

**CITY OF VERO BEACH, FLORIDA  
CITY COUNCIL SPEICAL CALL/WORKSHOP MINUTES  
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19, 2023 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 Rey Neville, Councilmember **Also Present:** Monte Falls, City Manager; John Turner, City Attorney and Tammy Bursick, City Clerk

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

**A) Pledge of Allegiance**

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

**B) Roll Call**

The City Clerk performed the roll call.

**2. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

**A) Discuss Affordable Housing**

Mr. Jason Jeffries, Planning Director, gave a Power Point presentation (attached to the original minutes). He explained the SB 102 Live Local Act. He said in subsection (6): Governing Body of municipalities may approve any multi-family residential development or mixed use development with 10% affordable residential units in any commercial or industrial zoning district. He went over the optional affordable housing approvals and what is required for affordable housing approvals located in subsection (7). The municipality must approve multi-family and mixed-use residential projects in any commercial, industrial or mixed use zoning district. The residential project must include 40% rental affordable residential units. It "shall" not require zoning or land use change, special exception, conditional use approval, variance or comprehensive plan amendment for building height, zoning, and densities. It requires administrative approval, but no further action by the governing body. He went over the City's zoning Codes. The Indian River County Affordable Housing Committee recommends expedited permitting for affordable housing projects implemented by the County, all allowable fee waivers provided for the development or construction of affordable housing, flexible densities, reservation of infrastructure capacity for affordable housing projects, affordable accessory residential units, reduction of parking and setback requirements for affordable housing projects flexible lot configuration, modification of street requirements, establish process for considering before adoption cost effect of new regulations, policies, and ordinance, inventory of publicly owned land and supports developments near transportation hubs and major employment centers. He said the next steps would be to update Chapter 79 – Affordable Housing Incentives. That would include the process to approve residential projects with 10% affordable housing in commercial or industrial zoning districts. The process to approve residential projects with 40% affordable housing in commercial, mixed use, or industrial zoning districts, consider recommendation from the Indian River County Affordable Housing Committee, develop a list of eligible City properties by October 1, 2023 and develop the process to offer eligible properties for Affordable Housing.

Mayor Cotugno showed his Power Point presentation having to do with the Indian River County Affordable Housing Committee (attached to the original minutes).

Mr. Carroll commented that it sounds like the Governor already signed the Bill. He asked when the effective date was. He was told by the City Attorney that it is July 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Carroll said that if they are considering the old nursery property then they would have to put this up for a referendum for the citizens to give approval to use that property.

Vice Mayor Moore thought that was being waived in this Bill.

Mr. John Turner, City Attorney, commented that the whole Bill presents conflicts under the requirements and their protection of the City Charter. He is still sorting through those things.

Vice Mayor Moore commented that if they are going to allow the property to be used for affordable housing then they could put it on the ballot and then if it is approved they could see if there were any developers wanting it.

Mr. Carroll agreed that they needed to decide how to handle the property.

Mr. Turner explained that would depend on how City Council wants to proceed.

Vice Mayor Moore questioned if there were other properties instead of just that one piece of property that could be used for affordable housing.

Mr. Jeffries said that he would be doing the inventory for the City and should have that ready in October. He said they would look at the property available, the zoning, is the property protected under the Charter, and is it being used as a Park.

Mr. Neville asked if the State was planning to take this property from the City to use it for affordable housing.

Mr. Jeffries did not think so. He said what is being required by the City is to make a determination of any of the properties suitable for affordable housing. Then they would need to come up with criteria to make it available and solicit the properties.

Mr. Neville asked if the City would get fair market value for the property.

Mr. Jeffries explained that they are talking about leasing the property to developers, which market value leasing would be looked at.

Mr. Monte Falls, City Manager, reminded Council that they are talking about a piece of property that was used in 2004 to hold the debris from the two (2) hurricanes that took place that year. Right now they don't have any other places to do that since they sold the Dodgertown property. The only other place would be at Riverside Park. He asked Council to keep that in mind when they are considering this.

Mr. Carroll agreed that they need to consider all of the factors.

Mr. Jeffries continued going through his Power Point presentation.

Vice Mayor Moore commented that if they are talking about not having some of these things done until September then they could not get it on the ballot this year.

Mayor Cotugno asked if they could go ahead and do what is similar to what they did at the Three Corners property and find out the interest there is by issuing an RFI for the 13 acres and solicit proposals and hopefully some local developers would like to submit something. Then that would give them an idea in moving forward for the future.

