

Town of Mount Pleasant Economic Development Committee meeting

March 6, 2017

Observer Jeannie Harrell

Chairman: Mark Smith

Agenda Items

3. Presentation by Gary Breit, CLP, of the City of Charleston Technology Business Development Initiative

Mr. Breit discussed a “systems approach” to creating jobs. He focused on knowledge based startups, and provided some information. For example, the average age of entrepreneurs in that field is 40, and the average start up costs for a business are about \$30,000, and those funds usually come from the entrepreneur’s personal savings, family and friends.

4. Presentation by Perrin Lawson, Deputy Director of the Charleston Area Convention and Visitors Bureau

Relevant Data:

1. The economic impact of tourism is \$3.68 billion dollars a year. 23% of all sales are attributed to tourism.
2. Hotel occupancy in Mt. Pleasant runs at approximately 72.6%, with 1,000 additional rooms in the works.

Important Plans & Strategies:

Travel: The airport improvements and increased numbers of direct flights are beneficial for the area. The Bureau hopes to encourage tourists from farther away, who will fly, rather than drive here (and hopes that they will not to rent cars). The goal is to reduce the number of tourists’ cars on the road.

Rental Property: Short term rentals are controversial. There are currently 217 active Airbnb and VRBO hosts in Mt. Pleasant, 40 of whom have multiple listings.

Workforce Development: Workforce development is an issue. There are not enough trained employees. The College of Charleston has a hotel management program, but the graduates tend not to stay because they are often recruited by large companies.

Parking: Also, parking is an issue for hotel employees, and there are currently plans in the works to provide off-site parking with transportation to and from downtown by CARTA.

Hotel Construction: There is No current moratorium on building hotels in Charleston, but there is concern about “killing the goose that laid the golden egg.” Developers are currently encouraged to build small hotels, but larger ones may actually create less of an adverse impact, and also offer event venues, etc, that could be used by residents, e.g. for receptions and meetings.

5. Presentation regarding Tampa Economic Development Outreach

Some council members and Town employees recently visited Tampa to exchange ideas about economic development. Tampa also seeks to recruit millennials for knowledge-based jobs, particularly for its outposts of Fortune 500 companies. There were interesting comparisons and contrasts with Charleston. Tampa has affordable housing, with average home prices between 150,000 and 200,000. They’ve found that millennials prefer to live in apartments in city centers, with nearby parks, rather than in single family homes with yards, and they have a lot of construction of housing underway. In Tampa there is a lot of focus on events, festivals, performing arts and museums, and lots of parks along their waterway.

Finance Committee meeting 3/6/17

Elton Carrier, chair; Paul Gawrych, Mark Smith, Gary Santos

3. Discussion of whether to spend funds for additional design work for the Lucy Beckham High School to build seating for a football stadium. The costs would be \$18,000 for a schematic design, and \$90,000 for a complete design. The current concrete stadium at the old Wando site will be demolished in 2018 because it would collapse in the event of an earthquake registering 6.2 on the Richter scale. There was uncertainty among the committee members as to the CCSD's current plans: whether they already were planning to build 400 or 600 seats at the field, or possibly none at all, it was unclear to me. The referendum approved by voters several years ago (?) designated a large, state of the art, stadium to be built at the current Wando High School, which would be shared by the other East Cooper high schools that CCSD expects to build in the future. (There are some plans for another high school, closer to Awendaw.)

Mr. Santos believes that each school should have its own stadium, and that this would be preferable for the students and their families, as well as reducing the traffic burden on Highway 17 and Carolina Park. Mr. Gawrych expressed concerns that the stadiums would not be comparable, since Lucy Beckham would be a smaller school and any stadium built would be considerably less impressive than Wando's, resulting in resentment. Mr. Carrier thought the Carolina Park residents' concerns about game night traffic were unreasonable, since that neighborhood has always been zoned for 300 acres of commercial (big box type) development. Mr. Smith seemed to be uncomfortable about circumventing the referendum, as well as authorizing \$108,000 to be spent without clarity as to whether anything would ever be built, and whether CCSD would contribute. (I would need to check the minutes to verify my notes here...it was confusing.)

Mr. Carrier, Mr. Gawrych and Mr. Smith voted against authorizing the funds, and the motion failed.

4. The new Principal Planner position was approved unanimously.

5. Budget items: all members were concerned about the changes being made at the state level, which have negative impacts on the town. Some went to Columbia to meet with legislators, and were disappointed in the responses.

6. Contract for Fire Department medical director was approved.

7. Developmental Impact Fees will be raised. Please see minutes, too technical for me.

8. Request for town owned land at 5th St. to be turned into a pocket park in a privately funded project in honor of Kenny Seamon. Motion passed.

9. Bid regarding Coleman Blvd revitalization. Confusing, please see minutes.