

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

December 10, 2018

Committee Members Present

Philip Wert, Nicholas Imbesi, Andrew Kearney, John Woodward, Robin Horman, Benjamin LaManna, Christin Kelley, Cathy Hoffman, Mark Ratcliffe

Committee Members Absent

Aaron Gantz

Visitors Present

None

Call to Order

Mr. Wert called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Public Comment

None

Approval of the Minutes

Moved by Nick Imbesi and seconded by Robin Horman to approve the minutes of September 10, 2018. (The October and November meetings were cancelled.) **Motion carried.**

BID Status Update

Mr. Ratcliffe reviewed the next steps necessary for the completion of the BID. A revised draft should be available by January 3rd, with the process finalized in February.

Foreclosed & Blighted Residential Properties Update:

It was noted that 311 Spruce has been sold and will be renovated. Also, it was noted that a new tenant has been located for the property at 23 S. 6th Avenue.

Significant/Vacant West Reading Commercial Properties Update:

- Narrow Fabrics Building – Construction of the new restaurant (B2 Bistro) is ongoing.
- VF Building – Construction of the executive suite has been slowed due to permitting issues.
- 301 Penn Avenue – Property is still available for lease.
- 433 Penn Avenue – Changes have been noted at Schweitzer's Service Center and it has been suggested that the owner be contacted concerning future plans.
- 445, 447 and 449 Penn Avenue – Given that 445 Penn was a commercial establishment, the current residential use is not permitted. Codes will contact the owner.
- 501 Penn Avenue – Construction on the addition is complete.
- West Reading Shopping Center – Plans for the redevelopment of the property have been discussed with a developer.
- 609 Penn – Code violation exists with 2nd floor residential egress.
- 611 Penn – Property maintenance issues are being addressed.

- 619 Franklin – A portion of the property is currently for rent.
- 707 Penn Avenue – No update on the reported construction.
- 166 Franklin Street – Mecca Caribbean and Soul Food restaurant has opened.
- 23 S. 6th Avenue – A new tenant (Bells Lina) will be moving in soon.

Strategic Planning Discussion

- Five-Year Plan – Before his passing, Dean Rohrbach had applied for two DCED grants (both \$25,000); a planning grant and a façade/sign improvement grant. Word regarding award of the grants should soon be received. Mark Ratcliffe has also secured a \$50,000 grant from BB&T Bank.
- HARB/design strategy – Ms. Kelley and Mr. Wert are working on the possible implementation of a Historical Architectural Review Board for West Reading to address items such as façades and signage. Meetings will be held in January to discuss how best to proceed.
- Buttonwood/Circle Enhancements – Randy Peers, President and CEO of the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance will be attending the January meeting to discuss the potential development of the Buttonwood Street Gateway. Council President Imbesi recently met with Mr. Peers and provided him with a copy of the plan developed by Kautter and Kelley Architects for Buttonwood Street and Delaney Circle. There is hope that the GRCA may be able to obtain development funding from the Greater Reading Development Fund.
- Rental Property Discussion – Mr. Wert briefly raised the question as to whether residential rental properties are considered a benefit or a problem in the Borough. This will be discussed further.

Old & New Business

- Update on recently opened and potential new businesses – Updates were noted above.
- Railroad Bridge – repainting and potential lighting/embellishments – No discussion.
- John Woodward stated that the Borough of Wyomissing has budgeted \$25,000 to study the redevelopment of Penn Avenue. An RFP will be going out in January. He also spoke about the possibility of extending N. 4th Street southward (currently terminates at Greenwich) to connect with the parking lot property owned by Equus Partners that is being developed on the north side of the Norfolk Southern railroad lines. Also being discussed is the possible construction of a vehicle bridge over the railroad tracks that would connect the Equus property to 8th Avenue on the Knitting Mills property.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Hoffman