



Minutes - Final

Community and Economic Development Committee

Tuesday, February 13, 2018

6:00 PM

Call to Order: Chairperson Robinson, Affa, Guridy

Present: 3 - Courtney Robinson, Candida Affa and Daryl Hendricks

Excused: 1 - Julio Guridy

Discussion:

In an attempt to be proactive, the Community and Economic Committee is looking for issues/concerns the committee can take up during the course of the year. We are attempting to seek guidance from residents, city staff and vested interests in the community to both create a list of items to be explored and a prioritization of those items. We plan to create a list and then prioritize the list. If you are not able to make the meeting, please email the City Clerk with issues you would like explored (michael.hanlon@allentownpa.gov). We plan to develop an on-line survey and discussion forum in the near future.

CEDC Priorities - possible priorities for discussion:

Quality of Life Issues - disruptive conduct, noise, litter, weeds, etc.

Business Retention/ Development/Streamlining Business Permit Procedures

Affordable Housing

Housing/Inspections

Comprehensive Plan/Zoning

Neighborhood /Community Group Development

Economic Development

Public Transportation

Public Health Issues

Opportunities for Partnering with other 'agencies'

Ad Hoc Committee Suggestions

Mr. Courtney Robinson thanked everyone for being there and stated that the committee is himself, Ms. Affa and Mr. Guridy. He thanked Mr. Hendricks for attending the meeting. He stated that they are looking at strategy for economic and community development. The purpose is to look

at ways in which this committee can be investigating better and best practices in forms of economic and community development. We have to worry about our neighborhood and our community. We have thriving community groups and how we can support them and reactive them. We are going to look at reactivating examining an issue and developing a strategy over the course of an entire calendar year. We have a supreme issue when it comes to blighted property and promoting housing. Not just affordable housing, but housing strategy. Better ways we can deal with building standard issues, historic neighborhoods and new construction and come up with a comprehensive strategy.

Ms. Candida Affa stated that looking at the agenda she is interested in quality of life with the Disruptive Conduct. She agrees with Mr. Robinson with the housing and inspections. These are things that she will work hard on. We have one person that will be evicted after a three time thing. This is important.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated that as a lifelong resident of the city and a police officer for almost 40 years, quality of life is important. He is always interested in working with all the crime watch groups in the city. There are all great issues and issues that he feels is extremely important. The housing issues expanding within the community and economic development and more employees. The employees are overworked and overburdened and we need to move forward with all the good that is happening here with the NIZ Zone. We will be moving forward with the waterfront development.

Mr. Courtney Robinson stated that unfortunately Mr. Lightner is not here. Is there anyone from the department who would like to talk about some of the issues.

Mr. Dan Diaz stated that Mr. Lightner has a conflict and would have definitely liked to be here. Unfortunately, he was unable to do so. He sent us on his behalf to listen to some of the concerns and the priorities.

Mr. Courtney Robinson thanked Mr. Dias.

Mr. Don Bernhardt, 621 N. Glenwood Street, Executive Director of Downtown Allentown Community Development Initiative and Co-Chair of Upside Allentown, stated that with housing and neighborhood improvement it is important to maintain a Comprehensive Strategy. If you don't have companion programs on many fronts, or an economic development/workforce development strategy. If you don't enhance the prosperity of the neighborhood to maintain and with some public infrastructure improvements and improvement in the school district is

important. The school district had its peaks and valleys. CACLV has quarterly classes for homeownership with about 100 people and the last one of those classes, Mr. Alan Jennings went to an exit interview of a class of 100 and 50 of the 100 were existing renters in Allentown and he asked how many are contemplating buying a house in Allentown. Out of the 100 people, the answer was zero. The predominate answer was that they did not want to send their children to the schools. Code Enforcement is a core piece of a neighborhood strategy. There is a contract fund with the city with CACLV and HADC to make some grants and low interest loans to property owners. Upside Allentown and a number of staff people and nonprofit did a tour of Center City. It is important with the limited resources you have really tightly defined target area a block at a time. Downtown Allentown, particularly center city Allentown is a pretty big place. With infrastructure, the city did a good job with street lighting and street trees. He stated the importance of a Comprehensive Plan. The existing plan is the Upside Plan. Businesses are putting \$550,000 a year into that plan.

