SPECIAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

The Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee Meeting was held on August 26, 2014, at 5:30 p.m. with Chairman Dixon presiding. Members present were Mr. Hutchison, Mr. Anderson (arrived at 5:32 p.m.), Mr. Caldwell, and Mrs. Horsey. Mayor Christiansen was also present.

AGENDA ADDITIONS/DELETIONS

Councilman Hutchison moved for approval of the agenda, seconded by Mrs. Horsey and unanimously carried.

Downtown Development District Boundary

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, advised members that the Delaware General Assembly enacted the Downtown Development District Act in June 2014 and that under this law, the Governor will designate three (3) Downtown Development Districts in the first round of designations, one from each county. Mrs. Townshend explained that development projects within designated districts will be eligible for a 20% rebate for project costs over $25,000 and that Dover is well positioned to submit a successful application for Downtown Development District designation because of the number of redevelopment incentives in place. In addition, Dover has two master plan documents that complement each other in support of revitalizing the downtown area. Mrs. Townshend noted that, within the designated development districts, Dover offers preferential treatment for other State programs, such as the Housing Development Fund and the Delaware Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program, and works with State agencies in this regard.

Referring to the "Proposed Downtown Development District" map previously provided to members, Mrs. Townshend explained that, under the program application guidelines, Downtown Development Districts are limited to 225 acres in size. She noted that Planning Office and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) staff worked together to develop a proposed 220-acre district within the Downtown Redevelopment Target Area defined in code. She stated that once a boundary is determined, staff would compile data based on the determined boundary and complete the Downtown Development District application, noting that the application deadline is November 1, 2014.

Mrs. Townshend advised members that the boundaries were set as shown on the map because the primary purpose of the bill enacted by the General Assembly was to foster private investment in the downtown areas; therefore, boundaries were focused on the downtown areas and would exclude Wesley College, BayHealth Medical Center, and State offices.

Mrs. Townshend stated that applications would be evaluated based on three (3) criteria. The first 50% of the application was based on need and impact, which includes information such as the percentage of properties that are rental or vacant, age of structures, poverty rate, median home value, etc. The second criteria, which is 30% of the application, is the district plan, which would include a combination of the City of Dover Comprehensive Plan, the Transit Center Neighborhood Plan

completed by the Dover/Kent County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Downtown Dover Partnership (DDP), and the Restoring Central Dover Plan. The third criteria, which comprises 20% of the application, includes a summary of local incentives.

Staff recommended that the Committee endorse the proposed Downtown Development District Boundary and recommend that City Council accept the boundary.

Responding to Mr. Hutchison regarding those involved in developing the boundaries, Mrs. Townshend advised members that the planning staff and the City's GIS technician worked together to determine downtown redevelopment target area. She indicated that originally only 175 acres were to be within the boundary; however, based on feedback from Dover and Wilmington, the State increased the boundary to include 225 acres. Mrs. Townshend stated that once the options were established, the City Manager was also consulted to determine the proposed boundary.

In response to Mr. Caldwell regarding local incentives offered by the City, Mrs. Townshend stated that a number of incentives were included in the City's Code, including a waiver of building permit fees, abatement of taxes based on value of improvement for a period of ten years, and a waiver of city's impact fees for multi-story mixed use construction. She indicated that staff had also discussed the possibility of additional County incentives with Kent County.

Responding to Mr. Anderson regarding the boundary in the West and Queen Street areas, Mrs. Townshend explained the boundary line "dips down" at that location to incorporate two (2) parcels that are the proposed location of a transit center and a Transit Center Neighborhood Plan. She explained that it was hoped that a transit center could developed through public/private partnership and that the R.E. Michel site at 550 South Queen Street had the potential for redevelopment.

In response to Mr. Dixon's concerns regarding possible conflicts with the proposed boundary, Mrs. Townshend stated that the Restoring Central Dover Plan would be part of the Downtown Dover Development District and there would be no conflict with National Council on Life and Labor (NCALL) efforts.

Ms. Yvonne Hall, 228 N. State Street, State Street Inn, expressed her feeling that it was embarrassing to her when guests come from out of town or out of the country on the Greyhound bus and are dropped off at an auto transmission business with no covered area and no place to go. She stated that visitors do not realize the distance between the bus stop and their destination. Ms. Hall also inquired as to the types of incentives that are set aside for housing, sharing her opinion that the City needs more home ownership and not rentals.

