

MILFORD CITY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
October 30, 2017

A Joint Meeting of the City of Milford Economic Development and Parks and Recreation Committees was held in the Joseph Ronnie Rogers Council Chambers at Milford City Hall, 201 South Walnut Street, Milford, Delaware on Monday, October 30, 2017.

PRESIDING: Police Committee Chairman James Burk

IN ATTENDANCE: Mayor Bryan Shupe

Committee Members:

Chair Chris Mergner and Councilmember Lisa Peel (Economic Development)

Chair Archie Campbell and Councilmembers Owen Brooks and Katrina Wilson (Parks & Recreation)

City Manager Eric Norenberg & Deputy City Clerk Christine Crouch

Mayor Shupe called the Joint Committee Meeting to order at 6:06 p.m.

Downtown Recreation Concepts

Milford Parks and Recreation Director Brad Dennehy was also present.

City Manager Norenberg recalled Council being informed of an RFP that was developed earlier this year. One proposal was received to develop a potential mixed use commercial site on the Mispillion River. Also being considered was a city land swap. He referenced an area on a drawing (not included in packet but attached to minutes) that will remain as a green area as well as other areas that will be converted. The city lands were originally purchased with Delaware Trust (State) Funds (DTF) and Delaware Land Water Conversation (Federal) Funds (DLWCF).

As a result, the City will need to go through an approval process for other potential uses and will need to identify the substitute land.

Mr. Norenberg advised that Planning Coordinator Rob Pierce has been working with the State and they will require an archeological survey to satisfy the conservation requirements. The cost is between \$25,000 and \$30,000 to survey parcels 1, 2 and 3 as shown on the map.

In addition, there is a City water well at this location that will need to be considered when the land is developed.

Since learning of that requirement, Parks and Recreation Director Brad Dennehy, Mayor Shupe and the City Manager have discussed some other recreational uses in the area.

Mayor Shupe believes the original intent of the Rivertown Rebirth Plan (RRP) was for a mixed use which would be a good use in our downtown area. Also being considered were some adjacent parcels, such as the Salvation Army land, which would permit the building to be pushed back more thus allowing more of the river and parks and recreation areas to be used. He emphasized there are a number of challenges being encountered as we move forward with this plan.

The Mayor then referred to the splash pad project included in the RRP. He said they considered reorganizing some of the items within the plan and moving them to the location of the proposed mixed use building. When they began talking with the developer, who was designing a four-story building, there were several recreational uses being discussed that were more family-oriented and would better suit the community as a whole.

Consultant Ben Muldrow was present and stated the concept he was presenting was far more about the concept of leveraging the asset of the river to be able to drive private sector investment and increase the municipal tax base. They looked at the property in question as city-owned property that could be used to develop the riverside.

He agrees the various parcel breakdowns and restrictions will most likely have to change the original plan.

The Consultant pointed out the big question is how the public sector investment catalyzes the private sector and what can be done; he further continued by stating that he will need additional details in terms of restrictions in the wellhead area that may allow some sort of micro-retail that is more a temporary type structure versus a permanent fixed foundation. In that manner, some retail activity could still be created in that space and advantage taken of the additional parking amenities and similar items.

He continued by explaining the designer that worked on the plan will actually be in Milford next week for a Downtown Milford, Incorporated project. The consultant is anxious to have another opportunity to draw some additional sketches that can be shared at next week's meeting.

Economic Development Chairman Mergner expressed some concern about only one developer's interest in the land. He feels there could be more developers who feel that area is not suitable or profitable.

Mayor Shupe pointed out there may be some problems with the size of the area. That is the reason the developer wanted to build up. There was not enough land to make the project bigger any other way.

Chairman Mergner said he constantly hears the downtown area does not have the appropriate parking to accommodate new businesses. Councilwoman Peel feels there is sufficient parking but most people want to park in front of a business versus having to walk.

Mayor Shupe asked if family-type activity such as a splash pad or a playground attracts people and creates economic opportunities throughout the downtown in other municipalities.

Mr. Muldrow stated that any recreational amenity will provide additional opportunities for the community to spur growth. However, one of the few things they have seen is this massive investment by the City to create the riverwalk without any private investment. He is aware there is a large project on the horizon in the area of McColley, Marshall and Mispillion Streets. If that happens, it will put residents on the riverwalk which will help. From a potential mixed use project there is still a tremendous amount of property north of the river that is controlled by Growmark.

He said Milford is even seeing a new restaurant that is getting ready to open soon.

Mr. Muldrow stated that for a City to try and capitalize on growth and activity, they may end up throwing a lot of single serving experiences in a place instead of creating the amenities that seem to make sense. He does not think Milford's downtown lacks parking but he does feel it lacks consumer motivation. Therefore, an effort to provide more parking is actually a really smart solution in his opinion.

