

City of New Castle Delaware
Special City Council Meeting at Town Hall
201 Delaware Street – New Castle
Thursday, May 2, 2019– 6:00 p.m.

Council President Ratchford stated the purpose of this meeting as being to discuss the Downtown Development District application, and a resolution for consideration by Council, as well as some organizational matters.

Call to order: 6:00 pm

Roll Call

Councilperson Suzanne M. Souder
Councilperson Russell P. Smith
Council President Linda Ratchford
Councilperson Michael M. Platt
Councilperson Valarie W. Leary

Also present:

Daniel Losco, City Solicitor
William Barthel, City Administrator
Janet Carlin, City Treasurer
Chris Rogers, City Planner

Ryan Mawhinney from AECOM was also present.

Council President Ratchford provided some background information regarding the Downtown Development District application. The city filed for a Downtown Development District designation in 2016, and was not successful. A grant was received to revise the proposed plan, based on input from the state. It is unknown how many cities will be selected this time. The decision is based on the number of applications received, and how much money is available.

Advantages to receiving the designation include the incentives that private businesses and residents receive, as well as the recognition of being a Downtown Development District. Items covered include rehab of houses and historic preservation.

The purpose of this meeting is not to discuss the Comprehensive Plan or zoning, which are being worked on by the Planning Commission. This meeting is to decide whether or not the plan should be submitted, and what incentives should be approved.

City Planner Chris Rogers presented the following:

- The biggest advantage to a Downtown Development District designation would be that property owners within the District will receive a 20% rebate from the state, for investments made to their property.

- As part of the determination process, the state wants to know what the local municipalities are doing to complement the program. Therefore, a large part of the application includes local incentives that are to go along with that rebate program.
- If the application were to include 100 points, 50 points would be assigned to the local municipality's need, 20 points would be assigned to the strength of local incentives, 20 points would be assigned to the strength of the plan, and 10 points would be based on the strength of the local commitment to administration of the program.
- The proposed application, which has been provided in a handout to Council members, includes items which were decided upon by Council in October of 2018.
- What have not been decided upon are local incentives.

Council President Ratchford pointed out that if the designation is awarded, the city would have 90 days to implement/pass ordinances to put incentives into place.

Chris Rogers returned to his presentation, including the following points, as well as responses to some questions and comments from Council and other attendees:

- The incentives to be decided upon would only apply to properties within the DDD. Ms. Ratchford pointed out that this does not mean that the city could not come up with incentives to apply to outside of the DDD, separately.
- The DDD would include the historic port, some of the Ferry Cut Off gateway, and other properties down 7th Street. Shawtown is also included.
- By including the incentives in the application, the city is committing to future action to implement them, if designated as a Downtown Development District.
- A detailed list of proposed local incentives was included in the provided handout, beginning on page 47. Mr. Rogers provided a summary of the included incentives.
- The deferment referred to in the City Property Tax Abatement item would be for a period of five years.
- Some draft ordinances that implement some of the incentives are included in the application. This inclusion is a requirement from the state, and was not required at the time of the previous application.
- A minimum investment to a property of \$25,000 is required, to receive the state rebate. This is reflected in one of the draft ordinances.
- Councilperson Leary commented that she would like to see the city's potential incentives increased.
- Regarding the previous application, the state called out need as a determining factor as to why New Castle fell behind other municipalities when DDD designations were awarded. No comment was made by the state at the time, as to incentives.
- David Baldini, of the Planning Commission, expressed concern over the projected potential administrative and/or financial burden to the City Administrator's office.
- Long-term benefits to the city of the DDD designation are presumed to include increased property values, and therefore, increased property tax revenue.
- The DDD designation lasts for ten years.

- There was discussion as to whether the \$25,000 estimated administrative burden included in the application should be increased.

After a motion and second, **Resolution 2019-16**, A Resolution supporting and approving submission of application for Downtown Development District designation (posted by Council President Ratchford on 4/25/19) was read into the record by Council President Ratchford.

Supporting letters would be required to be submitted with the application, along with proposed ordinances. Council President has reached out to the New Castle Historical Society, New Castle Community Partnership, Delaware Greenways, the David Finney Inn, the William Penn House, and Café New Castle, for the supporting letters.

Resolution 2019-16 was passed by a vote of 4 to 1, as follows:

Councilperson Suzanne Souder - Yes
Councilperson Russell Smith - Yes
Council President Linda Ratchford - Yes
Councilperson Michael Platt - No
Councilperson Valarie Leary - Yes

City Solicitor Daniel Losco was excused for the remainder of the meeting.

