

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

January 14, 2019

Committee Members Present

Philip Wert, Nicholas Imbesi, Andrew Kearney, Robin Horman, Benjamin LaManna, Christin Kelley, Cathy Hoffman, Mark Ratcliffe, Aaron Gantz. John Woodward arrived at 7:00 p.m.

Visitors Present

Randy Peers – Greater Reading Chamber Alliance
Deb Millman – Greater Reading Chamber Alliance

Call to Order

Mr. Wert called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Public Comment

None

Approval of the Minutes

Moved by Nick Imbesi and seconded by Robin Horman to approve the minutes of December 10, 2018.
Motion carried.

Greater Reading Chamber Alliance Discussion

Randy Peers, President and CEO of the GRCA, spoke of the ongoing work of the GRCA which includes small business development, business attraction and expansion, as well as partnerships and collaboration. He also spoke about his work in Brooklyn and noted that Brooklyn's rebirth took 20 to 25 years, however over the last two years he has seen extraordinary development in West Reading. This is due in part to the significant interest of outside developers.

Deb Millman, Director of Business Development of the GRCA, talked about the success of the 18th ward and how they can build connections with West Reading. The Buttonwood gateway was also noted as an area worth exploring for redevelopment.

Mr. Peers also spoke about the "opportunity zones" that would attract shovel-ready projects, however a more concrete plan for strategic goals is necessary. Discussion ensued regarding possible revitalization in areas such as Cherry Street, Court Street and Reading Avenue. Also discussed were underutilized properties throughout the Borough and the possibility to obtain multimodal grants.

The next steps potentially would be to prepare an inventory of areas of the Borough that are more ready to be developed than others, as well as a "wish list" of projects that would fit well in the community. The future of Main Street, such as the possibility of becoming designated by the State again was discussed briefly.

BID Status Update

A first draft of the plan requires more tweaks. Mr. Ratcliffe will be working with the committee to get the final document ready prior to the public hearing. Decisions to be made include what the funds will be used for and the creation of a formula to determine how each property owner will be billed.

Foreclosed & Blighted Residential Properties Update:

It was noted that the sale price for 311 Spruce was \$18,000.

Significant/Vacant West Reading Commercial Properties Update:

- Narrow Fabrics Building – Restaurant 'B2 Bistro' is scheduled to open in two weeks (per the owner).
- VF Building – Construction continues; a signage plan will be presented soon.
- 301 Penn Avenue – Mayor Kearney met with the owner concerning his difficulty in leasing the space.
- 433 Penn Avenue – No new information to share.
- 445, 447 and 449 Penn Avenue – The Codes Department will be asked to contact the owner of 445 Penn regarding the current residential use not being permitted.
- 449 Penn Avenue – A new Italian restaurant has been opened at the former 'Mike's Taste of Philly' location.
- 525 Penn Avenue – No new information concerning the Shopping Center.
- 550 Penn Avenue – Café Bold has closed but will have a new tenant soon.
- 609 Penn Avenue – Code violation exists with 2nd floor residential egress. Codes needs to check exterior (both back and front) for repairs that need to be made.
- 611 Penn Avenue – Little Dreamer has closed; the space is available for rent.
- 619 Penn Avenue – Beer Wall will be opening soon.
- 633 Penn Avenue – Business has closed and the space is available for rent.
- 643 Penn Avenue – Business is closing at this location and the landlord has a new tenant.
- 637 Penn Avenue – Business is closing and space will be available soon.
- 707 Penn Avenue – Property has been sold and is being converted into retail space. Discussion regarding satellite dishes ensued. Codes will be asked to look into this matter.
- 715 Penn Avenue – Gourmand Café is relocating to this space.

General discussion followed regarding landlords of commercial/rental properties not thoroughly vetting prospective renters to ensure that they are financially viable and a good fit for the Avenue.

Strategic Planning Discussion

- HARB/Design Strategy Discussion – Phil and Christin will be meeting with representatives from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission concerning the possible creation of a historical designation.

Old & New Business

- Nothing was discussed other than items mentioned under Commercial Properties Update.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Hoffman