

Memo

To: Downtown Development Authority Board
From: Bryan Myrkle, Director of Community Development
Date: August 25, 2015
Re: August 27 Special Meeting agenda

Because we did not get very far in the agenda for our August meeting, we are holding a special meeting. Most of the agenda topics are the same as those from August 10, however I am adding one item – a discussion on the proposed reconstruction of parking lots 4 & 10.

I realize that this remains a long agenda. If we cannot get through it, some of the items can be carried-over to September.

- Sign Ordinance – The City of Charlotte Planning Commission has a sub-committee working to update the city's sign ordinance. In most every respect, the committee will be recommending relaxing standards on signs.

Earlier this year, a group of people working on business recruiting here in Charlotte met with Lansing developer Patrick Gillespie, of the Gillespie Group. During that discussion, he mentioned that strict signage standards are a bit turn-off to developers and business owners. He suggested that in an area of special focus for redevelopment and recruitment like the downtown, a community might best be served by not restricting signage at all – by effectively deregulating it.

Since giving this suggestion to the Planning Commission sign committee, they have indicated their willingness to accept this proposal for downtown. I very much appreciate the committee's willingness to try something new, and give downtown business

owners the freedom to be creative, but I also want to be sure and give the DDA a chance to weigh-in.

Some urban settings almost become defined by their distinctive and vibrant signage. Think of Times Square, or certain parts Tokyo. And the same is true of historic locales, such as the (attached) famous photo of Woodward Avenue in Detroit.

The same is true locally. When you look at historic photos of downtown Charlotte, you will see an abundance of signage – window signs, awning signs, projecting signage, wall signage – that helps give the district a sense of vitality and activity.

I would like the DDA to discuss the idea of giving downtown business and property owners, as well as potential re-developers, the freedom to place and use signage as they see fit.

- Reconstruction of Parking Lots 4 & 10 – The city is working toward the reconstruction of parking lots 4 & 10. This is the area that includes the former Corral lot and the lot immediately north of it. I have included rough drawings of four different concepts. We can review and comment on these, and it would be possible to mix and match something from all of them into a final concept. I would like the DDA Board to consider the following things as we discuss these proposals.
 - Do we want to leave the existing green island in place and work around it?
 - Do we want to minimize the number of access drives on Washington?
 - Do we want an access drive on Lovett?
 - Do we want to preserve an area on the southern end of the lot for future development? One concept shows a ‘pocket park’ in this location – this area could be developed with basic infrastructure that could be relocated in the future if a development opportunity occurs.
 - Do we want islands internal to the parking lot? At the ends? Not at all?

- Do we want to use the alley as a main entrance/exit point from the parking lot? Or just use Washington?
- Conditional Use requirements for upper story apartments – Two years ago, I was given the responsibility for most of the zoning administration in the city. During those two years, I have had the opportunity to really learn our city's zoning code, including the good and the bad.

One element of the code that I find to be at odds with our goals for downtown is its treatment of upper story residential areas as conditional uses.

It is clear that, when adopted, the intention of the code was to preserve the downtown area as a business district. Therefore, it treats most commercial business uses as permitted uses, and residential uses as conditional. Today, however, creating a mix of uses in the district with apartments in the upper stories of downtown buildings is recognized as a best practice of downtown development. And, the City of Charlotte itself has been actively promoting the development of upper-story apartments.

In practice, the Planning Commission has blessed the development of apartments downtown and has not imposed conditions. It's become a routine, business-as-usual decision for them. So, practically speaking, the only effect the conditional use process is having on downtown apartment development is to make it slower and more expensive.

I would like the DDA to consider requesting a change in the city's zoning code to make upper-story residential development a permitted, rather than conditional use, in the downtown area.

- Downtown Public Art – I wanted to discuss with the DDA several opportunities the city has to seek installation of public art in the downtown area and give DDA members the chance to comment or get involved directly.
- Main Street/M-50 – I also wanted give the DDA an update on a couple other downtown-related initiatives including the Michigan Main Street program and the M-50 committee.