

Douglas S. Wright, Jr., chair, called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m., on Wednesday, January 9, 2013, in the Conference Room, Fourth Floor, City Hall. Also present were commission members D. Miller, J. Stone, R. Thomas, and J. Wheeler. The following staff members were present: K. Maher, Planning Director; S. Bockmiller, Development Planner/Zoning Administrator; A. Rohrbaugh, Planner; and D. Calhoun, Secretary.

### WORKSHOP MEETING

#### Approval of Minutes: November 14, 2012 - Regular Meeting; and December 12, 2012 - Regular Meeting

##### November 14, 2012:

**MOTION:** (Wheeler/Thomas) I'll move approval of the minutes.  
**DISCUSSION:** None.  
**ACTION:** APPROVED (Unanimous)

##### December 12, 2012:

Action on the December 12 minutes was tabled until the next meeting.

#### 2012 Development Report.

Staff presented a report on commercial site plan approvals, building permit activity, new housing unit permits, and construction activity at the City's active residential development projects in 2012 (full report in meeting file). Highlights from the report are as follows:

- Site plans were approved for 137,089 square feet of commercial and institutional development projects with a total estimated construction value of \$29.9 million. The largest project was Bester Elementary School at 72,848-74,348 square feet and \$23 million in construction value. The largest commercial project was the Trilogy II office building at the Light Business Park with an estimated construction value of \$4.3 million.
- City issued 495 building permits in 2012 with a total estimated construction investment of \$41.8 million.
- The Dual Highway saw the majority of construction activity by regional and national commercial chains including Supreme Buffet Hibachi Grill & Sushi, Sonic, PNC Bank,

MedExpress, ProBuild, Taco Bell, Hampton Inn, Jimmy John's, Checkers, and Walgreen's. AutoZone received a permit in December and is expected to begin construction sometime in January, 2013.

- Medical construction continued with Antietam Pediatrics in the Light Business Park, The Professional Center (former Food Lion) on Eastern Boulevard, North, and First Choice Pediatrics on Pennsylvania Avenue.
- Tenant fit-outs of vacant spaces in shopping centers and outparcels included Jimmy John's, Checkers, Hobby Lobby, Sweet Frog, Carol & Company, and El Rancho (former Applebee's on Wesel Boulevard).
- The City issued a total of 33 permits in 2012 for 34 new dwelling units. Active developments were Collegiate Acres (single-family detached units and townhouses), Cortland Villas (duplexes), Greenwich Park (duplexes), Hager's Crossing (single-family detached), and Potomac Manor (single-family detached). A concept plan was approved for 272 multi-family units by The Reserve at Collegiate Acres, however, APFO approval is pending.
- Downtown renovation projects continued at the Wareham Building (Ansari), Mulberry Lofts (Laughlin), 36-40 North Potomac Street (City), and 56-58 West Washington Street (City). The project at 56-58 West Washington Street created additional space for the University System of Maryland-Hagerstown campus. Work began at 140 South Potomac Street for an Edward Jones investment office (Lyles).
- City installed sun canopies at University Plaza and constructed two new parks: Margaret Greenawalt Park and Memorial Park (Phase I).

### **How Strong is Our Community?**

In order to assist the new administration in developing a plan of action for the next four years, staff prepared a list of attributes of a strong community and challenges that affect Hagerstown as a community (see memo in meeting file). Seven attributes of a strong community identified by staff include:

- Ensuring the dignity of every individual by increasing access to good quality housing, safe neighborhoods, and good paying jobs.

- The entire community benefits when every individual and household is protected from forces that would jeopardize their quality of life and stifle their sense of hope for their future and their children's future.
- Community is stronger when residents are occupied productively and good paying jobs are available within a reasonable distance from their homes.
- The community is stronger when neighborhoods provide opportunities for households of varying income levels and are representative of all demographic strata of the community.
- Community is stronger when neighborhoods are protected from overconcentration of housing which is set aside for low-income households and special needs populations and from saturation of service providers for special needs populations.
- Community's quality of life is stronger when there are adequate amenities to serve the leisure needs of residents and when residents feel safe utilizing public spaces.
- Attractive amenities, public spaces, and streetscapes help to build pride in our neighborhoods and our city and make for a stronger community.

Commission members added the following ideas to include as attributes of a strong community:

- Good schools that make the city a desirable place to raise a family. This, in turn, motivates residents to stay in the community. Commission members felt that most city schools compare favorably. Ms. Maher added that the public school system has been focusing on the inner city schools.
- Close proximity to historical sites, such as Antietam National Battlefield, Charles Town, Washington, D. C.
- A less-transient population. Residents are more dedicated in a stable population. This includes businesses. Ms. Maher added that the transient population issue affects students and schools as well.
- A vital and thriving downtown urban core. Not many thriving communities have a hollow core. This would include commercial and residential development.
- Strength of the business and commercial activity of the community, not just downtown, but everywhere. A strong community contains many thriving small- and medium-sized businesses that are locally owned and managed. Currently there are many local offices

for large national companies. A strong community needs business leaders that are locally invested. A community is stronger when it has a business base that is strongly rooted in the community. The business leaders live in the community and invest in it.

