

MILFORD CITY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
September 9, 2019

A Meeting of the City of Milford Community and Economic Development Committee was held in the Joseph Ronnie Rogers Council Chambers at Milford City Hall, 201 South Walnut Street, Milford, Delaware on Monday, September 9, 2019.

PRESIDING: Chairperson Mike Boyle

IN ATTENDANCE: Mayor Arthur Campbell

Committee Members: Todd Culotta

City Manager Eric Norenberg, Chief Kenneth Brown and Recorder Carlene Wilson

ABSENT: Committee Members Owen Brooks Jr. & Katrina Wilson

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Boyle called the Committee Meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

Planning Director Rob Pierce was also present.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Utility Box Painting Proposal

City Manager Norenberg reported at the last Committee meeting, the painted pilot project box, located on the corner of Southwest Front Street and Walnut Street was discussed. Downtown Milford Inc. (DMI) indicated they would initiate a project including fundraising and associated policies and procedures.

The Urban Art-Electrical Utility Box Project document states as follows:

This agreement establishes responsibilities and authority of the Electrical Utility Box Art Project

Downtown Milford Inc. will:

Seek funding through grants, sponsors and donation (\$1K per artist needed) Establish number of separate artists per year (no more than 3 per year)

Ensure that box is graffiti proofed after completion, restore the art in the event of any damage or vandalism, including cleaning/removing any graffiti OR restore the box(es) to the original condition if restoration/ cleaning is not possible.

Supervise the painting to ensure artists do not paint over hinges, keyholes or protective keyhole coverings, or in any way affect the ease of operation of handles and doors. Create Press Release- possible unveiling ceremony

The City of Milford will:

Determine acceptable electrical boxes through Public Works

Be a part of the artist selection process Approve final products

Attend unveiling ceremonies

This agreement establishes responsibilities and authority of the Electrical Utility Box Art Project

Downtown Milford Inc. will

**Seek funding through grants, sponsors and donation (\$1K per artist needed)*

- *Establish number of separate artists per year (no more than 3 per year)*
- *Publicly announce "Call to Artist" with Press Release (once a year)*
- *Distribute packages to artists*
- *Field applications and select artists*
- *Assign pre-approved electrical boxes to artists*
- *Monitor progress and ensure art meets sketch design*
- *Ensure that box is graffiti proofed after completion, restore the art in the event of any damage or vandalism, including cleaning/removing any graffiti OR restore the box(es) to the original condition if restoration/ cleaning is not possible.*
- *Supervise the painting to ensure artists do not paint over hinges, keyholes or protective keyhole coverings, or in any way affect the ease of operation of handles and doors.*
- *Create Press Release- possible unveiling ceremony*

The City of Milford will

- *Determine acceptable electrical boxes through Public Works*
- *Be a part of the artist selection process*
- *Approve final products*
- *Attend unveiling ceremonies*

Beginning with 4 or 5, a map was presented showing 12 to 13 locations where potential utility boxes have been identified. During a previous meeting, guidelines were established and suggested materials are included in the Committee packet.

It was also noted that the City's Electric Superintendent suggested doing a pilot test on one box by painting it with a base coat and sealant, as proposed. After a couple weeks, it would be stripped and restored to its original condition, to ensure they can be repainted, as needed in the future.

Councilman Culotta prefers waiting five years to strip them versus one pilot test. He asked if all utility boxes are within DMI's purview; Mr. Norenberg commented they are not necessarily in DMI's purview but are all City-controlled boxes in the Greater Downtown area.

Chairman Boyle confirmed there will be two boxes, on average, painted per year. DMI will make the determination when repainting or touch up is required.

Acting DMI Director, Joey Phillips, was present to represent the DMI Design Committee.

Chairman Boyle also verified that no permit would be required. Mr. Norenberg added that jointly, they would select boxes from the list. However, DMI is taking the lead on the majority of the project.

Councilman Culotta suggested that the store owners be able to comment on a box being put in front of their business to prevent colors from clashing, etc. Chairman Boyle feels that would be at the discretion of the artist though he does not expect it to be objectionable.

Councilmember Peel recalled prohibiting anything offensive or distasteful.