Responding to Ms. Hall, Mrs. Townshend stated that potential plans are in place for a building at the transit center and that if a public/private partnership could be established to locate a building there, including a ticket sales center, this would resolve the issue. Regarding housing, Mrs. Townshend

advised that incentives are contained within the Restoring Central Dover Initiative, which would assist in promoting home ownership. Mrs. Townshend stated that 75% of housing units in the target area are currently rentals and that one (1) of the incentives of the Positive Development Working Group - Restoring Central Dover Initiative includes tax abatement for owner-occupied housing in the downtown area. In addition, she indicated that the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program provides down payment assistance and may be combined with housing rehabilitation efforts as well.

Mayor Christiansen noted that meetings had taken place with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regarding allowing Section 8 housing residents to be eligible to become homeowners, noting that 51% of available City housing is owner occupied. Mayor Christiansen stated that Ms. Ami Sebastian-Hauer, Executive Director, Dover Housing Authority, is also involved with the Positive Development Housing Working Group and said they are looking at combining available tools with down payment assistance to promote home ownership.

Mr. Reuben Salters, 109 Bertrand Drive, recalled discussing this topic 25 years ago when he was on Council and shared his opinion that the City needs to hold landlords accountable and responsible for the condition of the houses they rent and enforce the City's Code, which would improve quality of housing. Mr. Salters stated that many rental costs are higher than mortgages and the homes are in poor condition because the landlords are not being held accountable to the standards for maintaining their property. He suggested including lighting, street scape, and parks as vital parts of redevelopment. In addition, Mr. Salters noted that when implementing programs or changes, the City always start east and works to the west and felt the City should start working west and move eastward. Lastly, Mr. Salters shared his belief that the City needs to continue to have a full-time mayor.

Mr. Greg Moore, President, DDP, stated that Mr. Bill Neaton, Executive Director, DDP, also helped to prepare the map outlining the boundary for the Downtown Development District and planned to provide an update to the DDP Board in September. Mr. Moore expressed full support of the outlined boundary.

Ms. Yvonne Hall shared her feeling that DDP meetings should include realtors, who can help people obtain the loans they need for homes, instead of only including developers.

Mr. Hutchison moved to recommend endorsement of the proposed Downtown Development District Boundary as presented, seconded by Mr. Anderson and unanimously carried.

Capital Holiday Celebration (Tree Lighting) Location

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, advised members that the purpose of this agenda item was to obtain public input on the City of Dover's Annual Capital Holiday Tree Lighting Celebration. She stated that, historically, the ceremony included Caroling on the Green and the Festival of Lights, which were held on two (2) different nights in two (2) locations. She explained that four (4) years ago, the two (2) events were merged and last year a decision was made to move the tree lighting from in front of City Hall to Loockerman Way Plaza in an effort to incorporate downtown business merchants. Mrs. Townshend stated that a great deal of feedback was

received, some of which was positive and some negative, including concerns about the electric supply, availability of public facilities, the location being closer to local bars, and the desertion of a longstanding tradition. Due to the varied responses and in preparation for this year's ceremony, the Capital Holiday Celebration Committee decided that the best way to determine what the public wanted was to invite the public to comment. Mrs. Townshend noted that, historically, the City partnered with the Central Delaware Chamber of Commerce (CDCC) for the event and felt that this should continue to do so if an agreement could be reached as to the location and how the downtown Dover merchants could be included.

Mr. Thomas Smith, 126 Hampton Drive, stated that in 1988 he was the President of Downtown Dover Business Association, which started the tree lighting ceremony because the downtown merchants wanted to give something back to the City for its support. He informed members that the first tree lighting ceremony was held in front of City Hall and schools brought children to sing, Santa Claus was present, and it was a great family event. Mr. Smith said that over the years some changes were made, including moving to the Wesley Church Fellowship Hall with tables displaying what the area businesses had done. This was not done for the purpose of selling because it was decided not to "push retail" in an effort to keep the event family oriented. Mr. Smith felt it was best to hold the event in front of City Hall.