Mr. Charlie Theil, 22 S. 16th Street, stated that it is a great step in the right direction to create a Strategic Plan. He stated that in representing the School Board, as a blanket statement to City Council, we long to work collaboratively together between the School Board and City Council. We are in this together. We long to work and continue an open dialogue together. Something tangible is the new elementary school. He stated February 20th at 6:30 PM at Hope Community Church there will be an open forum. We want to hear from the community. There could be some great returns in targeting an area that will see an elementary school with whatever programs, incentives, and initiatives. There could be some force multipliers. Whatever we can do together to make a difference. We did intentionally make that a community elementary school by providing community services in the architectural plans. He encouraged Council to come to that meeting. In terms of a strategic plan, you will already have some leverage going into that community over the next few years with the new elementary school.

Mr. Adrian Shanker, Executive Director, Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Community Center - 522 W. Maple Street, stated that it is rare that City Council is able to make time for a broad strategy conversation. He argues that the city will be well served by not looking at what happened in the past, but how to create a broad vision that's different from the past. If we think about what is the population and what are they capable of supporting or having. He stated that he believes downtown Allentown deserves nice things too. We can work on the important and critical values on affordable housing, accessible public transportation and high quality of public health for citizens. If we only look at it one at a time we miss the opportunity to see the big picture of what Allentown could be. A strong economic

development strategy requires a focus on diverse communities, walkable neighborhoods, a culture of health and responding to public health challenges as they rise. Thinking about a demographic shift, stating he is not talking about gentrification. He talked about appropriately and adequately ensuring that the city is attractive to the next generation. There are other cities that have created this very well. Making the city of Allentown exciting to a recent college graduate who want to stay here. We will be right there with you to try to find solutions that could make this work possible and more available.

Mr. Peter Lewnes, Main Street - 7th Street, stated that he loves the initial conversation on the quality of life issues. He talked about double parked cars and to enforce the double parked cars ticketed. It would be amazing for the city of Allentown. The city has done a great job on adding pedestrian street lights in our neighborhoods. He wants them to take a look at the neighborhoods and Sixth Street is really dark and people really live here. How do we keep funneling money to the streetlight programs for our neighborhoods. He stated that it would be amazing to have a focused facade program for Gordon Street. It is a well traveled street. He stated that he would love to see Seventh Street finished and a facade program to run through the bridge. There are ways of dressing up the bridge. The first impression is formed when you come into the city. From an economic standpoint is a focused block by block and building by building. He talked about de-converting units to homes. he wants to see a game plan on buildings that outlived their purpose or renovation strategies. He talked about having a New York City bus on Seventh Street Transportation Terminal. He stated that he has been in Lancaster and Harrisburg and they have stormwater management mixed with streetscape. They ripped up their concrete and put in pavers that look beautiful and they help the stormwater abatement. He wants to tie into the stormwater management Seventh Street received streetlights. He would love to see an overall plan of street trees. The parking deck on the 500 block to have a Feasibility Study. B1R District had two craft brewers trying to open up on 7th Street and the Southside. It doesn't make sense that we are sending businesses away. Hopefully, we can open up a dialogue. We are turning away businesses. We have to catch up.

Ms. Mar Housler, 1406 Hamilton Street, stated that as a resident, a member of the West Park Civic Association, and Head of the Board to the YWCA the issue of after hours clubs and the one at 1101 Hamilton Street. She talked about the transport to New York, to Newark to western New Jersey. She uses Trans-Bridge bus depot and think if the city can pretty it up so if someone wants to use mass transit to Allentown their first impression is a positive one. There is an opportunity to link better to LANTA. She talked about marketing and shuttle buses. The parking there

is filled. She has been a full-time resident for six or seven years. She suggested a survey on how people are using the bus depot. As an alternative of going east or New York, they want to come to PPL Center and come west. They can think about how to enhance the ability for people to do that. She spoke about New Jersey and the inter-county public transportation. From a West Park Association, making it easier. There are inconsistencies with the HARB guidelines and people who are purchasing properties in the historic district and conflicting guidance or requirements of our building codes and the HARB guidelines. The other priorities are education that she would put high. There are empty nesters and millennials that are coming, but once the millennials become parents there will be an issue if we can't address the schools.

