

Economic Development Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

May 26, 2022

EDC Members:	Councilor Melanie Hamblen, Chair; Councilor Cobi Frongillo, Vice Chair; Councilor Patrick Sheridan; Councilor Glenn Jones
Other Town Staff:	Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator; Alecia Alleyne, Assistant to the Town Administrator

Chair Hamblen called the meeting to order at 5:35 PM and read announcements.

Agenda:

1. Expressions of Interest results for the Old South Church on Washington Street
 - a. [Expressions of Interest submitted](#)
 - b. [Expression of Interest solicitation document](#)
 - c. 2020 Old South Church [Existing Conditions report](#)
 - d. 2015 Old South Church [Existing Conditions report](#)
 - e. Old South Church document [website](#)
- Town Administrator Jamie Hellen (TA Hellen) reviewed what is in the meeting packet and discussed the Expressions of Interest (EOIs) process/ submissions for the land containing the Old South Church located on Washington Street, and the next step of a Request for Proposals (RFP):
 - We hosted two open houses and put out a Request for EOIs to gauge interest in various types of use for the property. There were some interesting ideas and overall about 12 - 18 individual parties called, emailed and/or visited. We also received several inquiries from local builders.
 - The Town received two formal EOIs, from Habitat for Humanity and Providence Baptist Church; both are included in the agenda packet for this meeting.
 - The decision and conversation for the EDC tonight is regarding the type of use/s that would provide a viable opportunity for redevelopment and investment, and what should be recommended to the full Town Council as the best use to be requested in the RFP.
- Chair Hamblen asked if we might get more proposals when the RFP is released.
 - TA Hellen discussed that when we put out the formal RFP other organizations can still bid, though he thinks it is unlikely we will get more. Given the number of calls we got, and the news coverage, if there was interest it's likely more people would have written in with an EOI.
 - There was further discussion regarding how streamlining the purpose of the building in the RFP could attract more bidders, and discussion of some of the limiting factors such as traffic, parking, and zoning in that area which is for Residential 1.
- Councilor Sheridan asked if we need to take the highest bidder, and TA Hellen responded that we do not.
- Vice Chair Frongillo discussed how one of the proposals included a request to purchase an adjacent parcel which the Town does own, and asked if there is potential for this parcel to be sold as well.
 - TA Hellen replied that it's a tough decision and discussed considerations and/or complications.
- Vice Chair Frongillo commented that he believes due to parking limitations, if we decide not to sell the adjacent parcel there is no potential use for the building aside from housing.
 - TA Hellen discussed it's a tight space that wasn't designed to accommodate cars. If parking is a requirement there would need to be an agreement with another place for parking. There would need to be a traffic analysis. It is not a popular idea to cut down the trees to provide more parking. Some interested parties walked away when they saw the lack of parking.
 - There was further discussion regarding parking and related limitations.

