

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

May 8, 2018

The following are the minutes of the Growth & Redevelopment Committee meeting, which was held on Tuesday, May 8, 2018 at 6:41 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
Tushar Patel
Charles Lavine
John Conroy, Chairperson
Robert Pluta (7:03 p.m.)
Joan Brame
Maria Connolly
Peter Ferrone
Melissa Clark (7:24 p.m.)
Christopher LaFlamme

Absent: None

Excused Absence: Lovette Love-Stevens
Teresita Bastides-Heron
Brian Vaughn
Nina Reeder
Andrew J. Frank
Ryan Kennedy

Also Present: Christopher Bobbitt, Council Liaison
Andrew Link, Liaison
Susan Snook, Secretary

Minutes:

The April 10, 2018 minutes were unanimously approved.

Public Comment:

None

Securing Awards Program Sponsors and A Speaker:

Chairperson Conroy stated we have secured our first sponsor which is Investors Bank and will be sponsoring the Service Award and also reached out to the Quaker Bridge Mall and had no reply. Chairperson Conroy will put out a new notice to Mercedes-Benz. Ms. Connolly stated she contacted the Athletic Club and is waiting for an answer and will reach out to Center Court and Costco; Mr. LaFlamme stated he will try to get Pay Checks to do the Business Award; Mr. Lavine will reach out to Rachel at Stark & Stark; Mr. Link stated Ryan should reach out to Bristol-Myers Squibb.

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Speaker: Chairperson Conroy stated he did not reach out to Brandywine because he can't find a connection; however, it is under a new name. Speakers in recent years were Matrix Development, Bob Hillier, Jerry Fennelly, Maureen Hasick from NJDEP; Kevin Nerwinski, Manager and the Rider University President. The Committee had ideas such as Trenton Mayor; Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver; Debbie Schaeffer; somebody from the business department such as Rider; social media speaker are a big draw to talk about the trends; Gardella Group. Ms. Connolly stated there are groups that do marketing for municipalities and will reach out to them because she works with them through Main Street New Jersey and Jeffrey Mueller from her office.

Mr. LaFlamme stated that Ms. Gardello is interested in speaking and for her to send us her bio. Ms. Connolly spoke about the Main Street and how the administration did not pay the fee of \$5,000.00 for the previous year; however, they will this year and will be back.

Signage:

Ms. Connolly stated she spoke to Jim Parvesse and asked if they made any changes to the sign ordinance after we sent the recommendations. He stated they did not make any changes and never developed specific language or policy that could be crafted into an ordinance. He is happy to work with the Committee on ideas for changes on the ordinance. So what do we want to bring back to him and open that discussion again about the A-frame signs. Chairperson Conroy stated that at the July meeting review what we sent him and we can see if that still holds or tweak it or leave it the way it is and then meet with Mr. Parvesse and also Kevin Nerwinski.

Lawrence Shopping Center – Visioning:

Chairperson Conroy stated he met with the Greenway Committee and Open Trails Committee last week and they are both very favorable on trying to connect communities together through the Lawrence Shopping Center and look at a more global plan for the area, instead of having this reactive kind of philosophy we have. So have a plan in place so we can figure where things go. He stated he lit a fire under the owner of the Shopping Center and he called Mayor Bobbitt and Mr. Nerwinski; but Mayor Bobbitt stated the owner spoke to Mr. Parvesse who spoke to Mr. Nerwinski who talked to him. We have a good relationship with the owners of the Shopping Center and they are doing a lot of good things.

Chairperson Conroy stated his conversation with him was that we are starting this vision plan and left it in a diagram and we are not firm on anything as of yet. It does involve the property of the Lawrence Shopping Center and would like to have their input and have them as a collaborative partner in the process. The owner of the Shopping Center stated he would be happy to do that and is not committing to anything and the Chairperson Conroy sent him some of the diagrams for him to look at. The owner will get back to him and he has to review it with his partners.

He is a retail developer and does not want anything to do with housing but he understands he has underutilized property there and if he could shed some of the property he would be willing to talk about that. Some of that money could be reinvested into the Shopping Center itself. It sounds like he is open to the conversation. Mayor Bobbitt stated that the owner of the Shopping Center was not sure what role Chairperson Conroy was playing and not sure if he was a Township employee. Chairperson Conroy stated to the owner that he was from the Growth & Redevelopment Committee and appointed by Township Council. Chairperson Conroy stated the owner did e-mail him his contact information and that is a definite positive.