Discussion followed regarding Council meeting schedules, including budget meetings, and members' availability. Council members will be informed of meeting schedules, and are asked to advise of any availability issues.

City Administrator William Barthel and Council President Ratchford provided a summary of the budget process:

- Mr. Barthel and City Treasurer Janet Carlin have met with most of the departments regarding the upcoming budget, and he expects them to be ready to come before Council by May 15th. Once that meeting date has been determined, a budget recommendation will be presented at that meeting.
- A line by line review will take place.
- Grants to non-profits will be discussed at that time, as well.
- Meeting dates will be scheduled, as well as some dates being held aside, if needed.

Current major city initiatives were discussed:

- Per Mr. Barthel, current road projects for this year are being finished, including Third Street, South Street, Baldt Avenue, Johnson Way and Centerpoint Blvd. Centerpoint Blvd. and Johnson Way should be completed by the end of May. The next major project is Delaware Street. Bids for that are expected by the end of May, with the expectation that they will be back to Council by early July. Work on that project is hoped to begin in August or September.
- Negotiations are beginning with Comcast and Verizon for the upcoming renewals of those franchise agreements. The renewals are two and three years out. Legal assistance

will be brought in to help with this process, and those costs will be included in the upcoming budget proposal.

- The city has applied for and received a CLG grant of \$7,960, for purposes of training. The Fed share of that grant is \$4,776, and the city's share is \$3,184. Approximately \$3,000 had been budgeted for training. The training is facilitated by the National Association of Preservation Commission. Topics have yet to be finalized. There will be an emphasis on HAC and on planning. A one-day training on a Saturday in June is being proposed. The preferred date is June 29th, with the fallback date being June 22nd. The first session will be dedicated to legal and FOIA.
 - Council prefers the date of June 22nd, due to availability concerns. Mr. Barthel will check on whether that can be accommodated.
- Council President Ratchford stated that information is pending from the state, regarding the railroad crossing renovation. Council will need to pass a resolution to close Eighth Street. Mr. Barthel expects to have more information on this within the next month or so.
- The traffic light work at Sixth and Delaware is expected in July of 2020. Council will have to decide whether they want to pay for a historical light.
- The fishing pier project has moved up to the top of the state's Fish and Wildlife construction list. The funding is provided by fishing license fees. Past Council and the Trust have agreed to easement. The city has agreed to fund an opening at the gravel, so that a vehicle can get in. The next step will be for Council to develop a Memorandum of Intent. Fish and Wildlife has committed to a paved parking lot, with lights, and a 300-foot steel pier for fishing.
- Sea level rise is a topic that the city will continue to deal with. The state has provided a grant for analysis of the costs of a major storm, as well as the benefits of building a structure against such a storm. The topic of sea level rise, including resiliency, emergency action plans, and some flood plain issues, will be an ongoing topic. Strategies to lower flood insurance rates will be part of the discussion. This is a critical and complex subject of high priority.

Council President Ratchford mentioned:

- A major corridor redesign is another current city initiative.
- Code enforcement is another ongoing topic, along with improved land development.
- Bike Delaware is looking at adding connections off of the Markell Trail.
- The County will be installing a kiosk at 273, which will tentatively include a panel for the City of New Castle.
- A requirement that nominees for commissions be present at the City Council meeting in which they are nominated or voted on, which was put in place by the previous Council, may be reconsidered by the current Council.

On the topic of priorities of Council members:

- Councilperson Souder intends to bring up the topic of a code of conduct for City Council members. She is working on this with Councilperson Leary.

- Public behavior and processes for comment at meetings is of interest to Councilperson Souder. Council President Ratchford is working on this.
- Councilperson Smith and Councilperson Leary are working on the zip code issue.
- Councilperson Platt would like Council to take a look at people who don't care for their properties, not referring to vacant properties, but rather people who accumulate trash, cars, parts, etc.
- Councilperson Platt would also like the subject of a Mayor's Court to be a topic of discussion.

Council President Ratchford reported that street sweeping will be starting on Monday, May 6th. Signs will be put up in the affected areas, regarding when no parking is allowed. The process of starting with temporary signs and moving later to permanent signage is being developed. Being a new program, it is a work in progress.

The Motion to adjourn was made by Councilperson Leary, seconded by Councilperson Platt and passed unanimously. Council adjourned at 7:57pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Whitaker
Clerk of the City of New Castle

Next Regular Meeting Date: May 14, 2019
Posted: 4/25/2019