Mr. Jeffries had some concerns with looking at the timing of getting any responses.

Vice Mayor Moore felt they needed to solicit for interest in order to formulate the wording for the referendum that states why they want to lease the property and not sell it for the purpose of affordable housing.

Mr. Falls said they could do that, but he recalled with the Three Corners project referendum they showed the public what could be done with that property and the turnout for the referendum items was very good. If that is not done they might not have a good chance of getting it passed.

Mrs. Zudans commented that what is coming across to her is that they are putting the cart before the horse. They don't know all the things behind this and were potentially offering this piece of property for lease. She did not understand why they were rushing this. They need to potentially get the community involved. She said this is a big project. She didn't see the need to rush and get this on the November ballot. They first need to iron out the wrinkles and then look at putting it on the referendum in November, 2024.

Vice Mayor Moore commented on the shortage for affordable housing. She said that the School Board is looking at hiring over 100 teachers and they don't have affordable housing in this area for them to live in.

Mrs. Zudans agreed they need workforce housing, but she was not in favor of rushing into anything. That would be a disservice to their community.

Mr. Neville would like to see the percentages of the different levels of affordability. Mr. Jeffries said it is around 40%. Mr. Neville asked if there is any State funding. Mr. Jeffries said there could be because there are State programs.

Mrs. Zudans asked if the County was doing the same inventory for their properties. Mr. Jeffries said yes they are required to by State Statutes. Mrs. Zudans continued by saying that there is a need for workforce housing in the whole County and what is the City's part of this. She questioned where is the balance of what the need is versus where the work is.

Mr. Jeffries would like to do an analysis on what truly is needed. They need to talk about the different income levels. He said teachers are in the higher percentage and they probably need to take a hard look at people with the lowest income.

Mrs. Zudans agreed that it was important to have an important collaborative conversation with the County and find out what they are doing and where the need is for the most effectiveness for the community.

Vice Mayor Moore knows from her employees that there are not affordable housing in this community. As soon as someone moves out of an apartment someone is waiting in line to get it because there are no apartments available in the vicinity. She asked how long the City's old nursery has been empty.

Mr. Falls said that it has not been used as a plant nursery since the late 1980's.

Vice Mayor Moore asked if there have been any proposals to do anything on this property.

Mr. Falls recalled that at one time they were talking about making it a Park. He reiterated that It is a piece of property that is protected by the City Charter.

Vice Mayor Moore wondered how they might have a good use for this property that has been vacant for the last 40 years. She said this piece of property is close enough to downtown and is a good source of economic development.

Mrs. Zudans brought up density and that they did not need to rush into having a referendum until all the "wrinkles" have been ironed out.

Mr. Neville felt that by knowing what the low, medium and high revenue source is can give them the basis in determining whether or not there is a value here. Giving the property away makes him uncomfortable.

Mr. Carroll asked if property taxes will be paid. Mr. Jeffries said it depends if the establishment going on the property is non-profit or not.

Mr. Carroll commented that they are hard press as seeing development coming into the downtown area. Developers will need to look out how to lay out the development without spending a good amount of money for a site plan. They are still looking at September being the earliest they could get an RFP out. He believes that 99% of the community is supportive of affordable housing. But to say they have 13 acres and don't know what they are going to do with the property, the referendum would not pass.

Mrs. Zudans commented on all of the things that they have already charged staff to get done and this is not on their priority list.

Mayor Cotugno did not feel that there was any negative feelings looking at this particular property for affordable housing. He would like to see them move forward on this to collect the data so they can make an informed decision. They should begin to gather data and put the process together and pointing in the direction of using their piece of property for affordable housing.

Mr. Carroll felt that this Bill will be modified.

Mr. Neville expressed that this property does not belong to them, but to the people in Vero Beach and the City needs to get fair value for the property if they relinquish this property. They also need to know what kind of revenue they would get from this property.

Vice Mayor Moore agreed with moving this forward and having Mr. Jeffries bring them back some data.

Mayor Cotugno opened the meeting up for public comments at 2:31 p.m.

Mr. Jason Brown commented that some of the workforce is not being paid enough, but that is beyond this discussion. There is no supply for affordable housing. People have respectful jobs, but don't have an option of finding affordable housing in the City and sometimes not even in the County. He said there needs to be a plan to increase density and look at the assessable units and provide a larger supply.