He recommends that as the City thinks about this site, it is thought of strategically without considering the future of the residential development on Mispillion Street as well as any potential investment on the Growmark properties. The three of those, according to Mr. Muldrow, are all tied into one market. The City's goal should be that any City investment made in the riverfront property off Washington Street should serve investments in other areas of the riverwalk.

Councilwoman Peel recalled past discussions about an amphitheater on the river. Chairman Mergner agrees that perhaps this property may be more suitable for a music type venue versus an area further down the river as was previously considered.

Mr. Muldrow pointed out that amphitheaters are often added to plans because they look nice. However, there is already an amphitheater next to the library. He feels another appears redundant to him. Councilwoman Wilson agrees adding we need to consider how much it is used as well.

Councilman Mergner referenced Mr. Muldrow's original presentation that included a flea market with permanent booths already set up. If that was created, a bathroom facility, ATM and other similar fixtures should be considered.

Mr. Muldrow would love to explore any type of similar use. That is why he questioned the building restriction that would be impacted by the well in this area. His goal would be that any development re-engage Washington Street and the riverfront. He agrees that some type of micro-retail combined that is open on a regular basis would be very appealing to people.

Councilwoman Wilson recalled those previous discussions and though the idea of pop-up stores was a very exciting idea; Mayor Shupe agreed that would be a good incubator for people who are interested in starting a new business.

Mr. Muldrow pointed out that one of the biggest problems at this point is the number of great businesses in Milford who are spread throughout the City. He would like to see several relocate to the downtown area.

In the meantime, he will get a better understanding of any limitations that the wellhead in this area creates. Afterwards they will sketch out some opportunities to address that.

Councilman Campbell arrived at this time.

Mayor Shupe asked Mr. Muldrow for his opinion about the interest in a splash pad and if that is something that could create interest from residents in other communities; Mr. Muldrow pointed out a splash pad can be used in two different ways. The intention determines the most appropriate location. If the purpose is to create a community recreation versus a community pool, for example, then it needs to be in a park facility with ample parking and appropriate resources.

However, to be a catalyst to drive people to Milford, a splash pad in front of the Riverfront Theater should be considered. That would create a use where people could contribute to the vibrancy of the environment.

Mr. Muldrow feels that whatever additional development is created should be designed to engage people. He compared it to when food courts were added to shopping malls which extended the times shoppers spent there. However, a business or retail is needed to capture that. If not, the City is taking on the expenses and maintenance for a hangout.

Councilwoman Peel pointed out we have a new kayak dock and the Life Cycle facility, and asked about using some of the space for a bike or kayak rental; Councilman Mergner suggested an outdoor workout area.

Mr. Muldrow explained the biggest issue in the eastern most part of the space is that the large green parcel is not level. The combination of the topography and tree cover creates a sanctuary for people to simply hang out.

The Consultant recalled that residents reported at the community meetings that some of the park space in Milford was lost to them. The basketball court is used on a regular basis and he recommends taking advantage of people using this space to reclaim the activity that will be lost when it is removed.

Councilman Mergner recommends adding various stations as part of a fitness course that would include both sides of the bridge. Mr. Muldrow also referred to the activity that has been created around Life Cycle and is anxious to see what type of interest is expressed in the parcel directly east of where the previous gas station was located.

Mr. Muldrow suggested that as they meet next week with DMI and City officials, updates should be provided though Mayor Shupe has already reached out and set the tone that this would be another great preservation project that needs to be included.

He stressed the need for the City to not jump the gun on an expenditure that limits the future. He said a lot of communities discussed splash pads though they can be expensive in the long run. He feels we can learn from Bicentennial Park where just because there is ample sidewalk space and it looks good from an overhead doesn't necessarily mean it will be utilized on a regular basis.

The suggestion to have a multiple-station type fitness use that brings people along point to point makes sense and reinforces the messages the City is putting out.

Another possibility is looking at a more standardized solution to bike racks and bike parking because of the increase in bike traffic.

Mr. Norenberg stated that some of Downtown Milford's board members participated in some placemaking training. As part of that there will be some discussions about acquiring bike racks and parking in the downtown area that would be unique to Milford and encourage more people to ride their bikes.

Mayor Shupe said he continues to hear complaints that we do not have a playground in the downtown area and asked Mr. Muldrow's opinion; Councilwoman Wilson referenced the playground at the Parks and Recreation playground. In addition, a great number of children use the Can Do Playground by the Boys and Girls Club on a regular basis.

Mr. Muldrow feels that playgrounds are more of a neighborhood-based activity versus a downtown urban amenity. Milford should not invest in an amenity in the business district and which parents will complain they are unable to find parking to be able to walk their kids to that playground in an area where retail is being created in support of its customers.