Mr. Jeff Barber, President of Lehigh Financial Group - 1244 W. Hamilton Street, thanked and echoed what everyone has said. We are here because we love our city. Our biggest challenge is our rental properties. He stated that he financed commercial buildings. He sees and does site visits. It is horrible with the landlords do to the properties. You are cramming more people in an area that was not intended. There is more wear and tear and infrastructure, more garbage with a strain to EMS, police and fire departments. Most of the blighted properties are rentals and not owner-occupied properties. Our properties will not go up on value. There are overcrowding in the schools and the school districts have to raise taxes. Harrisburg has never address the issues. People come here and they are transient. They may work cash jobs and don't pay taxes. A homeowner has a vested interest in this town. If they rent, they tend not to care. There is a property shortage in Lehigh Valley. We have more property buyers than we have homes right now. There is a major property shortage and not good properties on the market. He suggested to work with landlords that are not taking care of the properties and give them an incentive to sell and people an incentive to buy them. The de-conversion of multi-family is something we should focus on and work with the Lehigh Valley Realtor Association. He suggested waiving the transfer tax upon purchase and sale. The city of Philadelphia did a 10 year tax abatement. Focus on getting grants to families that want to move in and take a property from a three unit to a single family. Think about the facade program. Imagine what Seventh Street would look like without facades. You would not have 100 percent occupancies. There is not one available storefronts because they beautified Seventh Street. That was a labor of work and a lot of love. It has been by property, by property, by property. If we had a Housing Counselor or someone like Peter for the de-conversion of rental properties that will be a huge benefit from our community. He thanked the Committee and stated that he hopes something resolves from this. It will take time, but we are all here for the long-haul and want the city to be a better place for everybody.

Mr. William Green, 214 N. 8th Street - Executive Old of Old Allentown Preservation Association, stated that aesthetics matter to attract more diverse income groups and increase our revenues. We need more money for facades and rehabs and de-conversion projects. He stated that he has seen the little amount of money devoted to the residential area. It had a huge impact on Turner Street. It transformed that block. You had middle income people and a more modest incomes. The amount of money that was invested downtown is great. We love to see that. It is a feeling from the residents that the residential area has been neglected. It is very lopsided. Even if a tiny fraction of the money that was devoted to downtown could be brought for facades, rehabs, de-conversion. It has a huge impact. More trees can be placed where you have the shorter trees. More diverse income groups can bring in more revenue and bring in everyone from all income levels once you diversify. There is a carriage house on Gordon Street that is in disrepair and the city has ordered demolition orders and I find it to be a tragedy that the same amount of money that could be used to demolish the structure which the city has and it could be used for to repair the structure. Code Enforcement - On the 200 block of 8th Street there was a house that was recently sold allowed to be renting and there has been paint chipping on that building for years. It was allowed to be rented. The historic fence is leaning forward and ready to collapsed and put in the garbage. It has to be done in a systematic way not to allow this to happen. We see dilapidated properties, and properties in disrepair. Even something as simple as awnings adds to the aesthetic value of the area. We need to be strategic, not just pour money, but be strategic. Zoning - needs to be changed and more flexible. It is outrageous that there are businesses being denied to be started in our city. The kind of businesses that would attract more diverse income groups. Quality of Life - Litter and noise is a big deal. He stated that he is cleaning up his block on a daily basis and it is if he never cleaned it up. It needs to be addressed. The noise - he knows that the Allentown Police Department priority is preventing violence and addressing that and crime. These quality of life issues matter as well. There are resources available to address the noise and the litter.

Mr. Joe Calhoun, 313 N. 10th Street - Old Allentown, stated that he moved here from Philadelphia and does not have a car. He uses the inner city transit that was mentioned by Mar and Peter. It is depressing going there, It smells. It is dirty and when you get off the bus you are welcome to Allentown is a homeless camp on the steps off the Silk Mills. I moved here to work with the homeless. He stated that he cares, but it is not the best imagine. It feels unsafe when you arrive there. For much of the stretch it is dark and full of litter. You have dump tvs, and litter. Chew Street is filthy every week. Our neighborhood is so dirty. It is disappointing and put you

in a bad state of mind. There could be more trash cans. There could be fines. He stated that he has walk behind the Clean Team and saw them not pick up trash in the morning. Real cities have paid staff. We don't have a Central Business District that spends money. That would allow the city to fund these quality of life issues that we are facing. The money could be put into neighborhoods. Nothing has changed in the neighborhoods. We do our small tree projects. He stated that there is flooded intersections. The city spending funds to demolish building, when they could be spending funds to stabilize buildings. We are about to lose the Carriage House on 8th and Gordon. It is the only Carriage House in Old Allentown and that is our signature intersection.

Mr. Courtney Robinson asked Mr. Hanlon who overseas the Clean Team program.