Mr. Wilford Hart said there is a great difference between affordable housing and workforce housing. He thanked Vice Mayor Moore for trying to push this forward. He expressed there is a great need for workforce housing in this area. He said the County wants to do their part. He is talking to them a lot about workforce housing. He said it is a major problem to find teachers to come to this community because they can't afford it. They need to follow this process slowly and do it right the first time.

Mayor Cotugno closed public comments at 2:39 p.m.

Mr. Jeffries said that he will come back to their next City Council meeting with an outline.

### **B) Downtown Master Plan Schedule**

Mr. Jeffries gave a Power Point presentation on the Downtown Master Plan (attached to the original minutes). He first talked about how the community vision is implemented. They first determine the community's vision, explore alternatives and develop a strategy, adopt objectives and policies based on analysis for the Comprehensive Plan and implement the land development regulations (zoning) and site development. The planning process would be to collect the data needed, identify issues as well as the goals and objectives and then adopt a plan. Mr. Jeffries briefly went over the land development regulations. He said there have been previous downtown plans done over time. One was done in 1987, which was for the concept of Vero Beach Downtown, then one was done in 1990 for the Downtown Vero Beach Redevelopment Project, there was one done in 1992 for the Downtown Vero Beach Redevelopment Plan, in 2000 the Downtown Revitalization Strategy was prepared for Vero Beach Main Street to provide a marketing strategy, in 2006 there was a Downtown Charrette and in 2008 there was a Downtown Action Plan done. He said that a Retail Market Study is needed. He said that Mr. Matt Haynes would be presenting an update on the business and property owners meetings that have been recently taking place.

Mr. Carroll said he was in favor of the new boundaries and it was good to expand it out.

Mr. Matt Haynes, Downtown Mainstreet Executive Director, thanked them for allowing Mainstreet to get involved with this. He held 2023 Downtown Business Owner and Property Owners Roundtable Summaries, where they had four (4) meetings and got people involved. He went through a Power Point presentation (attached to the original minutes) and had live excerpts of these meetings to show the discussion that took place.

Mr. Neville mentioned that it was not that long ago that the City of Naples downtown was dying. A design was done by Andres Duany and now their downtown is booming. However, the businesses and shops are vastly different than what they have in their downtown.

Vice Mayor Moore felt they needed more people to live in downtown. She said there are people that come to her restaurant who would love to live in the downtown area, but cannot find a home.

Mr. Neville commented that central beach is very busy because there are places that you can walk to and businesses to go to.

Mr. Carroll added that there are plenty of destinations in central beach like the Theater and the Vero Beach Museum of Art and they have those things in Naples also.

Mr. Haynes expressed they are at a pivotal point now. He said they have to either do something or do nothing.

Mr. Neville felt that the not for profit businesses downtown need to be replaced with regular businesses.

Mayor Cotugno said not necessarily and they could not blame this on the non-profits. He doesn't like them compare downtown with central beach because it has its own environment and they have their issues also. There are a lot of possibilities downtown. He took a developer that was visiting this area downtown and he liked it. He said what is needed downtown is a plan. They need to figure out how to get to the next level. It needs a plan for the community where they buy into it and know what they want to do downtown. He said if they are going to ask the community to potentially make some changes to downtown then they have to like the plan being designed for downtown.

Mr. Neville showed his Power Point presentation (attached to the original minutes), which was his vision and no one else's.

Mr. Carroll gave his Power Point presentation for his vision 2023 for Downtown Vero Beach (attached to the original minutes).

Council briefly talked about the Rotary fountain downtown and what should be done with it.

Vice Mayor Moore brought up the reports that have been done for downtown and they all basically say the same thing on what is needed downtown. They said in the reports that the Twin Pairs needs to be narrowed down, there needs to be tree lined streets, mixed use, increase the density, apartments upstairs, etc. She said to make all visions a reality these are some of the things they have to do and a lot of the other things will take care of themselves. Once they have apartments and townhouses downtown they will have people living there then there will be more stores that come downtown because there will be people to go shopping in them. Every downtown needs to be lined with trees. She feels their new consultant doing the downtown master plan will come to them and say the same thing that the other studies have said. She wants them to do something with this study when they receive it and not file it away and never look at it. She thanked Mr. Haynes for doing such a good job as the new Executive Director of Mainstreet and bringing good energy to downtown. She felt that the Theater should be a central focus of downtown, but no one will want to buy it unless they fix up downtown first. She also would like them to look into allowing patio tables and chairs in the parking lot in front of the restaurants so it doesn't block people from walking down the sidewalk. Her commitment as long as she is on this City Council is to have action moving forward on this issue.