Mrs. Cindy Christiansen, 714 Carol Street, stated that, as a family tradition, she had attended every tree lighting ceremony, beginning as a child. Last year when she attended with her family, she was unaware the event had moved and was "left wondering" what had happened to the event, along with many others, including dancers scheduled to perform, until they were directed to the location of the ceremony downtown. Mrs. Christiansen stated, with all of the beautiful trees outside of City Hall, that she was very upset to see the tree that was representing the City for the tree lighting ceremony. In addition, Mrs. Christiansen expressed her disappointment at not being able to hear the children singing Christmas carols at the new location, nor could she see them due to the placement of the hot chocolate truck that was blocking the children. She felt that other alternatives could be considered to include the downtown businesses without moving the whole ceremony and suggested having Santa Claus arrive in front of City Hall and go by carriage to his house in the business area, and everyone could follow, singing carols. Mrs. Christiansen implored Council not to break a beautiful tradition, and stated opposition to trying to fix something that wasn't broken. She indicated that many people that came statewide last year left disappointed as a result of the changes that were made to the ceremony.

Mr. Zachery Carter, 248 Mifflin Road, former City of Dover Director of Parks and Recreation, stated that the tree lighting ceremony was a tradition, like many events in Dover, such as the Maypole Dancing on the Green and the Old Dover Days Parade. He noted that the event kicked off the holiday season and provided a family tradition for adults, children, parents, grandparents, and families, to come out and see the trees and lights together. Mr. Carter said the original tree still stands outside of City Hall and shared his feeling that the tradition should continue there.

Mr. Jim Thistlewood, 455 E. Loockerman Street, Wesley Methodist Church and Preschool, stated that, upon finding out about the change in plans for the Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, he met with Ms. Tonda Parks, Vice-President of Advertising and Development, Delaware State News, and

Ms. Judy Diogo, President, CDCC. Mr. Thistlewood said that Wesley Church typically participates in the festivities and presents a live nativity and preschool students who sing Christmas carols. Mr. Thistlewood stated that last year they were unable to participate as they had done in the past because they could not move the live nativity and the preschool was not comfortable taking children through the downtown area to the new location. Referring to Mr. Thomas Smith's comments regarding having used the Wesley Church Fellowship Hall in previous years, he suggested that this might be good alternative that would allow businesses an opportunity to show their wares. He felt that the City should keep the tradition of having the ceremony in front of City Hall, which would allow the church and the preschool to continue to participate and contribute to the celebration.

Mr. Reuben Salters, 109 Bertrand Drive, expressed happiness hearing the unanimous voice of the City to get back to tradition of having the tree lighting ceremony in front of City Hall, stating that for 22 years he sang out in the cold, sometimes in the rain, with his family, kids, and grandkids. He always thoroughly enjoyed the event, noting that it was a festive time, and he felt it was important to stick to something that is solid and that everyone agreed upon.

Ms. Tonda Parks stated that she participated on the planning committee for the Capital Holiday Celebration, which was a combined effort of the CDCC, the City of Dover, and the DDP and that she was speaking as a member of this committee. She explained that part of reason the location was changed last year was in response to the businesses in downtown Dover, who expressed the desire to see more pedestrian traffic downtown surrounding the event. As a resident, Ms. Parks said she was offended by Mr. Thistlewood's comment that children were afraid to walk a block away from City Hall and that this prevented them from participating last year. Ms. Parks indicated that another part of the agenda of the Capital Holiday Celebration was to engage the community and make people feel more comfortable and welcome in the downtown area and to build a sense of community and inclusiveness. She stated that people on the west end of the City felt excluded, and the DDP indicated their awareness of this, noting that Dover Days activities did include all of the City. Ms. Parks thanked the Mayor for attending the Downtown Dover Merchants meetings and stated that, based on some of the discussions he presented, the merchants seemed happy with potential relocation back to City Hall. However, they indicated that they would like to see more work done to be more inclusive, incorporating the arrival of Santa at Loockerman Way Plaza and heading east to include the downtown businesses and the entire City.

