



**Leesburg Economic Development Commission
REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES**

**May 5, 2021
7:00pm.
WebEx**

Commission Members Present: Eric Byrd, James Choi, Marantha Edwards, Brittany Youkers

Commission Members Absent: Curtis Allred; Britta Neel

Staff Liaison Present: Mayor Kelly Burk, and Councilman Ara Bagdasarian

Staff Present: Economic Development Director Russell Seymour; Business Development and Retention Manager Melanie Scoggins

Presenters:

Peter Burnett, Esq., Burnett & Williams, PC/Alan L. Hansen, Managing Director of Architecture, FAIA LEED AP
Susan BerryHill, Director of Planning & Zoning, Town of Leesburg

Petitioners:

Molly Novotny, Esq., Cooley, LLP
Kyle Crosby, Kettler Management Inc.
Charlie Hieler, Kettler Management Inc.

AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:06pm by Chair Byrd.

2. Roll Call

Chair Byrd asked for the Calling of the Roll by Director Seymour; Director Seymour stated a quorum was present.

3. Adoption of the Agenda

Motion by Vice Chair Youkers to adopt the Agenda; seconded by Commissioner Choi. Motion carried.

4. Approval of Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Choi to adopt the Economic Development Commission Meeting Minutes of April 7, 2021; seconded by Vice Chair Youkers. Motion carried.

5. Petitioners

Chair Byrd opened the floor to the Petitioners, and introduced Molly Novotny, Esq., an urban planner at the law firm of Cooley, LLP, who represents landowners with zoning applications with the Town. Ms. Novotny presented thoughts regarding two properties adjacent to Russell Branch Parkway. Ms. Novotny encouraged the Town to consider rezoning the property in question from industrial to mixed use. Ms. Novotny added that the Village needs more residential space within walking distance of the retail center. Chair Byrd expressed his gratitude for Ms. Novotny's presentation.

6. Liaison Comments

Councilman Bagdasarian expressed his thanks to the EDC for hosting the recent business forum, and added that it was a good opportunity to discuss with the business community things which could be done to return strongly in a post-Covid world.

Mayor Burk mentioned Small Business Week and added that she joined Supervisor Kristen Umstadd in acknowledging *A Wedding Loft* and *ION International Training Center*, two local businesses that came out of the pandemic stronger than when it started. It was a great opportunity to speak with these businesses and learn about their hard work in surviving the pandemic. Mayor Burk expressed her thanks to the County of Loudoun for including the Town in Small Business Week.

Mayor Burk mentioned that she will be presenting a State of the Town address on May 20, 2021 at 5:00pm on the Town Green, and added that much of the content will emphasize economic development. Mayor Burk also mentioned that Coffee with the Mayor is planned for May 15, 2021 at Maverick Coffee Shop from 9:00am - 11:00am.

7. Staff Report

Flower & Garden Festival – Bingo Cards

Director Seymour mentioned 4,000 Bingo cards were handed out to businesses and attendees of the Festival, and that completed cards are now being received for entry into the prize drawing. Director Seymour mentioned that two gift bags, valued at \$150 and containing local products, will be the prize for the drawing.

Economic Development Website

Director Seymour indicated that the RFP was successful and that a company has been selected. Director Seymour added that all items should be finalized shortly, with plans for the new site to become operational in six months.

Ribbon Cuttings

Director Seymour mentioned recent and upcoming ribbons cuttings:

- May 5th - Crumbl Cookies
- May 7th – The OM Center for Chiropractic & Wellness
- May 8th - Honey-Baked Ham
- June 11th – Abaco Strategy

8. Liaisons to Other Commissions and Committees

Chair Byrd opened the floor for discussions from liaisons to other commissions and committees. Commissioner Edwards indicated she was unable to participate in a recent COPA meeting, however, she will obtain details and provide highlights to the EDC.

9. Old Business

a. Business Forum – April 22, 2021

Chair Byrd requested feedback on the business forum from the members of the EDC. Manager Scoggins indicated that she has a list of general topics discussed at the forum. Chair Byrd mentioned the importance of supporting local businesses. Vice Chair Youkers suggested that the fall forum be held at Ida Lee Recreation Center. Vice Chair Youkers is in support of having quarterly forums, with a follow-up with businesses within two months. Commissioner Edwards mentioned the need to come up with a common thread and follow-up with that in the quarterly forums. Chair Byrd is in favor of an in-person forum, which enables groups to split off, and added that quarterly forums will allow for a more targeted, focused format. Chair Byrd indicated the possible need to form a subcommittee group to explore methodology of how to choose topics. Vice Chair Youkers mentioned that marketing be a future topic for discussion.

Commissioner Choi believed the virtual format was difficult, given the ideas being presented, but that all did the best at the time; and noted the benefit of in-person meetings. Chair Byrd recommended the EDC focus on how the forums should be held during the year, regardless of format, and suggested one more virtual forum before face-to-face meetings are instituted. Chair Byrd stressed the importance of communication before and after the forums to ensure participants are informed and provided with follow-up.

10. New Business

Theatre/Conference Center/Housing

a. Liberty Street Lot Presentation – Peter Burnett, Esq.