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Chairperson Conroy stated he talked with the other Committees about a working session where we come together and express our ideas and feelings about what has been generated so far and do another rendition of the plan. We also have an attorney who will do pro-bono who is retired from Stark & Stark. Chairperson Conroy stated the attorney told him about the back parking lot, looking at the flood maps, is dry; but on the flood plan maps, it gets soggy and have to find out what the flood plan level is and what that will entail. Ms. Connolly will reach out to Mr. Parvesse to speak to him about the wetlands in that area. We are going to try and organize a group session with all the committees in town and put all ideas together and do an incarnation of the plan and then open it up to the Town.

Mayor Bobbitt wants to know what the end goal with this. Chairperson Conroy stated we are keeping it in the diagram mode, so if we can start the process of planning and maybe this becomes a redevelopment zone and the committees have put all their input in it and all behind it and have Council look at it and maybe moves onto Zoning and Planning. Mayor Bobbitt asked if the community would be involved and Chairperson Conroy stated we would first do all the committees in town and do a work session and after that have a work session with the community and have it as a work session. Mayor Bobbitt wants to know how the property owners fit into this and how you walk the line of getting the communities input about visioning what they want to see in their community and at the same time respect the rights of the property owner.

Chairperson Conroy stated he reached out to the biggest property owner to say that we want you to be part of the process and want to start to collaborate with you on it and have yet to decide on how it should be done. Mayor Bobbitt stated if you get to far ahead you are going to get a big no from Planning and Council because you need the property owners involved. He likes the idea of talking amongst different committees and being pro-active because that has been a problem in the past where something comes up and everyone doesn't know about it. Chairperson Conroy stated he is going to do a follow-up sometime late next week and explain what it is all about. Mayor Bobbitt suggested keeping it more on the visioning side then getting into the nitty gritty of it.

Mr. Ferrone asked if the owner has stated in any of the conversations what their plans are originally. Mayor Bobbitt replied they are right now focused on coming before Planning for a big exterior upgrade, that is their biggest thing and secret talks are in the works right now about various outer buildings and what they might want to do with those, but nothing has been settled, all in negotiations. Ms. Brame replied that she believes they are focusing on improving the property and bringing businesses in. Their major drive is to make money and our vision might be in some ways a conflict with their vision. Chairperson Conroy stated there needs to be a business plan behind this to be a financial incentive and saying this is what we want, some financial benefits to them and the key is to get foot traffic in front of stores that will generate sales and increase rents, that is kind of our key and see it more of a neighborhood destination and not a regional destination.

Mr. Pluta stated a person opens a business to make money and be profitable and one idea is some tax abatement program. Looking from Texas Avenue to the circle you have so many empty buildings and maybe try to spruce it up and make parks; however, until people are profitable there is really no incentive to move into these locations. Chairperson Conroy commented about the Colonial Bowling Lane and demolished half of it to make it a more vibrant facility and seems to be working. Mayor Bobbitt suggested someone talking to the Dress for Dance and see what their ideas are for the Pizza Hut site. Ms. Connolly stated the site has to be a restaurant and not a fast food restaurant because of the parking issue.

The Board members spoke about the tax abatement and how the school is affected and maybe waive fees for permits like Brick Township is doing. Mr. LaFlamme stated the biggest issue is there is no access to those site because the traveling you have to do to get to them.

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Other Business:

Ms. Connolly spoke about the creator of the app. With a \$1,000.00 initial cost and a \$75 monthly fee and if interested we need a coordinator from the Township. It would keep with Township news, list Township sponsored events, schedules for trash and leaf pickup and committee board meetings; non-emergency notices; when tax and sewer bills are due.

Ms. Connolly explained the shop discount program and there are eleven towns that have the tax rebate program.

Chairperson Conroy reminded the members to get at least one sponsor; Mr. Link is keeping a running list; think about a speaker and we will be putting together some type of joint session with all the committees to do a working session for a visioning plan for the Lawrence Shopping Center neighborhood.

Adjournment:

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Digital audio file of this meeting is available upon request.

Respectfully submitted,



Susan J. Snook
Recording Secretary

Minutes approved: 6/12/18