Ms. Paula Kinsey, owner, Tea for Two, 224 N. State Street, shared her opinion that downtown Dover was utter chaos during the tree lighting ceremony last year, noting issues with electricity, failure of those involved to work well together, and the receipt of negative comments. Ms. Kinsey suggested moving the ceremony to another night for the downtown merchants and continuing to have the ceremony and the lights in front of City Hall in accordance with tradition. Ms. Kinsey also pointed out that the tree lighting ceremony is held on Monday, which is a school night, which makes it difficult for parents to take time to patronize the local businesses. She also suggested that a farmers market type scenario be considered to include the merchants and draw people together.

Mr. Thistlewood echoed Ms. Kinsey's suggestion and suggested having the Christmas Parade on a Saturday, allowing for more time and incorporating local merchants.

Ms. Madison Christiansen, 714 Carol Street, Dover, said she has always gone to the tree lighting and enjoyed the singing and the countdown to the tree lighting, noting a memory of when the lights didn't light on the first try but did seem magical when they lit up on the second try. She indicated that she didn't stay for the tree lighting last year because it wasn't real, it wasn't tradition, and it lost its beauty and magic. She felt that the event felt "fake"and, with all of the things in the world that are materialistic and fake, that it would be nice to look at "something real and magical."

Mr. Harold King, 378 Kentwood Avenue, shared his feeling that there was no better place for the tree lighting ceremony than in front of City Hall. He agreed that last year was fake and had no sense of tradition or Christmas. He said his family looked forward to the ceremony every year but last year they were not interested and cautioned against Capital of the First State losing that sense of tradition. He requested that the ceremony be kept in front of City Hall and not next to a bar down the street.

Mr. Sean Christiansen, 216 N. Caroline Place, said that the Christmas tree lighting ceremony was a family affair based on tradition. He stated that he had been a City resident for 36 years and was a taxpayer and a registered voter. Mr. Christiansen said that he had a special bond with the tree lighting ceremony because used to drive Santa Claus in the fire truck and drop him off at his house when he was in the Dover Fire Department. Mr. Christiansen said that, in 1923, on the grounds of the White House, President Coolidge lit the first National Christmas tree and, 91 years later, that tree still stands. He said that in 1931 workers who were building 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York decorated a 20-foot tree with cranberries, tin cans, and garlands made out of paper in celebration of Christmas and, 82 years later, the tree still stands and its lighting is the official start to the holiday season. Mr. Christiansen stated he agreed with incorporating downtown Dover and that Mr. Neaton had done a great job with the Home for the Holidays Parade and other events that benefit the downtown merchants; however, he felt that the tree in front of City Hall is the City's tree, the hub of the City, and is where the tree lighting ceremony should continue to be held.

Mr. Christiansen questioned Mrs. Townshend regarding the inadequate electricity last year at the downtown ceremony and the cost involved to ensure adequate electric supply, should they continue having the ceremony at that location. Responding, Mrs. Townshend stated that the cost for electricity was approximately $4,000, assuming no complications, but could soar to $10,000 - $15,000 should they run into any difficulties when boring the lines for the electricity. Mr. Christiansen pointed out that adequate electricity is already available in front of City Hall at no additional expense and asked, for the sake of tradition and for the purpose of being financially responsible, that the ceremony be held in front of City Hall.

Mayor Christiansen thanked Ms. Parks for her presentation and for her efforts concerning the tree lighting ceremony, noting that new things are not always accepted very readily, and recognizing the importance of tradition. In addition, Mayor Christiansen addressed some of the other comments that were made, recognizing the efforts of those who volunteered in the community, and stating that because of those efforts, the City had the ability to expand on the traditional lighting by incorporating the entire length of the business district. Mayor Christiansen challenged the downtown area to hold a window decorating contest to bring people downtown to enjoy the decorations, starting with the tree lighting in front of City Hall.

Mr. Dixon thanked everyone for attending and sharing their thoughts.

Mr. Anderson moved to recommend that the traditional location at City Hall be restored and encouraged the Committee to continue efforts to include the downtown merchants, seconded by Mr. Hutchison and unanimously carried.

Mr. Hutchison moved for adjournment, seconded by Mr. Anderson and unanimously carried.

Meeting adjourned at 6:32 p.m.

Wallace R. Dixon
Chairman

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