

Economic Development Commission
The County Commissioners of Kent County
400 High Street
Chestertown, MD 21620

March 1, 2017

Commission Members Present: Cindy Genter, Kate Gray, Jim Luff, Bob Ampula, Dan MacLeod, Bob Jacob, and Shreyas Suresh

Commission Members Absent: Aaron Bramble and Mary Ford

Also in Attendance: William Short, County Commissioner; Shelley Heller, County Administrator

At 3:00 p.m. the meeting convened. Mr. Luff called the meeting to order. Mr. Luff requested a motion to approve the minutes from the February 1, 2017 meeting. On motion by Mr. Ampula and seconded by Ms. Gray the Commission unanimously approved the minutes from the February 1, 2017 meeting.

Ms. Williams welcomed Mayor Kenneth L. Branner, Jr., and Kristen Krenzer, Public Relations, FOIA Coordinator, Town of Middletown, Delaware. Mayor Branner was first elected as Mayor of Middletown on March 6, 1989. The population increased from 3,800 to 20,000 today.

Mayor Branner shared that the County was developing south towards Middletown. The town annexed between 3,000 and 4,000 acres and in 2000 the Town went to a \$28 million referendum to build a waste water treatment plant. Middletown made a commitment to the residents that they would never pay for future growth through taxes or increased utility bills. The impact fees collected were set aside in a Capital Development Account to fund future infrastructure.

Mayor Branner shared that developers, builders, and/or companies ask about the following five items when making a final decision on location. (1) is it zoned appropriately; (2) is it supported by the local community; (3) is the infrastructure there now i.e. water, sewer, electric, fiber; (4) what is the time frame for approval; and (5) what incentives are available. Mayor Branner stated they could care less about the incentives but they do ask. Infrastructure is the critical component in the equation. Commercial and industrial growth is driving residential development in Middletown. Mayor Branner shared that rental properties and upscale apartments are in high demand.

Mayor Branner shared the experience of attracting Walmart, Amazon, Johnson Controls, and most recently Datwyler Pharma. Bryan Matthews, Vice President, KRM Development, asked about the \$7.5 million incentive and Mr. Branner shared the funding from the State was for the infrastructure when Amazon developed the property. Mayor Branner views developers and school districts as partners in the growth process. Mayor Branner shared the goal is to grow to 25,000 residents.

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Mr. Luff asked how the downtown is protected from the growth on the periphery. Mayor Branner shared that Middletown is a Main Street program and a commitment was made to the downtown business owners that the character would not change. The town invested in the downtown infrastructure to fulfill that commitment. Kay MacIntosh, Economic Development & Marketing Coordinator, Chestertown Arts and Entertainment District/Chestertown Main Street, thanked Mayor Branner for mentioning the Main Street program.

Mr. Ampula inquired as to the number of Amazon employees that live in Middletown. Mayor Branner explained that in the beginning a lot of people came from outside of Middletown. Bus routes were used to bus employees from Wilmington to Middletown. Once they came and felt comfortable they moved to Middletown.

Mayor Branner shared that Delaware has an advantage of being small. When they are attempting to attract a business they have access to State and Local officials to meet with decision makers. Commissioner Short and Mayor Branner discussed the fact that planning has to be done prior to any growth taking place.

Ms. MacIntosh, Paul Heckles, President, Chestertown Main Street; and Richard Keaveney, Chair, Main Street Economic Vitality Committee, gave an overview of the progress of revitalizing the Main Street program. The Main Street program was founded in the 70s by the National Trust for Historical Preservation to revitalize down town areas that were declining. There are 28 Main Street designations in Maryland. Rock Hall is an affiliate member, which is a new designation. The board and committee chairs have been identified. The committees are organization, economic vitality, design, and promotion. Chestertown was designated as a Main Street in 2008/2009. The goals of Chestertown Main Street Program are perfectly aligned with the goals of economic development for the County.

Mr. Heckles shared a video of a Main Street community. Business owners and residents shared what the program provided for their community. Mr. Heckles shared that the characteristics of the community in the video was very similar to Chestertown. Collaboration with existing organizations was an important component of the strategy session. The current Chestertown Main Street Board consists of nine members and the chairs of the four committees have been identified and the committees are just beginning to meet. The Chestertown Main Street Committee will host Mayor Cerino's business forum being held March 9th, 2017.

Mr. Keaveney shared thoughts on the strategy session. Three things need to happen in Kent County: (1) fiber to be installed with cell phone enhancements; (2) the Marina project to be completed; and (3) a boutique hotel to be built in Downtown Chestertown. There has been interest in building a boutique hotel and the conversations continue. Mr. Keaveney shared that the economic vitality committee has one remaining position and Ms. Williams was asked to join.

Ms. Williams shared the economic development efforts have focused on the Sunday Hunting bills and the Commerce Zone Tax Credit legislation, the coworking space, and preparation for the FY2018 budget session.

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Ms. Williams shared that the Citizen Survey Response Report that was done during the Kent County Comprehensive Plan Update was interesting to read. Ms. Gray asked how the demographics of the survey respondents matched the demographics of the County.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Ms. Gray, seconded by Mr. Jacob, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 5:34 p.m. The Commission agreed to meet again on Wednesday, April 5, 2017, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams
Coordinator