- The existing transportation network is a positive attribute of this community. It is centrally located within a reasonable drive. This area has one of the strongest transportation infrastructures (rail, interstates, airports).

Mr. Wright observed that some of the wording in the staff report is too “all perfect” (the City is going to take care of everything for everybody). He suggested replacing the word, “ensure” with “promote.” The text should use more words that indicate that the City is not going to fix everything for everybody.

The staff report also listed challenges facing the community. To prepare its findings, staff members studied the most recent Census and the 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) Three-Year Estimates. The following social dilemmas were identified by staff:

- Two census tracts in Hagerstown have nearly 50% of their residents living below the poverty level, while two others have 26% to 30% of their residents living below the poverty level.
- Two census tracts have an 18% to 30% unemployment rate.
- Eight census tracts are below the County median for attainment of a bachelor’s degree or higher (19%); five of Hagerstown’s census tracts have less than 10% of residents over the age of 25 with a bachelor’s degree or higher.
- Two of Hagerstown’s census tracts (excludes the five census tracts where City residents are a small minority of total) have median household income levels that are over the County median of \$52,653.
- Six of Hagerstown’s census tracts have median household incomes that are below Hagerstown’s median of \$36,806.

Various public-subsidized programs are concentrating special needs populations in the City Center and urban core area:

- City Center has a high concentration of housing which is set aside for low-income households (including Section 8 vouchers) and special needs populations.

- City Center and surrounding urban core have a high concentration of subsistence assistance, substance abuse treatment facilities, and mental health programs and facilities.

Other challenges include:

- City's older urban core neighborhoods have high concentrations of rental-occupied housing and deteriorated housing.
- City Center has quite a number of vacant or marginally occupied commercial buildings in deteriorated or substandard condition that deter reinvestment and contribute to negative perceptions of the viability of the City Center.

Mr. Rohrbaugh prepared corresponding maps and charts that analyzed additional census figures and data from the 2011 American Community Survey. Mr. Wright objected to Hagerstown being compared to the state of Maryland. Comparisons should be made with Washington County or other communities in the region such as Chambersburg or Martinsburg. Mr. Rohrbaugh read stats comparing Hagerstown with several other cities in the Hagerstown region.

- There was an 8.1% population increase in Hagerstown between 2000 and 2010 (36,687 to 39,662 persons).
- Hagerstown's median age is 35.5 years old.
- 80% of Hagerstown's ethnicity is "White, Non-Hispanic," with "Black or African American" the next largest at 13%. "Hispanic or Latino" populations increased from 1.8% in 2000 to 5% in 2010.
- According to the 2011 American Community Survey, median household income in Hagerstown was just over \$36,000. Hagerstown's household income is significantly lower than the median income of \$52,653 for Washington County.

Commission members asked if the community is still trying to attract people who are unemployed. Another discussion item might ask how much one population area can absorb of people who need extra levels of service. There needs to be a balance between social responsibility and trying to have a more vibrant community. Students graduating from the local institutions of higher education are not staying in the area after graduation.

- 22.1% of Hagerstown's residents live in poverty (incomes up to \$22,000 for a family of four). The inner core of the city has high concentrations of people living in poverty.

- Hagerstown's unemployment rate is 11.3% compared to 9.7% in Washington County.
- In Hagerstown 16.4% of residents have a Bachelor's Degree or higher; 17.4% of Hagerstown's population has less than a high school diploma or equivalency.
- Commission members did not see the relevancy of the chart concerning "Non-Family Households." This is a national phenomenon and there is nothing the City can affect.
- The total number of vacant units citywide is 2,223 for a 12% vacancy rate.
- Housing inventories - Mr. Stone said he thought the amount of inventory of available housing has dropped since the 2010 Census.
- Housing Tenure (Renter vs. Owner-Occupied Housing) - more than 75% of housing in census tracts 4 and 7 are rentals; overall, 57% of housing units are rentals which is down from 58% in 2000.
- Rental Residential and Subsidized Housing Data:
  - Tract 4 - 78.3% are subsidized and/or vouchers
  - Tract 7 - 34.5% are subsidized and/or vouchers
  - Tract 9 - 22.6% are subsidized and/or vouchers
  - Tract 10.01 - 45% are subsidized and/or vouchers

Included in the packet material for this topic was a map showing the location of "Housing and Service Facilities for Special Needs Populations." Mr. Wright asked staff to provide a list that associates a name with the number indicated on the map. Staff advised that the data is from 2010.

