

**WINCHESTER COMMON COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
JOINT MEETING AT OLD TOWN DEVELOPMENT BOARD RETREAT
SATURDAY, MARCH 7, 2009
MINUTES**

PRESENT: Vice-Mayor Butler, Councilors Clark, Hill, Veach, and Willingham. (5)

ABSENT: President Buettner, Mayor Minor, Vice-President Major, and Councilor McInturff. (4)

PRESENT FOR OTDB: Chairman Kimberly Sowers, Kim Burke, Marilyn Finnemore, David Smith, Ben Weber, Mike Miller, Lauri Bridgeforth, and Main Street Representative Kyle Meyer.

ITEMS OF DISCUSSION:

1. **Call to Order** – Mr. Meyer called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m.

2. **Council Mission and Directives** –

Councilor Willingham reviewed the mission statement and specific objectives and measures set by Council at the retreat in January. He stated the economic measures will have the largest impact on this group. The measures include raising the median household income, increasing home values, increasing the number of jobs in Winchester, increasing sales tax revenue, increasing occupancy and rents of commercial property, and increasing the average salary of all jobs in Winchester. Help from the downtown area will be needed to accomplish these goals. When Council makes a decision, it will be focused on these objectives. Council will hold the OTDB and themselves accountable and will work to keep the communication open between the two bodies going forward. The OTDB will need to align their goals with those of Council.

Vice-Mayor Butler stated Council is trying to establish or enhance communications that will have a meaning in order to succeed more effectively. The Council retreat was very effective in having uninterrupted time to set goals. The goals set by Council are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) and can only be accomplished with lines of communication.

David Smith stated this is the first time in 3 years that Council has sat down with the OTDB on a positive note. He sees a different body and wants to have a working relationship with City Council. However, the goals are the same goals set by previous Councils but nothing happened.

Vice-Mayor Butler stated a common statement made during the retreat is that Council wants Winchester to be a community of choice. The city has history, good restaurants, a new hotel and good shopping. We need to find a way to highlight those items.

Councilor Willingham asked the OTDB to tell Council what they need and want to achieve these goals. Salisbury, North Carolina, has a great downtown area. They have been aggressive in buying, rehabbing, and selling the vacant properties. Winchester can do that too. The EDA is the vehicle that needs to be engaged and utilized to fulfill these goals.

Ben Weber stated he feels the OTDB has no real teeth in getting things done. He would like to see part of the Comprehensive Plan revised to change that. He has not seen City Council willing to take a stand on buying properties in the past. Councilor Willingham responded by stating this is a new council.

Mr. Weber stated the downtown area is the anchor for the city and needs to be looked at as a whole. The biggest improvement will be the two way streets.

Special Session of Council & OTDB
March 7, 2009

Councilor Butler stated Council has not used the EDA in the past to do what we want. Success will have to come in redevelopment not development.

Lauri Bridgeforth stated she also serves on the board for the Old Town Business Association. The proposal to tear up Braddock Street and Cameron Street simultaneously has caused worry on the impact of the businesses downtown. She would like to see Council consider tax breaks or special advertising during this time to help the businesses.

Chairman Sowers stated the start of the 2009 year has not been great for businesses. She is very concerned about the possibility of the construction running late in the 4th quarter of the year and effecting the holiday season.

Ms. Bridgeforth stated there is also a trust concern that the city is using the same contractor that completed the work on Boscawen Street. Vice-Mayor Butler stated the contract has not been assigned as of yet but the city has more leverage because people want the work now.

Ms. Finnemore stated on the board's recent trip to Charlottesville, they learned the city used a project manager who kept everything on time but also kept the business owners happy. She suggested the OTDB and the City work together to create positive signage to use during the construction period.

Vice-Mayor Butler asked Mr. Godfrey to direct Perry Eisenach, Public Utilities Director, to work with the business owners. He also expressed confidence that Mr. Eisenach will stay on top of everything during the construction.

Ms. Bridgeforth expressed her concern regarding the construction timeline. She understood that Cameron Street and Braddock Street will be done this year. Piccadilly Street will be done next year and Loudoun Street Mall will be done the year after that. Mr. Godfrey stated the construction on Loudoun Street may be delayed due to budget constraints. The city may have reached a saturation point with the utility rates. One side of Cameron Street and Braddock Street will be torn up at a time to help businesses.

Ms. Bridgeforth asked if the city requested local bids. Councilor Willingham stated the local company decline to bid when the city contacted them.

Ms. Finnemore asked if the city could award the contract by best offer rather than lowest bid. Mr. Godfrey stated they could not. Companies could be prequalified before the bidding process begins.