Mr. Burnett indicated from listening to the business forum discussion, that it would be beneficial to downtown businesses to have a conference center within walking distance. Mr. Burnett mentioned he has experienced much change and growth in Leesburg. Mr. Burnett provided a brief history of the site which was once a town dump, and added that he would like to see the site rehabilitated to something for which the Town can be proud. Mr. Burnett presented suggestions:

- Public parking, with age-restricted housing above
- Good location for senior residents by virtue of walkability to the Town and schools (senior citizens volunteer at schools)
- 120 units could be placed on the site
- Remainder 25,000 sq. ft. could accommodate a conference center, theatre, and a restaurant
- Improve connectivity to Georgetown Park
- Opportunity for private citizens and corporate donors to fund significant portion of the project

Mr. Burnett indicated that, from research done around the country, towns want to combine

theatre and conference center components where each could interact. Mr. Burnett added that theatres are coveted by communities, and are net positive culturally and economically.

Mayor Burk indicated that discussion on this subject is scheduled for a Council work session, and added that it would be helpful to have insight from the EDC. Chair Byrd expressed his thanks to Mr. Burnett, and indicated that the EDC is not in a position to offer specific recommendations for a particular use at this time. Chair Byrd is of the opinion that the Liberty Lot is not presently being fully utilized for the benefit of the Town, and that he would like to obtain input from the EDC members to enable the commission to offer high-level generic guidance to Council.

Chair Byrd opened the floor for comments/thoughts/questions from the commissioners. Chair Byrd reiterated that he is uncomfortable making recommendations at this point. Director Seymour indicated that he and the Town Attorney will present this subject at the next Council work session, and added that Council has not yet looked at moving forward with this initiative.

Councilman Bagdasarian mentioned that this should be looked at, whether or not moving forward opening it up for solicitations to redevelop the lot. Chair Byrd questioned whether the parking lot remain, or is redevelopment a good idea. Commissioner Edwards is in favor of an opportunity to provide support, that redevelopment of the lot has been a longstanding conversation for both the arts and property, and hopes the EDC participates in a positive way to move things forward. Chair Byrd supports the EDC looking at the project further.

Vice Chair Youkers asked whether there is a need for senior housing downtown, and what are the potential risk and mitigation plans? Vice Chair Youkers also presented the question of whether traffic studies will be conducted. Mr. Burnett indicated that his understanding is that senior/affordable housing is a high desirability need for the Town, and discussions on risk and site studies ensued. Vice Chair Youkers is in favor of the conference center/theatre concept, however, expressed her concern regarding noise complaints. Commissioner Choi is in favor of redevelopment; as is Commissioner Edwards and Chair Byrd.

Motion

Motion by Commissioner Edwards that the Economic Development Commission send to Council a statement of support for exploring the redevelopment of the Liberty Street Lot and recommends soliciting concept plans in whatever way Council feels is appropriate to determine the best and highest use of that property for the town; seconded by Commissioner Choi. Motion carried.

b. Legacy Leesburg Town Plan

Discussion – Susan BerryHill

Chair Byrd initiated discussions on feedback of division and guiding principles sections (pgs. 99-110 of the plan). Chair Byrd noted that a consolidated referral from the EDC to the Planning Commission is being discussed.

Vice Chair Youkers indicated that focus be placed on commercial space vs. residential space, and to attract the right businesses into the Town. Vice Chair Youkers added the

uncertainty of trends of commercial space needs in the next two years, and advised flexibility to adjust the plan moving forward. Ms. BerryHill added that smaller, targeted plans can be implemented as needed.

Commissioner Edwards provided comments on principles, and suggested that additional comments may be submitted to Ms. BerryHill individually. Ms. BerryHill emphasized diversity in the plan. Chair Byrd indicated focus be placed not only on technical businesses, but also on Main Street/vocational businesses. Commissioner Edwards mentioned the benefit of higher education and skilled training and a plan to obtain the trades/creative/culinary businesses. Commissioner Edwards indicated the importance of branding, and making the experience relevant.

Discussions regarding principles and the addition of language ensued regarding:

- Authenticity
- Addition of technical/government skilled workforce; main street service; diversity
- Food trucks/pop-ups
- Positive process experience for land development applicants
- Coordination with the SBDC
- Technology and tourism zones be looked at
- Work with financial institutions; encourage financial stability (without being specific about loans or zones)
- Identify/encourage programs as opposed to specifics (such as a source of a loan)
- Plan would provide high-level policy guidance on lighting/noise ordinances
- Abundance of trees and making sure pedestrian ways are shaded

The EDC agreed by consensus to share comments with the planning commission.

11. Commissioner Comments

Vice Chair Youkers indicated this was an extremely productive meeting. Commissioner Choi expressed his interest in hearing about future plans for development in the Town. Commissioner Edwards expressed her pride and appreciation in being part of the EDC, and that the meeting was thought provoking. Commissioner Edwards noted the fortunate circumstance of having Jessica Chait, Manager, State and Local Government Affairs, Public Policy Law and Security, Verizon, attend the Business Forum. Director Seymour indicated that he is exploring the opportunity for Ms. Chait to speak at a future EDC meeting.

Mayor Burk expressed her gratitude to the EDC for a job well done, and noted her concern at the regular absences of several commission members. Mayor Burk added that Councilman Kari Naci is searching for a replacement, and would welcome names of potential candidates. Mayor Burk directed that the limited attendance issue be addressed at the Council level.

12. Chairman's Comments

Chair Byrd mentioned that it has been a very busy three months, and expressed his thanks to all in attendance.

13. Adjournment

Motion by Commissioner Edwards to adjourn the meeting at 9:25pm; seconded by Commissioner Choi. Motion carried.