Mr. Neville brought up that they as a Council can handle the FAR, but would need to go to referendum concerning the density.

Mrs. Zudans commented that she has her own opinions regarding downtown, but what really matters is what the community wants. She said they need to hear from the residents, businesses and surrounding neighborhoods on what they want to see downtown because their opinion matters.

Mayor Cotugno gave his Power Point presentation (attached to the original minutes). He showed the executive summary of a report put together from Kalamazoo, Michigan. This is the type of plan that he would like produced for them. He also had a Power Point provided to him by Fort Pierce, which he briefly went through (attached to the original minutes).

Mayor Cotugno asked for public comments at 4:07 p.m.

Mrs. Barbara Ruddy suggested taking the whole quadrant and redoing the entire space as their project. She said they need to take charge, spend money, and get it done.

Mrs. Dori Stone, Indian River County (IRC) Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, thanked Mr. Haynes for being such a great community leader and she is very supportive of what Mainstreet is doing. They (IRC Chamber of Commerce) want to see Vero Beach engaged and will help anyway they can. They are going to start advertising Mainstreet events in their newsletter and help them anyway they can. The Chamber of Commerce is happy and proud to be a business in Vero Beach. She said if there is anything they can do to let her know or if there are any questions they can answer they would be happy to come and speak to them.

Mr. Mario Corbiciero agreed opening the Theater downtown would be the focus of bringing people to downtown. They need to address the homeless and clean up the downtown area. He said seeing all these studies that have been done in the past and seeing they are still where they started is discerning.

Mrs. Dori Stone reported that the Chamber of Commerce has a Government Issue Committee looking at workforce housing and will be presenting ideas to the City Council and Indian River County Commissioners in the near future.

Mr. Ken Daigne asked Council to consider looking into hiring a grant writing company that gets paid in percentages. He also suggested that they look at some Ordinances passed in Sarasota and West Palm Beach considering the homeless and move forward with the plan. He said with budget time coming up they may want to consider hiring another Code Enforcement Officer because there are a number of things that need to be addressed. They need to continue looking into having lighting around the Pocahontas Park area. He said these are some things that they can do now. He suggested that they take a look at the budget because these things will cost money. There needs to be Police Officers patrolling downtown at night. He noted that the motel near the Freshman Learning Center is in bad shape and needs to be addressed. These are some more things that you as a Council can do now. He also brought up the work that needs to be done with the Rotary fountain.

At 4:17 p.m. public comments were closed.

Mr. Jeffries wrapped up the meeting by saying that he has provided the planning process that they will be following. There will be an Urban Market Study done, they will be reviewing all of the previous plans and take downtown to the next level. The traffic study when done will provide them with some higher level capacity issues for the roadway downtown. As the master plan gets into that process it will need to be budgeted for next year. He agrees with keeping the community involved. There needs to be a planning

process similar to what was done at the Three Corners property. They need to make sure that the plan is realistic, keeping in mind that for over 30 years there has been plans for downtown, but have never been acted on. He noted that a lot has changed in the planning world that will bring their downtown to the next level. He reiterated that whatever is adopted needs to be “realistic.” He said that is the path that he is taking.

Mr. Falls commented that there has been a lot of great things said at today’s meeting. They know density is a key component and there needs to be investors stepping up and buying property in downtown. He has heard a request for additional policemen for the downtown area, which he has been talking to the Police Chief about. The City has a contract with a grant writer who he can contact to help them. The benches at Pocahontas Park have been taken out and as they see how things are going downtown they may be able to put some of the benches back in the Park. He will be meeting with some people that are interested in the Theater downtown, so people are still looking at it. He reminded Council that they have tasked staff with three (3) priority projects and they are the Three Corners project, the Waste Water Reclamation Facility and the Marina. They added the Twin Pairs as a priority item just because of the timing. Then they brought up all of these other things. He was defending his Planning Department in saying that they will do the best that they can. It is nice to know that they have a Council who is so supportive of these efforts.

Mayor Cotugno announced that their next Workshop/Special Call meeting will be held on May 17<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 p.m. to discuss Pocahontas Park.

### **3. PUBLIC COMMENT**

This item was discussed earlier.

### **4. ADJOURNMENT**

Today’s meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m.

/tb