Mr. Meyer informed the group there are resources available through Main Street for construction campaigns.

Councilor Clark stated the City's commitment to Old Town has been shown through the new garage. Council has also changed statutes for occupancy levels in apartments and there is still more tweaking needed. Council wants to get people downtown to have a living, working, walking community. There is space for a small grocery store downtown. We need to make accessibility better. He would like to hear suggestions on how Council can change statutes to get people done here.

Mr. Weber stated he sees buildings that could be redeveloped owned by people who will not sell. The OTDB has the ideas but they need to force things to happen. Vice-Mayor Butler stated it goes back to changing the philosophy.

Councilor Willingham stated the EDA needs to be engaged to get that done.

Mr. Smith stated his concerns about not seeing the same philosophy in the EDA. Vice-Mayor Butler stated the EDA can be retooled with appointing people with the same philosophy.

Ms. Bridgeforth expressed her concerns with the proposed budget cuts for the Bluemont Concert Series. She stated the series draws people downtown and attracts the type of customers the businesses want. She also asked if something could be done to relax the parking issues downtown during the construction period to make it more convenient physically and economically.

Ms. Finnemore stated it is more of a direction issue for people to find parking.

Councilor Willingham asked that the board bring issues to him so he can bring them forth to Council.

Vice-Mayor Butler suggested the board come up with 5 short term issues that need to be addressed in addition to long term goals to give to Councilor Willingham.

Chairman Sowers stated she likes having a council representative at the meeting to have that open community. Councilor Willingham stated he is committed to being there.

Chairman Sowers stated she would like the opportunity to discuss with the OTDB how they can build a private/public relationship.

Mr. Weber stated having the city committed will get the private sector committed. Progressive steps forward will be made during the construction but that needs to be shown to eliminate negative attitudes.

Councilor Clark challenged everyone to participate in some activity on the mall on Friday nights and Saturday mornings to bring people downtown. Everyone who is invested in Winchester and the downtown area should share the responsibility. He would like to hear new ideas for festivals to draw people to the area.

Councilor Willingham stated the OTDB may need to be the driving force to get this started. He stated the Comprehensive Plan has been an ongoing process and asked what interaction there has been. OTDB Director Karen Helm stated the only interaction was during her presentation a year ago.

Mr. Smith stated the last time was when the Taylor Hotel collapsed. The OTDB wanted more help with inspecting the vacant buildings but ran into problems with the "good old boy network". He asked if there was already a private/public partnership.

Vice-Mayor Butler stated there is a partnership but Council could make it official policy to work with private groups for redevelopment. The problem is finding the groups.

Councilor Willingham asked Mr. Godfrey that Jim Deskins be more visible to the OTDB. He also requested that Ms. Helm attend the Planning & Development meetings more frequently to present updates and inform Council what the OTDB needs, where they want to be, and what problems they are facing.

3. Appointments

Councilor Willingham stated that Council will be interviewing every single candidate for appointment or re-appointment to make sure they are on board with the goals set by Council.

**Special Session of Council & OTDB
March 7, 2009**

Mr. Smith suggested anyone interested in serving be required to serve on a subcommittee or commission prior to being appointed to test their level of commitment.

Vice-Mayor Butler stated if the board has a candidate they want, they need to encourage that person to apply and Council will do the work to get them appointed. Council is trying to be more diligent about who is serving on the boards. He then asked if the OTDB wants to replace the Frederick County position that was recently given up or do without it.

Mr. Godfrey suggested having a representative from the Visitor's Center more involved.

Vice-Mayor Butler suggested keeping the board at 11 positions. He also asked about the position vacated by Steve Northcutt.

Mr. Weber stated City Council needs to bless Mr. Northcutt's resignation so the OTDB can move forward with 11 positions.

Councilor Willingham directed Ms. Helm to work with City Attorney Anthony Williams to address any code issues and to let Council know if the OTDB has anyone to appoint. He also suggested talking to Brian Bigsby of Shenandoah University for a possible candidate.

Vice-Mayor Butler stated Council wants to partner with the OTDB and have open communication to reinvigorate the two bodies for the short and long term. Council wants to participate in trying to be aggressive and in giving all a fair hearing.

Mr. Weber stated this will require a commitment physically and financially.

Councilor Willingham asked the OTDB to bring all proposals forward without saying Council will never do it.

Vice-Mayor Butler added that all projects will need to show a return financially and culturally.

4. Adjourn

With no further business to discuss, the Councilors were able to dismiss the meeting at 9:54 a.m.