

**Borough of West Reading
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

August 12, 2019

Committee Members Present

Philip Wert, Andrew Kearney, Cathy Hoffman, Christin Kelley, Aaron Gantz, John Woodward

Visitors Present

Eric Weaver arrived at 6:58 p.m.

Call to Order

Mr. Wert called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

Public Comment

None

Approval of the Minutes

Moved by Mayor Kearney and seconded by Ms. Gantz to approve the minutes of July 8, 2019. **Motion carried.**

BID Status Update

Due to Mr. Ratcliffe's absence, a formal update wasn't given however Mr. Wert spoke about the upcoming interviews that will be held with three consultant firms – 4ward Planning, Alloy 5 and Derck & Edson.

Residential Properties Update

Of the six new townhomes in 'The Villas at Narrow' four have been sold however the last two properties remain unsold.

Significant/Vacant West Reading Commercial Properties Update

- 301 Penn – Empire Home Design Center will be moving in soon – late September or early October.
- 416 Penn – Nitro bar/lounge will open on August 13th.
- 428 Penn – Plans have not yet been submitted.
- 433 Penn – Although the business is for sale, the property is not.
- 444 Penn – It was recommended that a separate category be added for residential properties on Penn Avenue.
- 445, 447 and 449 Penn – The owner will receive formal notification that the residential use in 445 must revert to retail. Legal avenues will be utilized if the owner doesn't comply.
- 448 Penn – The rental sign at the property refers to the residential space above La Abuela.
- 530 Penn – The space remains for lease now that Awards and More has moved.
- 637 Penn – The business remains for sale.
- 707 Penn – Property will be required to convert into retail space.
- 711 Penn – A Jamaican restaurant will be opening at this location.
- 723 Penn – The conversion to a restaurant is progressing slowly.

Other discussion points included:

- For interest sake, the Schweitzer gas station property will be reviewed informally to determine how many parking spaces could be created if the entire property were dedicated to parking.
- Both the Subway business and building have apparently been listed for sale.
- A separate list will be created of all remaining solely residential properties on Penn Avenue.

Strategic Planning Discussion

- Ms. Gantz showed the Committee a graphic that she uses to track properties in the core district in downtown Reading. Ms. Gantz will assist the Borough in creating such a graphic of the Borough.
- Discussions were recently held with Ken Pick, Executive Director of the Berks County Redevelopment Authority and Tom McKeon, Executive Director of the Berks County Industrial Development Authority regarding development strategies for West Reading.
- John Woodward reported that John Fry, President of Drexel University had met with staff from Wyomissing Borough concerning development, including the possibility of a bridge being constructed at 8th Avenue. Mr. Woodward also reported that the grant for the 4th Avenue traffic circle has been submitted however announcements will not be made to successful applicants until October. The traffic circle is a \$4M project whereas the bridge would be a \$20M project. It was also noted that approval to cross Norfolk Southern's property was provided in the past.
- The Buttonwood Gatewood design has been received. It was noted that the Borough did not submit a grant in July as planned due to the level of competition.
- Ms. Gantz asked if the Committee could do a walking tour to provide a different perspective of Penn Avenue.
- The Traffic Calming Handbook was briefly discussed as it relates to pedestrian street crossing in the Borough. Pedestrians crossing mid-block is a source for concern.

Old & New Business

- The addition of PA Games of Skill machines in a convenience store was briefly discussed.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Hoffman