He feels family-friendly elements are more integrated into the whole design scape of the community itself. For example, in Greenville, there are a series of sculptures scattered throughout the main street. Kids participate in a scavenger hunt where they are driven through the regional district which creates foot traffic and economic development to area businesses. If someone comes to Milford for a playground, that is a focused and planned activity.

Councilwoman Peel asked if that should be discussed in the focus groups; Mr. Norenberg noted we have done some Community Conversations already and a number are scheduled. At those meetings, there will be opportunities for people to present ideas. He received some good feedback at the first one so it may be beneficial if people talk about more recreational needs.

Mr. Muldrow provided a warning about the way that type of information is gathered. When asked 'what they want', he suggests caution because of the difference in what is said and what people will actually use. People will often say they will use something though they really won't. Amenities that will be used over and over again and create a habit are more beneficial.

The Committee then discussed the survey of land along the river and who would be responsible financially; Mr. Norenberg said there were a lot of unanswered questions related to the proposal. They will try and negotiate some of those matters though he feels the City may have been premature with that project at this point. He agrees with Mr. Muldrow that other uses be considered for that site or perhaps we need to wait for more retail and other activities to come into this area.

Mr. Muldrow stated that similar projects in the region have come to a screeching halt. Some have started as a result of the developer taking advantage of the DDD funding, though many have stopped. One tower was constructed in Seaford and is totally occupied but the construction on the second tower has not yet begun.

The idea of having a mixed use of retail and residential on the river sends a message that the river is important and creates a density of desirable people there. The height they are asking for to make their profitability he feels is inappropriate for Milford. The City has now explored the property and understands the restrictions that may impact that project and now needs to consider an appropriate use for the river property that will contribute to the community.

It was agreed that further consideration of the best use of the property is needed. In the meantime, Mr. Mergner recommends that Mr. Muldrow's team suggests micro-retail as well as station to station type amenities that would carry people through the riverwalk and the park.

Mr. Dennehy then referenced the site stating that the City has invested a great deal of money on the pump facility project and sewer upgrades. That cannot change and is something that will benefit for the entire town and not just for the downtown area. In addition, the well facility had a lot of money recently invested.

He noted the amount of money received from the land trust and is assuming they will provide another \$75,000 for the rehab

of the existing riverwalk. He recommends we not upset anyone from that entity should we decide to do something different.

Mr. Dennehy asked Mr. Muldrow if we proceed with the four-story mixed retail-residential use facility and more recreational activities like Life Cycle, exercise, splash pad or a kid's playground are added, would this draw people; the last thing he wants to do is build a recreational facility that gets only minimal use.

Mr. Muldrow emphasized that it really comes down to the will of City Council. There will always be an argument that an investment in a recreational amenity is good for the community. Also, there is the hope of increased economic impact by adding people and creating foot traffic. However, he would be very mindful of the way it is designed because the last thing the City needs to do is invest a lot of money that will increase the operational and maintenance budgets and not see any associated economic growth.

The Consultant stated that he prefers a village type setup with a splash pad component in the sense of combining retail and recreation. Mayor Shupe agrees that a mixed use with micro retailing and recreation may work.

Chapter 165-Parks and Recreation/ Proposed Amendments

City Manager Norenberg stated that he and Mr. Dennehy Brad have been meeting frequently to discuss some amendments to Chapter 165. He said that Mr. Dennehy is asking Council to consider reactivating the Citizens Parks and Recreation Commission to engage our residents in some of the recommendations and decision-making related to the Parks and Recreation Department.

He referenced the following memo:

Purpose and Background

The purpose of this memo is to review three categories of changes proposed as updates for Chapter 165-Parks and Recreation of the Code of the City of Milford. As a result of recent changes in procedures related to special event applications and an interest in enhancing civic leadership and involvement, staff felt it appropriate to review several possible changes.

Discussion

There are three areas of possible revision to consider for Chapter 165:

1. Reconstituting a Citizen Parks and Recreation Committee:

**Five members to be appointed by the Mayor and City Council to represent all areas of the community and the diverse interests in parks and recreation programming and facilities. (Possible option: One of the five members could be a non-City resident, but resident of the Milford School District.)*

**Responsibilities would be strictly advisory to the City Council and the Director. The Committee would have no authority over spending, budget, etc. Scope could include:*

**Advising City Council on future plans for parks and recreation facilities and programs;*

**Advising City Council on fees and charges, scholarship programs, etc. and other matters that may be referred to the Committee by the City Council; and*

**Assisting the Director with educating the public about the benefits of recreational activities, parks and open space, trees and their proper care.*

2. Clarification about the difference between the Park Use Permit and the Special Event Permit. Possible related subjects include:

**Authorizing the Police Chief and/or Parks & Recreation Director to make determinations regarding the requirements for security at events;*

**Allowing dogs and pets at special events if approved as part of the Special Event Permit.*

3. *Other minor clarifications and clean up.*

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Parks and Recreation Committee discuss the possible amendments with staff and provide input on the process of developing an ordinance for introduction at a future City Council meeting.