Concerning the challenges facing Hagerstown, some suggestions provided by commission members included:

- A homesteading program. Mr. Wright suggested targeting a small section of the inner core where the City would aggressively buy properties and sell them with conditions to families. Conditions could include minimum residency requirements, tax abatements on improvements made to the property, support groups for homeowners.
- City might consider participating in buying properties at tax sales. Areas could be targeted where the City is interested in seeing improvements.

Mr. Stone wondered, given the advantages we have, what Hagerstown is doing or not doing that makes the outcomes not as attractive given all the things we have going for us. Mr. Bockmiller noted that adjoining states have fewer regulations and lower taxes affecting development so business and industry choose those locations over Hagerstown. Mr. Wright observed that even when industries locate in adjoining states, Hagerstown residents can be employed by those businesses. Mr. Thomas suggested an intern program. Interns might stay in the area if they are hired by the company after their internship is over. (Mr. Miller left the meeting.)

**Implementing Hagerstown's Sustainable Community Plan.**

The City of Hagerstown developed a Sustainable Community Plan (SCP) in 2011 (updated of Community Legacy Plan) and forwarded it to the state of Maryland for approval of the plan and area. Following approval in early 2012, a work group of City staff began meeting to develop an action plan to implement the recommendations in the Sustainable Community Plan (meeting file). Seven broad goal statements were developed and staff devised activities to implement the SCP.

**Goal: Make the City Center easier and "safer" to navigate for business patrons, employees, and residents.**

City staff recently participated in a walking tour of the City Center after dark with the Hagerstown Police Department to observe situations which compromise feelings of "safety." As a result, strategies were developed to improve lighting and create a sense of ownership of public spaces in the City Center. Commission members commented that the time of the night-time walking tour is crucial. Downtown at 2:00 a.m. has a vastly different dynamic than downtown at 7:00 or 8:00 p.m. Mr. Wright stated there is a new trend in outdoor advertising in big cities that uses hotspots for Android phones. This technology replaces the QR and can give users instant access to information about their current location.

**Goal: Recruit new businesses and jobs to the City Center.**

Staff facilitated efforts to analyze potential sites for a new downtown location for the Board of Education. In addition, the Planning Commission is slated to hold a public meeting on January 30 to gain input from the community on the recommendations of Meritus' consultant for redevelopment of the former hospital lands on the east side of the downtown.

**Goal: Upgrade housing to attract residents who will support City Center events and businesses.**

City created new provisions in the Land Management Code to allow for creation of Artist Live Work housing downtown. Currently, the City is renovating 36-40 North Potomac Street to create four artist loft units. In addition, Hagerstown was awarded Community Legacy funds to create a Mixed-Use Building Facade Grant/Loan Program for targeted downtown properties.

**Goal: Create and support efforts that bring people downtown for events and to patronize businesses.**

Plans were explored in 2012 for a new multi-use sports and entertainment center in a downtown location. The current administration is still discussing locations for a new stadium. Hagerstown continues to partner with others on development of new downtown events.

**Goal: Create amenities to make Hagerstown a place of choice to live by all income groups.**

The City recently completed Margaret Greenawalt Park at North Locust Street and East Avenue. Work on Phase I of Memorial Park at South Potomac Street and Memorial Boulevard is coming to a close. The City continues to explore other opportunities to insert parks into the city's neighborhoods.

**Goal: Recruit residents with more discretionary spending power.**

Following the "Live Baltimore" model, staff have developed a map of proposed neighborhood designations and are preparing descriptive language on each for marketing tools to promote living in the city and the various housing opportunities in city neighborhoods. The neighborhood boundaries follow development <sup>areas</sup> ~~eras~~ more so than reflect the boundaries established by Neighborhoods 1<sup>st</sup> groups. The Planning Commission will review recommendations in the Sage Report for developing an arts, entertainment, and education cluster in Washington County.

**Goal: Turn blighted conditions into opportunities for economic development.**

Provided a deal can be reached with the owner, the City will utilize a Community Legacy grant award and CDBG funds to acquire and partially renovate 43-53 West Washington Street. A through corridor would be developed that could create a mini mall effect with additional parking developed in the rear. City staff continues to explore other

opportunities to intervene and seek positive action with blighted properties, such as the Mid-Town Motel site.

Staff asked for the commission's ideas on the action plan. Due to time constraints, discussion was limited.

**Board of Zoning Appeals Agenda - January 16, 2013 Hearing.**

Mr. Bockmiller reviewed the four cases on the agenda for January 16. The commission had no comments to pass on to the Board of Zoning Appeals.

**Adjourn:** It was moved and seconded that the meeting adjourn at 5:57 p.m.

1/30/13  
Date

DC Calhoun  
Debra C. Calhoun - Secretary