

**JOINT CITY COUNCIL/PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD WORKSHOP MINUTES  
THURSDAY, JANUARY 18, 2024 1:30 P.M.  
CITY HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS, VERO BEACH, FLORIDA**

**PRESENT:** John Cotugno, Mayor; Linda Moore, Vice Mayor; Tracey Zudans, Councilmember; John Carroll, Councilmember and Taylor Dingle, Councilmember **Also Present:** Monte Falls, City Manager; John Turner, City Attorney and Tammy Bursick, City Clerk

**Planning and Zoning Board:** Chairman, Jeb Bittner; **Members:** Elliese Shaughnessy, Jason Ground, Timothy Velde and T. P. Kennedy

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Cotugno opened the meeting up at 1:30 p.m.

**A) Pledge of Allegiance**

Mayor Cotugno led the Council and audience in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

**B) Roll Call**

The City Clerk performed the roll call.

**2. ITEM FOR DISCUSSION:**

**A) Downtown Master Plan Kick-off Presentation of DPZ CoDesign**

Mr. Jason Jeffries, Planning Director, reported that Gibbs Planning Group, Inc., did some data research in terms of the market research for the Downtown and Stantec Consulting Services, Inc., did a review of all the past plans for the Downtown. After the two (2) workshops that were held, it was decided by the City Council that they would move forward with a hybrid model for the Downtown Master Plan. He reported that Mr. Andres Duany, of DPZ CoDesign, has been in town for the past two (2) days walking through the Downtown and meeting with business owners and property owners to get an understanding of what the issues are. He reported that the DPZ CoDesign team would come back and hold a week long charrette the first week of November. He stated that today Mr. Duany would be reporting to the City Council on what they have seen and what their approach would be with this project.

Mr. Andres Duany, of DPZ CoDesign, stated that the charrette officially starts in two (2) weeks and they would be here with a full team for five (5) days. He said that they held some group and individual meetings over the past two (2) days. He reported that they first met with the property owners and then they met with the business owners. He said the first night that he was here from 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., he went to every open business and purchased something. He said that he was really impressed and was not expecting so much activity. He saw some interesting and edgy things that were very attractive to young people. He said that he also went to Ocean Drive to see what was going on there. He said they were also doing very well, but they were not

competitive with the Downtown. He said the last thing that they want is a second rate Ocean Drive. What they want is a first rate 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue. He said that he also met with the City Councilmembers individually because he wanted to know what their ideas were. He stated that this project was very future oriented. What they are lacking is that the young people don't have housing. He said that young people are moving north from the south because they can't afford to live there and they could capture them to move here. He said that he has been practicing for 45-years and he has never been to a place so unwilling to have the public sector help the private sector with funding or public/private partnerships. He said they have a public sector that won't help the private sector. He said it is a nightmare to deal with the Fire Marshal or with the Building Department, which is the single biggest problem. He said they could get a Fire Marshal who is sympathetic and knows what an old building is. He said Fire Marshals and Building Inspectors of the County makes this impossible because old buildings are not perfect. None of the buildings Downtown could meet the manic standards of the Fire Marshal and Building Inspector. He said although this is a large area to fix, the quality of it varies incredibly. It does have to be brought up to date, but the bones are good. They need to start in a concentrated way, which would be 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue and then they would have the velocity to go on.

Mr. Monte Falls, City Manager, felt that they had an opportunity that the next generation could enjoy.

Mr. Dingle feels that this is a great time to do this because the County is growing. It is his hope that they attract County residents to come here and spend their money to stimulate the City's economy. He said the Vero Beach Community Complex would not only attract new residents to the Downtown, but would also accommodate existing City and County residents. He felt that now was the time to be proactive and prepare for the future and put something special together. He was excited to be a part of it.

Mr. Carroll liked that they started off with "this is the future" because there were a lot of people who misunderstood how and why the City Council voted to go forward with this Downtown analysis and he felt that cleared it up. He said going forward they are going to need a new City Hall that they are going to need to plan for. He would like to incorporate that and have wider sidewalks, possibly a parking garage by Jetsons and have good signage.