- Councilor Sheridan asked if new owners could cut down trees and TA Hellen replied no, that this will be a stipulation, either in RFP or part of lease/purchase of sale, similar to requirements about exterior of building or any other conditions that are decided.
- Councilor Sheridan stated he would like to keep it as a church.
- Councilor Jones stated that he likes the Habitat for Humanity idea, and provided the reasons why he thinks a church is not viable. He discussed the reasons he likes the layout and plans of Habitat for Humanity's proposal.
- Chair Hamblen gave a reminder that the EDC's job is to vote on a purpose, not a proposal, and stated that she also likes the residential purpose. Reasons include that we need more affordable housing, it would not impact traffic, she likes the idea of it becoming a home for someone.
- Vice Chair Frongillo commented that he thinks we could get more bidders with an RFP since there is more incentive than with an EOI, and expressed concern that if we limit options to just housing we will be closing ourselves off to other great ideas.
 - TA Hellen discussed high renovation costs and other complications that businesses would face. Volunteerism and in kind donations are a factor.
 - Councilor Jones commented that residential use would be respectful of the neighbors, and would be a nice opening to that neighborhood, without traffic, signage or changing of businesses.
- Chair Hamblen asked for clarification regarding whether there is a historical preservation section of CPA funding and TA Hellen confirmed there is.
- Chair Hamblen provided further support of the idea of residential use vs. a community center or similar.
 - TA Hellen agreed and discussed why this location isn't ideal for a community center.
- Councilor Sheridan asked for a meeting with the two EOI bidders in person. TA Hellen responded that there are representatives for both on Zoom at this meeting and invited them to speak.
 - Eric Moores, representing Providence Baptist Church, said they would want to keep the church the way it is with color, facade. The building does need a lot of work but they have a lot of volunteer help available.
 - In response to a question regarding long-term viability for the church, Mr. Moores responded that they have been a congregation and renting space for about 20 years and are dedicated to being here. They have a congregation with an average age of about 30, and plan to go on for as long as possible.
 - In response to a question regarding parking, Mr. Moores responded that the building and lot is laid out similarly to the space they are currently renting, where they do angled parking around the lot. At this (Franklin) location there is space on the left side of the building and some space in the back. When they attended the open house there were around ten cars parked and it didn't feel cramped. Mr. Moores also commented that the church has the advantage that everyone comes and goes at the same time vs. businesses that have ongoing hours and visitors to buildings. During church hours they utilize around 20 parking spots.
 - In response to a question regarding the overall size of the congregation, Mr. Moores responded there are approximately 60 people.
 - In response to a question about days/time the church would be used and if it could be used by other organizations during off hours, Mr. Moores responded that currently they operate on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings and Tuesday evenings, and that they haven't previously discussed allowing other groups to use the church but would be happy to talk about it.
 - Sam Williams, representing Habitat for Humanity, stated this is a great opportunity to get a family into an affordable place to live. It's an existing building with a shell they can work with. Benefits include that there wouldn't be a lot of parking demand, it would get the building back on the tax rolls.
 - In response to a question regarding the loft area on the right side of the building in the rendering, Mr. Williams responded that that side is more shielded by trees and neighbors so if

they were going to do anything to windows, doing it on that side would have the least impact on the aesthetics of the building. The left front corner would stay exactly the same in theory.

- In response to a question regarding the possibility of a two-family home, Mr. Williams responded that the one-family proposal wouldn't require too many structural modifications; however with a two-family, ceiling height becomes an issue and they would need to modify the very old roof structure which would be difficult.
- Chair Hamblen asked if it is possible to have an RFP that specifies *primarily* residential?
 - Councilor Sheridan commented he would like to see it specify nonprofit or residential, no commercial.
 - TA Hellen commented we would need to look into primary / secondary uses, but thinks it's not possible, and gave a reminder that there is no obligation to act on proposals that come back. We could not act, and go back to a new RFP.
- Vice Chair Frongillo commented again that once we specify housing we are locking out other ideas.
 - There was further discussion regarding the reasoning for the RFP to be specific.
 - TA Hellen commented that if we'd received other formal proposals from current or prospective business owners or residents, the "menu" might be wider. We got calls from builders but it's likely they did the math and it doesn't work. Zoning is also a consideration. This area is not zoned for commercial-industrial so part of the RFP would be going through that process. If there is opposition to any certain use/s we will find out since the RFP will be put out at a public meeting.
- Councilor Jones made a motion to move a proposal of residential use for the purpose of affordable housing for the Old South Church location at the corner of Washington Street to full Council for further discussion. Vice Chair Frongillo seconded the motion.
 - Vice Chair Frongillo asked if the RFP can specify residential, but also open to alternative uses only if the bidder can prove that there is substantial separate parking included.
 - TA Hellen responded that this wouldn't be specified in the RFP. A required parking plan would be part of the permitting process. The zoning change to commercial-industrial would trigger those requirements. Adding it into the RFP would be complicated and we would need to dig into the map to look at adjacent parcels.
 - Councilor Sheridan commented he is against the proposal because it shuts out the church. He asked if the EDC can push both ideas to full council.
 - There was a discussion regarding whether the EDC can/should recommend just one usage type or more than one to the full Council, and further discussion regarding the benefits of recommending housing.
 - TA Hellen commented that if Councilor Sheridan wants to add the second use option to the recommendation to full Council, he'll need to make a motion to amend the motion to add it.
 - Councilor Sheridan made a motion to make an amendment to the RFP recommendation to add a place of worship to the RFP. The motion was not seconded.
 - Vice Chair Frongillo commented that he encourages the public to come to the council meeting with any additional ideas that may be out there.
 - There was a vote on the motion to move a proposal of residential use for the purpose of affordable housing for the Old South Church location at the corner of Washington Street to full Council for further discussion. Motion was approved 3-1 (Councilor Sheridan: no).

Chair Hamblen made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion was seconded by Councilor Jones.

Meeting adjourned at 6:39 PM.