Chairman Boyle recommended removing the social security information from the application; Mr. Phillips agreed.

The Chairman referenced the artist requirement that the painting cannot include offensive, pornographic, religious, symbolic or hateful images or language and suggested adding the word 'political'.

He also suggested opening this up to the High School Art Class under the guidance and direction of their teacher. The Committee agreed that would be a nice collaborative project.

Councilmember Peel liked the idea there was some non-regulatory guidance provided, which simplifies the process for the artist.

Mr. Phillips noted the one corner of Front Street and Walnut contains five boxes. Instead of painting only one, which he feels would look odd, he has requested Parks and Recreation put up a new fence around the corner and repaint the signs and maybe add a bench.

Mr. Norenberg explained that procedurally, the agreement will require full Council approval and will be placed on a future agenda. He asked Mr. Phillips to communicate to his board the City is moving ahead within the next couple months.

Economic Development Updates

The City Manager reported that the July agenda included an item to discuss how City Staff would be communicating economic development updates to the committee.

Chairman Boyle said he had a long discussion with the City Planner about when the critical factor comes together which confirms someone has a valid interest. He explained that at some point, someone seriously interested will always ask for a meeting with the City Manager, Mayor and the City Planner. He asked if it would be possible to include someone from the Economic Development Committee in that process. That would provide a way for this Committee to reach out on the people's side. If someone is bringing a business here, he feels members of this Committee are able to provide inside information on the City, like what it is like to live here and other information.

This would let the mechanics of the ordinances and guidelines fall within the purview of the Planning Department and City Manager's Office.

Chairman Boyle believes that would provide a way to have the Committee informed and become involved early in the process, if the person is serious. This may also be a way to relieve a lot of anxiety they may have.

Councilman Culotta feels it will also take a load off of the City Planner and City Manager to some extent.

Chairman Boyle feels that when a person pulls a permit, they are committed. Councilman Culotta prefers being involved prior to that stage. For example, a business that wants to expand their operations should be aware they will need plans drawn, which will become part of their development file, along with the permit application, that answers all the requirements for power, sewer, water, etc.

Though it is really the City Planner's job to inform them of those of those needs, it takes up a lot of Mr. Pierce's time, according to Councilman Culotta. However, someone with building experience would already know that. That is the reason he feels it would be beneficial for the Committee to know before that stage. In that manner, the Committee can reach out to them and advise them what needs to be considered and ask what they want to do, etc. He described it as a pre-meeting to the official meeting with City staff.

Mr. Pierce referenced the two-page process that he has added information on the City website to help anyone trying to start or relocate a business to Milford. He defined it as a short-form of the resources needed. If it is a small project that City staff is able to assist, and an architect or engineer is not needed, they will try their best to walk them through that process. However, he does not want to replace those private firms that guide potential developers with the process.

Councilman Culotta recalled a situation when the person called him complaining about the stack of papers he had to fill out. When he looked at it, it was very standard information required for all permits.

The one concern Mr. Pierce has with the information being disseminated to the Committee, is a lot of people come in that have 'some' interest. After he provides the information, many people never come back. It is not because of something his staff did, but the result of the deal falling apart, or the money wasn't available, etc. He also has people come in and talk with them confidentially about some potential plan, because they may not want their competition or the public to be aware. Many are in their due diligence period at that point and are still trying to figure things out.

Mr. Piece explained that generally, it becomes public knowledge once a formal application is submitted. He then provides the information to anyone requesting it. At the same time, it will be on an agenda for action.

The City Manager added that last week, he showed Mayor Campbell the list of projects being worked by the Delaware Prosperity Partnership (DPP) over the past few months to a year. There were several pages, and each was represented by a code and never an actual name, for the reasons Mr. Pierce explained. There are more times than not, a need for confidentiality and the City tries to honor that as much as possible, particularly if it is in the very early stages and are only asking generic questions.

According to the DPP, they experience the same thing. Many people don't come back though they always try to follow up to find out what has changed their mind. Often, they have found another area that is more suitable for one reason or another.

Councilman Culotta agrees that sometimes the person decides it may not be a feasible business idea or someone else has a better idea. However, he still feels it would benefit having a person of City leadership or politics reach out and ask how can we help you. He feels there needs to be a way of adding that before it comes to an official meeting with City staff.

