

MILFORD CITY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
May 30, 2017

A Meeting of the City of Milford Economic Development Committee was held in the Joseph Ronnie Rogers Council Chambers at Milford City Hall, 201 South Walnut Street, Milford, Delaware on Tuesday, May 30, 2017.

PRESIDING: Chairman Christopher Mergner

IN ATTENDANCE: Committee Members:
Councilman James Starling Sr.

MAYOR & COUNCIL: Mayor Bryan Shupe

STAFF: City Manager Eric Norenberg & Deputy City Clerk Christine Crouch

Chairman Mergner called the Committee Meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

Rivertown Rebirth/Progress and Next Steps

Economic Development and Planning Coordinator Rob Pierce was also present.

City Manager Norenberg informed the Committee that the Planning Coordinator had given the same presentation to local brokers and financial experts at the time they were informed of the Downtown Development District (DDD). After its conclusion, they discussed how to collaborate with the community to see the fulfillment of the Rivertown Rebirth Plan.

Mr. Pierce noted that the first couple slides are overviews of the DDD program that Milford was designated in August 2016.

He then provided an update on the investments occurring in our downtown area as a result of the program.

The former Lou's Bootery (Pikus) Building is being completed restored by Developer Dan Bond. Of the \$872,768 being invested by Mr. Bond, this project received one of the two largest awards from the State of Delaware in the amount of \$135,554. The City also provided some fee waivers whose totals have not been calculated to date.

Mr. Pierce explained that will be tallied once Mr. Bond pulls the permit for its construction.

The old Milford Skating Center is being converted by Davis, Bowen and Friedel (DBF) and Owner Greater Milford Development Corporation (Dennis Silicato) into a new professional office space. The \$1,539,225 project received a \$279,180 grant from the State of Delaware.

Mr. Pierce reported there are currently seven commercial, residential or mixed use small projects including residential new construction, residential rehabilitation or commercial renovations underway in the City. These properties were abandoned or had code violations and were purchased by private investors. Included is \$636,000 in proposed private investments and \$50,000 in earmarked State grant assistance. With that, \$2,170 in City fees were waived.

Mr. Pierce is continuing to encourage investors to apply for this money with the hope that the City receives as much grant money as possible.

Some smaller projects include the rehabilitation and conversion of the Historic Bank House into a Bed and Breakfast Operation. Approximately \$230,000 has been invested privately and almost \$50,000 reserved by the State of Delaware.

Another well-known project involves the conversion of the former M&T Bank into a Touch of Italy Restaurant of which \$250,000 was invested. The State is reserving another \$50,000 for that project.

Mr. Pierce recalled the conditional use application requested by Milly Pederson that was heard by City Council. The old Heishman Building, another historic landmark in downtown Milford, was converted into a floor covering and retail store at

the corner of Walnut and Southeast Front Street. The application is currently pending.

To date, there has been \$3,047,993 in private investments committed to the downtown area of which \$575,000 in State grants has been awarded or reserved. City fees in the amount of \$17,000 have been granted though that number will increase as permits continue to come in.

Mr. Pierce announced the information can also be found at the associated website at www.cityofmilford.com/DDD.

Mayor Shupe said he is very impressed with the amount of private funds invested already and thanked Mr. Pierce for his hard work over the past few months. He is very grateful to the investors for their confidence in our community and is very happy to have our history preserved through restoration versus demolishing and starting new.

Mr. Pierce then discussed the Steering Committee mentioned in the Rivertown Rebirth plan that outlines some milestones and goals in two-year increments. Please see attached plan.

The Planning Coordinator reported that he met with Councilwoman Peel last week to review some of the earlier goals. He pointed out if the Chair elects, some additional partners can be acquired to review the updates.

One item was to position Milford as a gateway to the Bayshore. He recalled when DNREC approached the City to extend their Bayshore Byway program after which an agreement was signed. DNREC is currently working on mapping out the continuation of the byway from Route 9 and Route 1 south of Dover, that will extend through Milford. It would then be connected to the bird sanctuaries along the bay.

One of the goals was to attract new restaurants. Touch of Italy acquired the M&T Bank building and following some renovations is planning to open later this year.

Foot patrol was increased in the Central Business District area to encourage Milford Police Officers more interaction with merchants to provide a safer environment in the downtown area.

An application was submitted to DELDOT Transportation Alternative Program for a Design Streetscaping Project on Front Street, excluding the areas that already possess brick sidewalks and street trees.

He has also been working on the RiverPlace mixed use project at the former Washington Street Water Treatment Plant site. The zoning was changed and an RFP distributed for development proposes. They are presently working with DNREC on the protected recreation land.

Chairman Mergner questioned the old firehouse reuse and the flooding issues at that site. According to Mr. Pierce, the flooding of the building was caused by an unsealed floor drain. He agrees that area of town is flood prone though he has not personally witnessed any impact to that building. He pointed out it is tall enough to elevate any interior improvements.