Mr. Joe Calhoun stated that he is well aware. Ms. Ann Saurman gets about one hundred emails from me a week. He stated that Ann is wonderful, but he thinks she is understaffed. He stated that he wants to move. He does not like living here. He loves the people, but the blighted property, the litter and graffiti is depressing.

Mr. Courtney Robinson stated that they reached a rate of attrition that is unsustainable.

Ms. Lauren Golden, the Allentown Preservation League - 1518 W. Walnut Street, stated that Allentown has a unique position of sitting in the middle of a 160 mile long recreation trail. She stated that if you were able to connect out the DNL you would be expand recreational opportunity and improve the quality of life. She talked about the coordination between zoning and permits, and historic and blighted properties. She witnessed the system not working. No one tells people that they are in a historic district. They replace the porch railing and HARB sends them the violation because they install one that meets building standards, but not historic district standards. They end up in a vicious cycle and the departments are not communicating. She talked about historic property as economic engines. One thing that was called out was the character of West Park. The beauty of the homes, the walkability of the neighborhood and the existing infrastructure. When she drives around the city, West Park is the best maintained because it is designated as a historic district. Old Allentown is similar and she is rooting for the Old Fairgrounds. When people come city, those are the neighborhoods they want to spend time in. She wants investment in those properties and looking past the blight and seeing those worthwhile investments. She encouraged Council to investigate that a little bit further. We are doing that, but she thinks that they can do it further.

Ms. Tricia Morsca, 400 Block of 10th Street, stated that she has terrible problems with slum landlords, blighted properties, illegal rooming houses, and even though we have a city ordinance that we suppose to put out trash after 5:00 in the evening, that is not being actually addresses. Trash is put out on trash day in the morning and some of the streets look like garbage dumps. We clean up our blocks and do it almost every day. She stated that when the sweeper comes through, she picks up the trash. The litter is getting out of control. She stated that she knows Sweep is understaffed. There are so many rental properties, we are talking about mounds and mounds of it. She stated that Peter Lewnes discussed Seventh Street. She stated that Seventh Street is the gateway and it looks like a dump. The trash and number of people that are standing around looking like bums. We need long-term solutions to these things. It won't happen over night, but it needs to happen.

Ms. Candida Affa stated that she likes to address some of the things you talked about. As an elected official it is so disturbing for us to hear this. We have our own fortes or our own pets that we like to fix. She stated that she is on the Parking Authority and there is a young couple that just moved into the city and they love the city and they had their friends come and they went down Seventh Street and they said I don't think that I want to ever live here. A lot of it was double parking. We have a new director now. His name is John Morgan and he already put this into action that all his officers are daily the tally of parkers of Seventh Street. The District Conduct is one of my babies to make quality of life much easier for residents. She has seen a lot of good landlords that properties are destroyed over and over. Back in the 80s everybody wanting to live on Eight Street.

Mr. Don Bernhardt gave the historic district in downtown Allentown a lot of credit for that. We worked with Ben Walburke who was president of OAPA and started the historic district. He stated that he sat in this room and got his brains beat in at many meetings for many years from people that were bitterly opposed to the historic district ordinance. There were systematic code enforcement programs. There was a safety component to that. We inspected every house on the First Ward, Sixth Ward and about an eight block radius in the Central Business district and got every one of those properties up to code standard. It can be done. It is hard and takes a lot of push on a lot of fronts.

Ms. Candida Affa stated block by block. That is the only way to have homeownership again. Once you have homeownership, you have children and the school district is better. She stated that she had a long conversation with Ce-Ce regarding the new school that is being built and the perception is that if you build a new school, it is going to help all. It is the opposite. We need the people in here to help the school district. She

stated that she sympathizes with all of them. We are trying very hard, but we don't have the man power.

Mr. Don Bernhardt stated that some of the same exact problems existed then. It takes a consertive, consistent effort.

Mr. Courtney Robinson asked if there was anyone else from the public who would like to comment.