Councilmember Peel feels that having a Committee representative there at the first meeting would be helpful prior to doing anything formal.

Since Mr. Pierce has been here, the Mayor (Shupe initially), the City Manager and he would meet with these potential business owners. He agrees that a lot of time, that person/developer prefers to hear from the Mayor while still considering a potential project. Councilman Culotta said then perhaps it should be the Mayor.

The Committee then discussed various businesses who had previously requested confidentiality with their plans. Mr. Pierce also provided follow-ups scenarios that occurred as they proceeded.

The Committee agreed there should one other Committee member present during these meetings, in addition to the Mayor.

Chairman Boyle said that will also satisfy Councilman Culotta's desire to be made aware of any potential businesses.

Mr. Pierce emphasized that the information provided at that initial meeting, is often requested to be kept confidential. Even if a Non-Disclosure Agreement is not signed, from his experience and best practices, it is in the City's best interest not to divulge that information as a sign of respect and trust. And that is typical throughout the economic development community.

NEW BUSINESS

Kent Economic Partnership Update/Chairman Boyle

Chairman Boyle announced that he attended his second KEP meeting. He reported there is a lot of activity but predominantly focused between Smyrna and DE Turf.

He pointed out there is very little movement downstate. When they refer to Milford, it seems to be about healthcare. Chairman Boyle stressed that Milford has a lot more to offer.

It was confirmed the City has given KEP \$60,000 and has not reaped any benefit. Councilman Culotta agreed adding the City needs to stop giving them money.

Chairman Boyle said that the fact is no one has received anything yet. One of the problems is they are only a year into the business and still learning. When they began to contact different agencies that research areas for businesses

Executive Director Linda Parkowski found out that no one had ever looked at Central Delaware. The first year was spent trying to sell the location and they are still in the process of doing that, while looking at other opportunities.

The Chairman reported they are considering building an air freight terminal through a joint agreement with Dover Air Base. The preliminary comments from their consulting firm were that the only advantage was two very long runways. In other words, there is nothing else out there.

In some respect, Chairman Boyle said they are still in the initial stages of developing interest in the area though they are primarily focusing on Dover, and a little north and a little south. Getting to Milford appears to be a problem.

Councilman Culotta reported that the Town of Millsboro has hired a consulting firm to go out and find businesses that would be looking for a market in their area. He asked if it would make better sense to take those dollars and redirect them to a private firm that can work just for Milford.

Chairman Boyle said he does not know what results a consulting firm would get beyond what KEP is doing. Councilman Culotta said they would at least focus on Milford solely.

A discussion followed about possibly hiring a part-time person, who is familiar with Milford and has experience and background in this area.

When asked what we are trying to accomplish in terms of attraction, Mr. Norenberg feels that what has been done, along with the current and past mayors, is to retain and expand current Milford businesses. He and Mr. Piece do retention visits and ask how they can help. One example is a large industry who identified shipping restrictions as a problem. In turn, Mr. Norenberg went to the Delaware Prosperity Partnership and Kent Economic Partnership, and they agreed it needed to be solved. Since then, they have been working collectively with DelDOT to get the weight limits raised.

Mr. Norenberg had an update earlier today that DelDOT has brought on IPA to study the weight limits and restrictions in Delaware that have not been updated for many years in comparison to surrounding states. He hopes those limits will be updated, but thinks it will be closer to the end of the year before they receive their data.

Two years or so ago, Mr. Norenberg, along with Chamber of Commerce, looked at the Buxton firm that Millsboro contracted with, but their focus was more on retail and restaurants at a price of approximately \$50,000 for three years. They seem to focus on national chains and actually started years ago working for Target and Chick-Fil-A to harness the data about consumers. They would then provide the information to those retailers and recommend areas to build their next restaurant, for example. Five or six years ago, they began to offer that service to municipalities and counties who need to fill vacant commercial spaces.

He pointed out that if the City is more interested in attracting larger employers, that is the goal of KEP.

