

MINUTES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
COMMITTEE MEMBERS PARTICIPATED REMOTELY VIA ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE
CITY STAFF PARTICIPATED FROM THE CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
May 13, 2020 @ 3:30pm

Committee Members present: Councilor Martin P. Dumont, Sr., Chair
 Councilor Richard Michaud, Vice Chair
 Councilor Crystal Paradis

Administration/Staff present: Bob Belmore, City Manager
 Scott Smith, Deputy Manager/Finance Director
 Shanna Saunders, Director of Development Services
 Dana Crossley, Planning Secretary

Other: Richard Brooks, Resident – attended in Chambers

Chairman Dumont called the meeting to order at 3:30 pm.

Chairman Dumont stated due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor and in accordance with the Governor’s Emergency Order#12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, this public body is authorized to meet electronically. This meeting will be held via Zoom online platform. The public is asked to submit comments via email to tharris@somersworth.com or bbelmore@somersworth.com. Comments must be received by Wednesday, May 13, 2020 at 12 noon. The public can access the meeting and listen live by telephoning any of the numbers posted on the agenda.

Chairman Dumont stated that all votes will be taken by a roll call vote.

Roll call attendance was taken, Councilors Dumont, Michaud and Paradis were present and by themselves.

City Manager Belmore stated who was present in Council Chambers which is noted above.

APPROVE MINUTES

Motion made by Councilor Michaud, seconded by Councilor Paradis, to accept the minutes of the January 21, 2020 meeting as presented, Motion passed 3-0 by roll call vote.

FORMER POLICE STATION PURCHASE PROPOSAL

City Manager Belmore stated that Micah Tasker, of Milton NH, is interested in purchasing the Old Police Station located at 5 Main Street. He stated Tasker has been meeting with himself, Director Saunders, and Economic Development Manager Robin Comstock to discuss his interest and intent for the building. He stated Tasker has submitted a letter that outlines his proposal for the building. He stated that Tasker intends to remodel the upstairs of the building for his personal family residence and use the first floor for his vintage watch repair business. City Manager Belmore explained that the proposal states Tasker plans to restore the windows in the front of the building and maintain the existing holding cells to be reused for a secure storage area for his business. He stated Tasker is interested in establishing a brick and mortar for his business and as the President of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors Chapter #87 he hopes to hold meetings and workshops.

City Manager Belmore stated that Tasker is offering the City \$60,000 for the former Police Station with the following conditions:

- *The City would complete the environmental remediation within 6 months of signing an agreement;*

- *The City would remove the radio tower from the roof within 6 months of signing an agreement;*
- *The City will provide clear and marketable title to the property at the time of transfer;*
- *The City will return the jail cell doors that are currently in storage to the building at the time of transfer; and*
- *The City will use the \$60,000 sale price as the assessment for property taxes for a minimum of 5 years from the date of completion of the first floor renovations (date of occupancy permit).*

City Manager Belmore stated Tasker has submitted a \$1,000 down payment. He stated when the City sells property, they do so in the form of a Quitclaim Deed. He stated the jail doors are stored off site currently and would not be an issue to return to the building. He stated they would need to have further discussion with Tasker on his proposal and explain that the City would need more time than 6 months for the environmental remediation.

City Manager Belmore reviewed the property record card with the Committee, explained the drop in assessment is due to the building being gutted.

Councilor Paradis asked for clarification on how many business units will be within the building. City Manager Belmore stated the letter states there would be 2-3 retail spaces and it could be clarified with Tasker and made part of the counter offer if it is of concern.

Councilor Paradis stated she likes that there is interest from Tasker's current clients for a brick and mortar business location. She stated she also likes that he intends to hold meetings there as well and that it will enhance foot traffic to downtown. She stated it would be a positive for economic development.

Councilor Michaud questioned if the building was still being offered to purchase the building for a dollar.

City Manager Belmore explained the history of a previous sale of the building. He stated it was purchased by a software company who gutted the building and when they decided to sell it, the City purchased it back. He explained they have had some offers in the past but Council did not accept those. He stated the building was built in the 1950's and has been empty for the past 10-12 years.

Chairman Dumont stated he has concerns about the presented conditions. He stated in particular the City's obligation for the environmental remediation.

City Manager Belmore at this time there is no planned funding for the remediation and they would need to reply with a counter offer for more time on that subject matter. He stated when they had gotten an estimate in the past it was about \$50,000-\$75,000 for the remediation.

Chairman Dumont asked if the radio tower is still active. City Manager Belmore stated no it is dormant.

