



Minutes - Final

Community and Economic Development Committee

Wednesday, February 8, 2023

6:45 PM

Roll Call: Chair Mota, Napoli, Affa

Present: 1 - Cynthia Mota

CD Priorities/Updates

Issues the Committee Members have suggested reviewing at meeting or future meetings:

Business Development/Outreach

Historic District Education/Outreach

Time Frame for Zoning Update

Set aside future meeting to review housing stock/rental inspection findings

Housing Study time frame

Ms. Candida Affa gave the purpose of the Community and Economic Development meeting to learn about the general structure and priorities.

Ms. Vicky Kistler handed committee members items and asked what they four items have in common. She stated that every one of those items were made in Allentown. She stated that one of the goals of the Business Expansion Attraction and Retention program is going to be to highlight these projects. You can promote businesses by encouraging people to buy in Allentown. All of these businesses need our help. She talked about the Historic District education and outreach. The majority of HARB issues that come before Council are people doing work without permits. She talked about the Zoning rewrite and Zoning 101 coming up. They are hoping to create an ordinance that the majority of people happy with the Zoning rewrite. She talked about inspections and the housing study. She stated that the city does not have a handle on housing. With the paper-based system, it is hard to say what units have been inspected in the last five years. She talked about Intergov and they are working backwards. They are writing the Standard Operating Procedures. They are implementing all of it at once. All the departments can work simultaneously. She talked about the city doing a Housing Study as part of Allentown Vision 2030. They have 17 open positions. Between Public Works and Community and Economic Development, there are 35 open positions. The goals are to fill the positions, get the Housing Study done, get the Zoning rewrite underway, get the Community Health and Assessment launched, prepare

and leverage for additional monies to the city. They need to bring in more state and federal dollars coming into the city on how to attack housing. The city has to convert to Intergov.

Ms. Candida Affa stated to Ms. Kistler it has to be one of the best presentations that Council had. It has been a long time since they were able to be this knowledgeable. She stated that it is overwhelming.

Mr. Santo Napoli talked about outreach. He stated that he has many friends who owns small businesses, and they speak very highly of Dan Diaz. Whatever he is doing, make sure he continues to do it. He is doing a great job in the community. He picked a place in Old Allentown, and he received a flyer saying you are in the HARB. That was very interesting. Working in that way to educate people is really important. He asked about staffing and the underline issues.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that there are several underline issues. There is a national shortage of building inspectors. When it comes to what is keeping the city from filling positions, it is a four-prog thing. National shortages of talented people make the market pay those people so much more than the city can afford to pay. There has been a reputation in this department that you can bid into and not do work. With a paper-based system it is hard to reward the people who overextend themselves and then know the people that don't. They are looking at implementing performance-based measures. These aren't easy jobs.

Mr. Santo Napoli stated that in Catasauqua they inspected a property of his and they came from Barry Issett. When it comes to salaries, it is too inexpensive to business now. This is the cheapest place to have rentals.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that is part of our problem because now we are being stretched thin.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that one of the things that they also recognized is it is a workforce development thing. It is not a short-term solution. They are trying to organize things so that there are growth opportunities and career paths within the city.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks offered a complement and stated that the 1800 block of Tilghman Street, they are finally moving on that and it is coming along very well.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that was held up in litigation. That was a lawsuit between the buyer and the seller. She went past it again to make sure.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated that when you are doing the housing stock, and is a question he posed. Risk looked at it and decided they were not the bureau to be looking into it. Along with houses, churches in the city. How many churches are now vacant?

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that she knows that they are seeing changes of use with some of the properties. The Health Department is the recipient of a large Workforce Development Grant. She talked about a community needs assessment. The hospitals do them. The city is doing it differently by quadrant of the city.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated that it is great to hear that there is an actual effort to try to reverse the current stats of how many Allentown residents actually work in Allentown. She asked if the Workforce Investment Board willing to do that data piece.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that she has a ton of partners with a ton of data. They need to pull that data together. She wants to see the data sharing happening.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach asked about affordable housing projects that are trying to continue to get money and keep going. Is there is an amount of what they need?

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that they are cautious of adding them all together.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that the Community Health Needs Assessment and the Housing Analysis part of that is going to do is to pull all that local data together and synthesize it and spit it out in a format that's usable and actionable.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated that in 2021, 80 percent of the jobs are held by non-Allentown residents. In 2025, 70 percent.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that the city gets a lot of data from earned income tax. Where they fail is that recruitment of city jobs is a challenge because of roadblocks (transportation, childcare, outside the city's ability to fix).

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated with affordable housing, she remembers at a prior meeting Ms. Kistler said there was a number of affordable housing projects that are trying to continue to get money and keep going. She asked do we know without naming all of them, is there amount that if you were to add them all together what they would need.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that they are cautious about adding them all together because of the fact that some of them are way premature in their plans.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that one of the things he is trying to get across from folks regarding funding is to make sure your project is shovel ready.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach asked what is the difference between a Nexus Study and a Housing Study.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that he does not know what a Nexus Study is.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that they will research it and get back her.

Mr. Santo Napoli asked about some of the developers coming to you and using income tax credits from the federal government.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that some are and honestly those projects are much more attractive to invest in. We have some work to do. The one project they are excited about is the tax credit project that has its award.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that she is hitting on another issue that they have to address as a city. The citizens who qualify are not claiming their child tax credits or their earned income tax credits. The city is going to launch more information on tax credits, so they don't go unclaimed.

Ms. Candida Affa stated that she would like to make a comment and hit on what Mr. Hendricks talked about the abandoned churches or warehouses. She stated that when Courtney Robinson was here, he tried to pass something about all vacant buildings had to be secured and insured after the Hyman fire. Who owns these churches?

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that she is not sure. She has to do some research on churches. This is the first conversation she is having on church properties. When it comes to vacant properties, the city does have an emergency boarding contract.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated to maintain a registry like that is one kind of voluntary.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated maybe the city can put the ownness on the insurance company.

Ms. Candida Affa stated that if they can somehow get the high school students to have a job as soon as they get out and continue their education.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that they are exploring that. The issue is the union bidding process.

Ms. Candida Affa stated that Ms. Kistler talked about having housing inspectors being promoted to building inspectors. How is that working? She asked about the points system working?

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated it hasn't totally come to fruition yet.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that program has not been implemented. The city needs people so that the managers can write the ordinance changes.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that they need to go out and assess the properties and determine who the landlords are and create the tiers.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that they will get smarter and more strategic about how they do enforcement. This will change.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that Council needs to be prepared because when they launch Intergov, there will be a lot of complaints. They were offered from a film developer willing to donate his services of once they have the whole process underway that they can tape a series of instructional videos that can talk people through the process both in Spanish and in English.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated with Intergov, they are now at a point where they need to spend more time in testing the system. Starting next week, every Wednesday, they are going to be shutting the counter on the third and fourth floor to dedicate the resources to getting this launched.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that they are promoting that on the website. They are sending that out with the rental bills. They are publicizing it with every mailing going out so that people don't come in. They can still pay their taxes and do their business privilege and do the first and second floors. It is just that Wednesday everyone is going to be in training.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated Council will be there for any assistance they need in that process.

Adjournment: 8:02 PM