Vice Mayor Moore said that she is a Downtown business owner and has been there for a while. She has watched it evolve, grow and improve. She thinks the key is that they need to have more residential. They need a way to have younger people to be able to afford to live here and open their businesses here. She would like to expand all the things that they are doing with art and to bring the Arts Village more into being an active part of the Downtown. She would like it to be more walkable, have more trees, and to make it inviting. She said that she has been around for many of the Downtown plans and nothing ever happens because there is never a funding source. She said that is the reason that nothing ever happens.

Mrs. Zudans said our community has, in her opinion, a Bermuda triangle of destinations. They have Ocean Drive that have boutiques, restaurants, etc. and the Three Corners will be different and unique that will be a destination in itself. She felt that this was a fantastic opportunity for Downtown to define what it is separately and uniquely from those two (2) areas. She said

Downtown was not the “red headed stepchild” of Ocean Drive. It is unique, fantastic, and vibrant in what it does. It needs to perfect and become what it is supposed to be and she sees this as an opportunity to do that. She was excited to see what they come up with. She also sees this as an opportunity for public/private partnerships that has not happened in the past. She said they do a good job with non-profits, but felt that doing it on a professional level was something new and exciting that they need to dive deeper into.

Mayor Cotugno felt that there was a tremendous opportunity for a Downtown that has survived the times. He agreed with Mrs. Zudans that they would eventually have three (3) distinct areas, which makes them different from a lot of places. He said the Downtown is a centerpiece of the mainland and it could have a resident component, which is needed. It has an environment that is conducive to a younger demographic. It is the opportunity for government to provide a plan for this to happen and to remove obstacles as much as they can. He said there is a tremendous opportunity to make this a different and vibrant part of the City. He was looking forward to seeing the input and suggestions of the citizens and seeing the final product.

Mr. Ground said one of the things that he was waiting for since joining the Planning and Zoning Board was when they could start to work on Downtown. He said that he grew up here and when he was in high school he spent a lot of time Downtown after school and there was not much there. He said it is far better than it used to be, but it could be much better. There is a lot of potential. One thing that he wanted to avoid was being over parked and mentioned incentivizing shared parking. Another thing was to find ways to incentivize developers to build mixed-use multi-family residential in an area with low density.

Mr. Velde said this is a very exciting time in the City with all the new projects. He said let’s do the best they can to make it right. If it takes more time to get this right, he was all in.

Mr. Duany said they should make sure that they get exactly what they want with apartments that are attractive to young people who are just starting out. They need to make certain that what they do does not set precedent for the rest of the Town. It would be a special zoning district.

Mr. T. P. Kennedy said that his main concern was coming up with a sensible residential unit count for the Downtown area. Another concern was hotel rooms allocated per acre. He said everyone wants at least 90 rooms for their hotel. He also felt that there needed to be a plan for off-site parking, possibly a public/private partnership because parking was only going to get worse. He said walkability across the Downtown was a big thing to him. He would like people to park and walk and not park and just walk in. He said the first floor should be commercial, the second floor could be offices, and floors three (3) through five (5) could be residential. He said the 50-foot height limit could stay, but they should research what type of embellishments could go on top of that 50-feet, such as rooftop bars, restaurants, etc. He also felt that they should pencil in a train station in the future.

Ms. Shaughnessy said that she is a Land Development Engineer and she has spoken with potential developers for the Downtown about redeveloping some of the office space and about hotels. She said as they got a little bit down the road the developer felt that their dreams were squashed so they ended the project. She said it was sad to see that some developers feel like they can’t develop

there. She said that she moved here a little over five (5) years ago and it was hard to meet young people so she created a facebook group and they now have over 2,500 young people in the group. She said that her original friends have all left so she is having to make new friends every year. She has seen a lot of young people come and go.

Mr. Duany said that he would like to know why her friends were leaving.

Mr. Ground felt a lot of it was that there were not a lot of job opportunities.

Mr. Bittner felt that public/private partnerships were important. He said cooperation between the entities was huge because the majority of the population this was going to serve probably lives in the County. He was happy that this was happening.

### **3. Public Comment**

Mayor Cotugno asked the public wishing to speak that they keep their comments to three (3) minutes or less.