Mr. Pierce said that same concerns apply to the former Capital Cleaning Building which is across the street from the old firehouse. They have had some temporary tenants though the building was renovated with the hopes of acquiring a more permanent lease.

City Manager Norenberg received some information about a project in another state that would be appropriate at the old firehouse. He is hoping to meet with the developer who will be visiting Delaware sometime in June.

Mr. Pierce then recommended a Steering Committee be created that would include some of the Committee members and representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Milford Inc. They would meet to review the goals and make sure proper implementation of the tasks is occurring. Chairman Mergner would like to be involved and welcomes comments from residents and business owners as well.

City Manager Norenberg recalled that when this was discussed more than a year ago, there was significant attention devoted

to getting other people involved besides City officials and key property owners. He recognized the small but committed group in attendance but feels that having more people engaged will provide the ability for more of those items to be addressed. The Steering Committee will be another avenue to encourage participation.

He referenced the Extended Hours Campaign where a number of people are involved in assuring the success of the Third Thursday. The City is also preparing to do a random citywide resident survey. Mayor Shupe suggested a couple questions be added that would provide data about preferences in terms of extended hours. For example, a Saturday afternoon, Sunday afternoon or Friday night may attract more people to our downtown area.

Chairman Mergner suggested contacting the local colleges and university who may consider a satellite campus. Bringing more education related to entrepreneurial and culinary programs may drive some additional interest or traffic to Milford. Mayor Shupe reported that similar discussions are taking place with Nationwide Health Services about bringing higher education in the field of nursing, but also culinary and entrepreneurship that would attract young students and adults.

Chairman Mergner asked for comments from anyone that was present.

DMI President Lisa Fitzgerald stated that she met with Mr. Pierce to discuss the Steering Committee. She had pegged some individuals that could be invited though they felt it would be more beneficial to keep the group small to prevent being overcrowded with ideas.

She said her term will be over in November though she plans to continue participating.

Ms. Fitzgerald noted that DMI's focus is downtown though they love all of Milford and are working to promote the entire town. They have been very busy focusing on their Executive Director search though they hope that will come to an end soon. They have also been focusing more on economic development especially since coming back from the National Conference in Pittsburgh in May. Because DMI has been so attentive to events in the past, they need to remember that is not their sole focus.

As a result, they are trying to rein themselves back in and now have an Economic Vitality Committee. Part of their duties are to identify properties and bring in new businesses, owners, etc.

Board Member Peggy Reilly is DMI's Liaison on the Entrepreneurial Network who meet on a monthly basis and are part of the Extended Hours Campaign/Third Thursday.

In addition, they are focusing on river events including a cardboard regatta though that is not scheduled until next June due to Arena's boat ramp not being completed yet.

Many things they are able to do on their own, though some require the partnership of the Chamber and the City.

They also have a revolving loan fund for businesses though they are restricted financially when it comes to purchasing capital type items.

She said a coworking space has also been considered and was also discussed at the conference. That includes business incubators, art galleries and anything creative where professionals are brought downtown and offered a place to work where they can collaborate versus working from home. They have not been able to identify a space for that yet though that has been very successful in other communities.

Andy Stevens then introduced himself as the Chairperson of the Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Commission. He welcomes the idea of a Steering Committee for economic endeavors for the City. His two thoughts of input would be to keep it small as opposed to large. Particularly when dealing with complex solutions, the larger the crowd, the more diluted the information becomes. He would be in favor of every other month meetings and would commit to that. He would be honored to be a part of that with their Executive Director's consent.

He reported that in 2016, their Commission worked on the idea of marketing Milford. They have recently launched, in cooperation with Milford Live, Milford Chronicle and Downtown Milford, a website called ExperienceMilford.com. They have a hard copy insert that is going to press at any moment that will help promote Milford.

Mr. Stevens said that this year they have been dealing specifically with the Workforce Development issue. To hear there is some kind of discussion of a satellite campus in Milford is phenomenal in his opinion.

Dan Bond of 101 Northwest Front Street shared information on a more recent program. He discussed the Strong Neighborhood Housing fund that Milford was recently awarded. It was kicked off by the City of Milford and Milford Housing Development Corporation (MHDC) who will use \$500,000 to create ten new units in the City of Milford's Downtown Development District area. That money will subsidize middle income housing in a focus area that is primarily in the fourth ward on Northwest Front Street.

Plans are in the process to build a row of ten townhouses and restore at least two houses in the block of 200 Northwest Front Street between Christ Church and Avenue Methodist Church. All will be sold at a subsidy of \$50,000 per property.

Though there is a three-year window to get this done, they hope to submit a large application for the townhouses in the next round.

There being no further comments, Councilman Mergner moved to create a Steering Committee, consisting of a small number of key individuals, to work on the projects outlined in the Strategy Plan as attached, seconded by Councilman Starling. Motion carried.

Councilman Mergner adjourned the meeting at 5:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Terri K. Hudson, MMC
City Clerk/Transcriber

Attachment:

Rivertown Rebirth Plan for Downtown Milford