Ms. Sherri Bender, 1553 W. Turner Street, stated that she wants to talk about housing. She stated that she is the Director of Ripple Community Inc. which is affiliated with Ripple Church and is located in Center City on 8th and Walnut. We work with the most vulnerable people in the city. We have about 150 - 175 people come through our doors for various reasons. Most have been homeless. The issues that we run into is that people are precariously housed. They will find a place to live for a little bit or get into an apartment. They will be there for a month or two months and then something happens and they lose housing and they are continuous cycle where the move from homelessness to basically crummy to unsafe apartments in the city. They are not cheap apartments. People are paying \$800 a month or more for apartments that are fundamentally unsafe. The situation is very bad for our neighbors that have to deal with this housing instability on a regular basis. it is bad for the city. A lot of issues that have been mentioned about slum landlords, and substandard housing that exist in the city. Our folks keep that market alive because they don't have other options available to them. There are programs in the city that works on issues with housing. By and large the programs focus on temporary solutions on temporary housing. In six months and one day or two years and one day, people are back exactly where they started. The issue I want to make sure gets on the agenda is housing stability. We don't have enough housing. Yes, we have a market of housing that is substandard. I want to make sure that we are talking about not just to house people, but to make sure they are stable, decent housing available. Most of the people that we deal with were born and raised in Allentown. They are lifelong residents that are not making it. My organization is in the process of starting a new program that will be the first permanent, affordable, community supported housing program in the city. It is based on a model that has been successful in Washington, DC called Jubilee Housing. That program has been successful in that community at maintaining stable housing for low-income individual, including the working poor. The issue of inspections is obviously an important issue. People it to us quite often.

Ms. Milagros Canales, 530 W. Allen Street - Old Fairgrounds President, representing HADC, stated as a nonprofit they deal with a lot of housing.

Currently, they love the city and work really hard. They have a hard time understanding the fees associated with running a rental property. She stated that she is the rental manager for 72 units and HADC does affordable housing, but also does affordable rehabilitations. Part of that is getting a CO (Certificate of Occupancy). You would think that the CO would allow the new owner can move in because the apartment is fit and passed all inspections. No, then the new homeowner has to pay \$100 to live there because they are illegally living there. As a nonprofit, it is not only our nonprofit that is being hit, but other nonprofits. What can we do to have that conversation? Have you seen your permit fees. These are ridiculous fees. There should be some consideration. The term is not to bend the rules, or flex the rules, but consideration. My apartments, you literally have to die before I can get a rental. I have no vacancies. My oldest tenant is 28 years living in our units. We have passed every city inspection there is. We have affordable housing. A lot of the units are inspected by Section 8 and myself. Being one of the three historic neighborhoods, it is hard when we do because we have the cost of maintaining the historic factor.

Ms. Sharon Frazer, 25 N. 11th Street - Chair of the Martin Luther and Coretta Scott King Memorial in Allentown, stated that she is here to advocate for the youth in Allentown. She asked City Council and all Economic Development to think about having a place for after school that is more of a community center. That lovely building in front of the terminal downtown will be a wonderful place because it will serve from all the wards downtown Allentown. They have computers. They have homework and basketball courts. That will help and give them somewhere else they can form friendships and create communities. We have a downtown that looks great, but our inner-city has not been taken care of. The bond that is floated to create that downtown is the people who work and live in Allentown that is supporting that. We have to find a way to make sure that they are the future for all of us.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated that it is a great idea and something that we only recently have talked about. Some type of community center in the downtown area. It will hopefully be interwoven with the new school that is being built on 11th Street. It will be open from 7:00 in the morning to 8:00 or 9:00 at night. We had some meetings, but very little up until this time, but I think it would be great to look for something downtown. Unfortunately, we lost a lot of our recreation places. We do need more throughout the city. It is certainly something we will look at.

Ms. Sharon Frazer asked that they continue to advocate for it.

Mr. Courtney Robinson thanked the community.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated that he really appreciates all the comments. They were all great with great idea. We do need more people, especially dealing with the housing issues. Funding will be an issue, but we still have to do it. It is just too important. The majority of the complaints tonight are quality of life, rentals, and landlords. Manpower is key for that. We need more people working on those problems.

Mr. Courtney Robinson extended his thanks for the public coming out and participating in this. This will not be the last time we have a conversation like this. A lot of what is said tonight, will be addressed in specific meetings as we move forward. The committee is going to be reactivating something that we did in years previous. We are not just going to be holding hearings here. We are going to get out into the community. These will not be voting meetings, but meetings with the committee to come out and listen to each and every one of you. He stated to Mr. Diaz to extend that to the whole department. We would love to have representatives from the department at each of the meetings. His takeaway is that we as a city needs to do a better job communicating with you. We do have to do something about staffing and manpower. We need to identify the most critical areas and work of those. We are not going to be able to create good communities and good paying jobs if we don't have a school district that is producing well qualified and competent workers. We are not going to be able to give the kids everything they need if we don't create the jobs that are going to pay for that education. There will be a meeting of this committee next Wednesday, concerning the Muhlenberg Student Overlay District.

Adjourned: 7:29 PM