Mr. Bob Dakin, City resident, said that he was an equity owner of the Ann Taylor Store in downtown Charleston. He said the streets reminded him of 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Vero Beach. He said that he went to Charleston and felt there was an opportunity to open a store and everyone thought that he was crazy. They said it was the south and no one wears the merchandise they wear in New York. He had to convince other executives that the young people would support the store. He encouraged everyone as they go through this process that they look through the lens of a 25 to 30 year old. If they keep that in the center of everything they will have a greater chance of being successful.

Mr. Roy Nathanson, County resident, applauded the City Council for doing the right thing with the Twin Pairs. He said there is a little parking lot that has 14 spaces on 20<sup>th</sup> Street and 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which was a very insufficient use of parking space that should be a plaza. He felt it would be great if they turned 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue into a walking street. He said to be able to sit at a table on the sidewalk would be fabulous. He said it would be fantastic if they turned the area where they were closing the lane by the Courthouse an exercise circuit with outside exercise equipment.

Ms. Laura Moss, Indian River County Commissioner, said it was going to be an exciting time for them in working with Mr. Duany in the planning of the Downtown. She encouraged the entire community to participate.

Ms. Alma Lockett, City resident, said that she has found herself wanting to support the small businesses, however they are not always the first on her list so she ends up going elsewhere. She said that she wants to put her money into the community that she is vested in. She looked forward to how the City moves forward and the decisions that they make.

Mr. Jackson Stewart, City resident, said something that has not been discussed was beautification. He said a previous City Council decided not to have trees in the right-of-way. He said that he did not know why because other cities have trees in the right-of-way and they provide shade. He said

there is no shade in the Downtown. He said that when he was on 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue someone dropped off some homeless people. There is a completely different group of homeless people than who were there last year. He said this was something worth looking at. He said there is nothing in the Downtown other than a derelict Park and a scattering of bars and restaurants. They need to consider what they want the Downtown to be.

Ms. Jerusha Stewart, County resident, said that she is the founder of the Vero Beach Film Festival. She said when they first started the Film Festival it was to increase the economic development of the City. It was held in June and it was focused on the entire City. It is now being held in April and it is focused on the Downtown. She said when she looked at previous plans she saw that there was a Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) and the CRA became Mainstreet Vero Beach. She asked is that going to be the roll of Mainstreet going forward. She asked who was going to shepherd the plan. She said not only was there a funding issue, but there was a lack of oversight. She felt that they needed a group who were totally focused on making this happen.

Mr. Curtis Johnson, City Commissioner of the City of Ft. Pierce, said that he is a property owner in Indian River County. He said they are going through the same thing in Ft. Pierce with battling with their Downtown and development. He said as to the homeless being dropped off, they are also seeing homeless people showing up in Ft. Pierce. He encouraged them to have some conversations sooner than later to figure out how to bridge these gaps because it is happening throughout the Treasure Coast. He said as they both look to grow their downtowns they need to work together. He was encouraged about what the City is going to do with Downtown. He looked forward to being an olive branch for the City of Ft. Pierce to have this conversation because they have more in common now than they ever have before.

Mr. Ken Daige, City resident, said that he resides in Osceola Park and they have a diverse group of people who live near this area. He said this is a very unique place. He said they were given some very solid suggestions that the City Council could act on, such as a Fire Marshal and a Building Inspector. He said they could put this on their agenda and do this right now. Also, it needs to be affordable and they need to hold people's feet to the fire. They need to make sure that they keep the rent reasonable. He said that slumlords make good money and that is why they get rooted in.

Mr. Dave Thomas said that he came here in 1961 and this is the first time that he has seen something happening. He said they want places for people to shop and to have offices on top floors. He said the top floor also could be a garden area.

Mrs. Barbara Ruddy said when they talk about Vero Beach, it is important that they remember that there really is an arts triangle on the beachside, which is the Arts Museum, Riverside Theatre and the World War II Tribute that is underway.

Mrs. Saskia Fuller said that she lives in the Vero Beach Arts Village and was very excited that this was happening. She hoped that the Arts Village would become a very important discussion point.

Mayor Cotugno closed public comments at 2:56 p.m.

Mr. Jeffries thanked everyone for their comments. He reported that February 5<sup>th</sup> would start the week long charrette. There will be information on the City's website, as well as a dedicated website.

#### **4. Adjournment**

Today's meeting adjourned at 2:56 p.m.

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