The clean up items relate to the Park Use and Special Event Permit and clarification of security at events. For example, when events are occurring at the parks, either the Police Chief or the Parks and Recreation Director will consult together to determine the degree of security that is needed.

In addition, there is a prohibition of dogs at special events. He thinks some additional information is needed in that area as well.

Councilman Brooks recalled being on the Parks and Recreation Commission for five years before he was a Councilperson. There were other current and previous Councilmembers that served on that Commission as well.

Mr. Norenberg reported that because we serve children in the Milford School District, Mr. Dennehy recommends that one of the five-member committee be a non-resident as long as they live within the school district.

Councilwoman Wilson has no problem with residents of Milford School District because they use City services. Finding people that want to serve is the most important part.

Councilwoman Peel said there is a lot of momentum surrounding what is happening through Life Cycle. Capturing that energy and getting those interested people involved will establish a pipeline for people to engage in other areas.

Councilwoman Wilson shared that a lot of feedback she receives is the need for affordable activities for children. This could be a way to throw out ideas that have not been thought of. She noted the concerns are related to both the Parks and Recreation programs, as well as the Boys and Girls Club programs.

She also recommends some focus be placed on activities for children ages 12 and up. There is a big need to develop something for those ages. Councilman Mergner agreed that something is needed for 12 to 16 year olds particularly on weekends or after hours. He referenced the Sports Factory in Lewes which is becoming very popular. They are at the point that they are unable to take on any more children, though they have nightly pickup games and other activities.

Councilman Campbell announced that Milford Library has a Teen Center where teens can gather and socialize. He is aware of a number of children that participate in that program.

Mr. Dennehy said his thoughts on the commission are to get more of a buy-in for our citizens. He does not always have the answers and is sure there are things Parks and Recreation should be doing. Having the Commission meet four times a year will help those members understand the challenges he is facing. They could also recommend some new ideas.

The P&R Director said one of the biggest issues at Parks and Recreation is a lack of gym space or any indoor recreation space. Years ago the City was considering building a community center which the former Director was in favor of until they started breaking down the numbers. The City instead ended up giving the Boys and Girls Club a big chunk of money versus building our own facility. The schools are busy with their own programs though there is a good relationship with the district. He said that in addition, the district is hurting for space for their own activities and is already down one school.

Mr. Dennehy welcomes anyone on this commission who is capable of helping with these challenges.

He loves the developments outside of the City limits on Williamsville Road or at Eastman Heights noting there are a lot of children that live there. There are many farmers' kids in these programs who do not pay taxes though they are still part of the community.

Mr. Dennehy also pointed out that he is not an expert of security but he feels that input is needed from the Chief of Police to get that right.

He also pointed out that he is dog-friendly and Mayor Shupe definitely is. He feels we need to be welcoming those situations, and encourage families, children and dogs at these events. There are other options that need to be considered as well.

In the past, his children loved going to the skating center. They were picked up on the bus and taken to the skate center which worked out well for working parents. Now that it has closed, we need to come up with some fresh ideas that will benefit the children in the community.

Councilman Brooks understands the concern about the increase in fees of these programs. He recalled years ago there was a mens basketball league who used the schools at no charge. Little league used the schools without paying rent either.

Mr. Dennehy announced the City is currently paying \$35,000 a year to Boys and Girls Club for only a few events. He feels that is a lot of money in addition to the fact we are actually competing with a number of planned activities at that facility. For example, the Boys and Girls Club offers basketball four times a year. He feels they are almost flooding that market as a result. He noted that the Parks and Recreation program is \$50 a year and the player is provided with a shirt, shorts and socks. He would like to offer these programs to other age groups but they have a real challenge because of the school teams/sports. There is also a semi-pro team that plays on Sundays according to the P&R Director.

Councilman Mergner suggested Mr. Dennehy collaborate with the School District Superintendent for some use of their gymnasiums.

Councilwoman Wilson noted that she was a member of the original Boys and Girls Club. She is aware of children, including her grandchildren, that cannot afford to attend their activities because of the high fee.

The consensus of members of both committees was to move forward with the plans.

There being no other business, Mayor Shupe adjourned the meeting at 7:12 p.m..

Respectfully submitted,



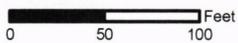
Terri K. Hudson, MMC
City Clerk/Transcriber

cc: Revised LWCF & DTF Map Conversion Plan



EXHIBIT 9 - REVISED LWCF & DTF MAP
City of Milford - 6(f) Conversion Proposal

Source: City of Milford Planning Dept.



City of Milford
 Planning Department

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