy stated a larger restaurant such as Green Acres or Rider University. It is a local event and been very successful in getting businesses promoted for a reasonable cost. Mr. Pluta stated he tries to be very generous, but you have a limited budget.

Other Business:

None

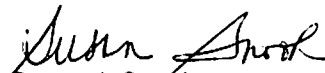
Adjournment:

Chairperson Conroy thanked the new members for volunteering their time.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

Digital audio file of this meeting is available upon request.

Respectfully submitted,


Susan J. Snook
Recording Secretary

Minutes approved: March 13, 2018