

City Council Work Session

July 6, 2009
5:30 PM
Community Center

ATTENDANCE:

Mayor/Council (please check) Tussing, Ronquillo, Gaghen, Brewster, Pitman, Veis, Ruegamer, Ulledalen, McCall, Astle, Clark.

ADJOURN TIME: 6:20 p.m.

Agenda

TOPIC #1	<i>Public Comment</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- **Joe White, Billings, MT**, commented that the lightning strike at Castlerock Park was related in some way to Cody, Wyoming, and the Buffalo Bill Dam.

TOPIC #2	<i>East End Master Plan Draft</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Community Development Project Manager Rebekah Wales introduced Sandi Fisher, lead consultant from EDAW AECOM, the firm that prepared the master plan. Ms. Fisher introduced other project staff members who were also present. She began her presentation of the East End Master Plan Draft with an overview of the timeline for the approval process. She highlighted proposed redevelopment and development for the area that was divided into eight districts and included various types of development and uses. Ms. Fisher advised that the plan included recommendations for implementing the proposed development. She noted that there was significant discussion regarding the “green” identity and to what extent the green concept would be taken.

Ms. Fisher reviewed the recommended organizational structure that consisted of shared management with the Downtown Alliance and the BIRD (Business Industrial Revitalization District).

Ms. Fisher pointed out that the document included a detailed action plan that addressed policies, programs and projects. She said the plan was not policy, but a working tool to help guide the development of the area.

Ms. Fisher explained that the area made up the east end TIF district and tax revenue from the district would remain within it to fund improvements. She noted that there was great need for utility and street improvements that could utilize the tax increment funds.

Councilmember Ulledalen asked about the most controversial items that would be the most difficult to implement. Ms. Fisher responded that the comprehensive rebuild of 2nd Avenue North and the design codes were the two items that received the most feedback or concern. She emphasized that the plan was intended for guidance.

Councilmember Ulledalen asked if there was consideration of a parking structure. Ms. Fisher explained there was discussion about pay-in-lieu of on-site parking for businesses in the area that would work with a shared lot. She said the group felt strongly that it did not want to eliminate the parking requirement but was willing to consider parking options for the area.

Councilmember McCall asked about the action plan and timelines. Ms. Fisher advised that the projects were not in priority order, but needed to be planned now, and because none of the projects were currently in the Capital Improvement Plan, they needed to be worked into it. She noted that Council action would be requested at the August 24, 2009, meeting.

Councilmember Ulledalen commented that one of the most critical management issues would be to keep the landowners involved in the process. Councilmember Gaghen said the involvement of the property owners in the process was impressive. BIRD President Gordon Tryan referred to the recommended management plan that called for BIRD recommendations to the City Council about spending the TIF funds. He said that assured that the property owners were involved and agreed with the projects.

Councilmember Ruegamer asked if everyone in the district had seen the plan. Mr. Tryan responded that he was not sure if every land owner had seen it, but it was available to them. Councilmember Ruegamer asked about resistance to it. Mr. Tryan said the resistance was that people were afraid the plan would become restrictive. He said there was enough resistance to be concerned, but the plan was not regulatory. He explained that the plan allowed for change and allowed flexibility. He noted that the Chamber was interested in the plan and identified the East End TIF District as a priority for the coming year because it saw the potential for a hotel/convention center at the east end near MetraPark.

Mayor Tussing asked if there was consensus among the dissenters. Mr. Tryan stated that he was told there would be support of the plan as long as it was non-regulatory, which it was. Councilmember Gaghen advised that she and Councilmember Veis were meeting with a group to determine how to encourage the County properties to come into the City. She noted that 60 landowners had paid the fee to join the BIRD.

Mayor Tussing announced that he would allow anyone in the audience to comment on the plan to allow Councilmembers to digest the information prior to the scheduled action. There were no speakers.

Councilmember Ulledalen commented that as the plan went forward, the people who drove the process needed to pay attention to criticism from people who had concerns.

Additional Information:

Councilmember Ruegamer reported that he and Councilmember Clark attended a Montana League of Cities and Towns meeting. He said the option tax was discussed and there was consensus that it would not be pursued. He reported that he told the board that Billings would support a bill if one was put forward, but would not initiate anything. He said the idea could be considered again in a few years when the redistricting took place.

Councilmember Ruegamer advised that the League would likely push for tax reform. He explained that the Executive Director and office manager did not get pay raises because there were no negative inflation raises. He said that was a good concept. He noted that MLCT paid his and Councilmember Clark's expenses to attend the meeting.

Councilmember Clark stated that when redistricting was done, it would probably be wise to review the City's ward boundaries. Councilmember Ruegamer advised that he talked with Senator Jeff Essman and Lobbyist Ed Bartlett and other Montana city officials who were not concerned about it. He noted that some of the cities that should care about redistricting were apathetic about it.

Councilmember McCall reported that she had been corresponding with Chief St. John about graffiti and found out that there was not an existing committee within the City. Ms. Volek advised that there was a private group that primarily dealt with school issues and had not addressed graffiti. She referenced equipment that had been purchased with CDBG funds that could be used in cleanup efforts, but had to be used on low-income housing only. Ms. Volek said a service club could take on a project to assist with graffiti removal, but the people who got the assistance would have to meet the income guidelines. Councilmember Ronquillo asked if the equipment could be loaned to other groups. Ms. Volek responded she would have to check on that.