Councilman Culotta said he is making the point that they need to be more focused on a City of this size. That is why he prefers to take the money from Kent County and put it toward a firm to work for the City. Mr. Norenberg said assuming that the goal is to attract national chain and restaurants. He recalled that for the downtown area, they wanted to remain unique and did not want chain restaurants taking over that area. However, the Silicato developers might be interested in bringing those type businesses to their site.

Councilman Culotta agrees it is up to those developers to help develop their own properties. But if a firm is hired who does a study on Milford, that data is then bought by a Roadhouse or other chain. You then go to their website that says if you want to be an investor, these markets are available. Milford would then be put in that rotation because of the study. He agrees national chains should not be downtown, but does not think Milford's downtown is busy enough to say they want one thing or another. Instead, downtown needs to attract as much as possible when it is available.

He also feels that Milford's downtown could also benefit from any growth in the area.

Councilman Culotta said Milford is growing south and if we are unable to get KEP to come south of DE Turf, that money is not being spent effectively.

Councilmember Peel prefers to hire someone for that price. She recalled a time when we had an Economic Developer; Councilman Culotta said that is a good example, but there are other people that do that and more.

Councilmember Peel pointed out there are varied opinions about drawing more traffic and consumers to box stores or chains. She is unsure everyone wants that type of growth.

The Councilwoman recalled that during the Community conversations, there seemed to be a divide as to what they did not want. She thought it was pretty even based on what people said. The same people may say they want big chain stores, but when they consider the traffic associated with it, they change their mind.

Councilmember Peel recalled that contingency in the contract and Council talked about re-evaluating whether or not KEP is a worthwhile partnership.

Mr. Norenberg said it is a year-to-year agreement though the current agreement started in October-November of last year. The City has only appropriated the second \$30,000 of the three years. A renewal contract would need to be added to an upcoming agenda if the City renewed. If not, all these options can be considered. However, he recommends we provide their Executive Director an opportunity to make a pitch at an upcoming Council meeting in November.

He is also willing to contact Buxton and have a representative address the Committee.

In terms of the transportation network, Chairman Boyle pointed out Milford is at a disadvantage because of its location. However, he would be pleased with a small business start-up with the potential to grow.

Mr. Norenberg recommends having the Buxton representative realistically talk about what Milford could potentially get or not. He would also invite the Chamber of Commerce, who has been discussing this from time to time, and had this concept a little over a year ago. The undeveloped property that could be developed did not get a lot of support from those owners. Instead, they wanted to use their own consultants and realtors who had different ideas.

Councilmember Culotta feels it is up to them to develop their own land and that it costs a lot of money to have it shovel ready. He said the company that Millsboro is using is called the Retail Coach who was hired for \$35,000 a year and they are very happy with their work.

Mr. Norenberg said that Buxton and the Retail Coach are the two main companies that do this type of work.

It was agreed to have KEP's Executive Director here the first meeting in October and have these other two companies the second meeting.

Mr. Pierce also explained that when the City was getting ready to finalize the contract last year, the County was getting ready to finalize their comprehensive plan which added the master plans in Little Heaven and South Frederica. Those plans would create a lot of job potential commercial growth in those two rural areas. The county is willing to develop commercially but not within a municipality.

He also noted the State Planning Office did a study on the surplus of commercial land and vacant commercial space between Milford and Smyrna and found it was saturated with available sites.

Councilmember Peel feels we really need to consider what is enough, noting that Milford businesses do benefit from DE Turf.

Mr. Norenberg reported that Milford is receiving one to three leads a week from DPP. When they review some of the request, they find many want I-95 access. Every now and then he finds one they can respond to and follows up on it.

He feels they are doing more marketing statewide and targeting certain areas such as biotech, stem areas, etc. As a result, he feels they are a few steps ahead of KEP at this point, in terms of trying to market the county.

The City Manager sent Council an email discussing the workshop in a couple weeks for small and medium size businesses that fits the criteria making them eligible for the EDGE Grant. The State Division of Small Business will be making an announcement with the Governor for the first round of grantees.

He is bringing in representatives from the State to meet with people locally to help them have a better shot at applying for this grant.

The Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Milford will co-sponsor and help promote this.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chairman Boyle adjourned the meeting at 6:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terri K. Hudson, MMC
City Clerk/Recorder