Chairman Dumont stated he has concerns with the proposed sale price. He stated he felt with the remediation that needs to be done, it would be like paying the buyer \$15,000 for the property.

There was a brief discussion on the assessed value of the building and potential for the Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive to be applied for.

Councilor Paradis stated it would be good to see the building re-developed. She stated she is interested in if there are other proposals out there but if this is the only proposal it is better than a vacant building.

The Committee discussed their concern of selling the property for a low figure with the cost of the environmental remediation being the responsibility of the City.

Councilor Dumont stated he agrees with the City Manager that there should be some negotiation on the offer. He asked what the next steps for this committee would be.

City Manager Belmore stated it is the preference of the committee. He stated he would be happy to meet with Tasker and discuss the Committee's concerns with him.

Councilor Paradis stated she would also like further clarification on the minimum of 5 years from the date of completion of the first floor renovations (date of occupancy permit).

City Manager Belmore stated they will also clarify how many retail spaces are being proposed.

There was a brief discussion of the zoning for the area. The Committee concluded they would like to see at least 2 retail spaces in the building.

Chairman Dumont stated they will have staff return to this Committee next month to report on the counter offer discussions.

FORM BASED CODES

City Manager Belmore stated the Committee has been provided a revised copy of the Form Based Codes that reflects the comments from the last meeting.

Director Saunders addressed some of the questions that were brought up at the last meeting and changes to the documents. She stated that a maximum building height has been added to all of the areas except for area 5. She stated at this time in the Zoning Ordinance there is no maximum height in the Business or Mill yard District.

Director Saunders explained that the front primary build to line and the secondary build to line has been clarified on the chart. She noted that the language that informs the applicant to look at the Historic District Ordinance has changed from 'should' to 'shall'.

Director Saunders thanked Councilor Paradis for catching that the page number for the HDC ordinance needed to be updated. She stated that has been done to correctly direct to that ordinance.

Director Saunders stated the neighborhood market has been added for area 4. She stated for area 5 the live work space, that has shown to be successful, has also been added.

Director Saunders explained the public art and brick requirements for area 5. She stated that currently in the Mill yard, the existing buildings, excluding the GE building, are between 2-5 stories. She stated that is why the minimum height for a new building is 4 stories, but does not prevent a 5 story building going in.

Councilor Paradis thanked the Director for addressing the questions. She inquired if there was a defined maximum height for areas 2, 3 and 4.

Director Saunders stated it is not. She explained that in the underlying zone there is no height restriction either.

City Manager Belmore stated this can be shared with the Planning Board at their next meeting and sent to the Council for first read if the Committee thinks it is ready.

Councilor Paradis asked if the Form Based Codes will be retroactively enforceable. City Manager Belmore stated no, once adopted it would become effective from then forward. He stated everything that exists previously would become grandfathered.

Motion made by Councilor Michaud, seconded by Councilor Paradis to send the Form Based Codes to City Council as an Zoning Ordinance Amendment. The motion passed by roll call vote of 3-0.

PLAZA SIGNAGE STANDARDS

City Manager Belmore reviewed the updated sign ordinance with specifications for the Somersworth Plaza with changes recommended by the Committee at their last meeting. One recommendation was that sign permits that are submitted for the Plaza be required to receive final approval by the EDC. He reviewed details of the signage requirements.

Councilor Paradis inquired about the 10% guideline.

Director Saunders stated the 10% requirement is from the existing ordinance and noted where the new language started.

Chairman Dumont stated he had no comments or concerns.

Councilor Michaud stated he is fine with the proposal and thinks the Director has presented an excellent draft.

There was a brief discussion on who the approving agent would be, and the consensus of the committee is approval should go through the Economic Development Committee.

Motion made by Councilor Paradis, seconded by Councilor Michaud to send the Plaza Signage Standards to City Council as a Zoning Amendment to the Sign provision. The motion passed by roll call vote of 3-0.

MISC

City Manager Belmore stated with the Stay At Home Order 2.0 from the Governor, restaurants are going to start opening with outdoor seating. He informed the Committee of the work City Staff has been doing to assist local restaurants with this matter.

Chairman Dumont inquired if when things go back to normal the outdoor seating approval will be rescinded.

City Manager Belmore stated yes and if they wanted to keep the seating it would require site plan approval.

Councilor Paradis asked if a restaurant that has outdoor seating needs additional approval before opening.

City Manager Belmore stated they can re-open following the guidelines without City approval to use their already approved outdoor seating.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Councilor Michaud, seconded by Councilor Paradis to adjourn the meeting at 4:27 pm. Motion passed, 3-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Dana Crossley, Planning Secretary