



Town of Beaufort, NC

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Town of Beaufort Board of Commissioners Special Meeting 3:00 PM Thursday, April 23, 2020 - Train Depot, 614 Broad Street, Beaufort, NC 28516-- Electronically through Zoom Platform due to COVID-19 Minutes

Call to Order

Mayor Newton called the meeting to order.

Roll Call

Mayor Newton called the meeting to order and declared a quorum for the meeting.

PRESENT

Mayor Everette Newton
Commissioner Sharon Harker
Commissioner Charles McDonald
Commissioner Ann Carter
Commissioner Marianna Hollinshed
Commissioner John Hagle

Agenda Approval

A motion was made to approve the agenda as presented.

Motion made by Commissioner Hollinshed.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Harker, Commissioner McDonald, Commissioner Carter, Commissioner Hollinshed, Commissioner Hagle

Presentations

1. NC Preservation 400 Pollock Street

Mayor Newton asked for a motion to recuse Commissioner McDonald from the discussion of 400 Pollock Street. Commissioner Harker made the motion. The vote was unanimous.

Myrick Howard and Maggie Gregg of Preservation NC were present to discuss the potential purchase/sell of 400 Pollock Street.

Mr. Howard began by showing a power point presentation of many structures Preservation NC had been instrumental in helping restore. He indicated the Preservation NC (PNC) group was a non-profit group dedicated to helping raise funds for restoration projects with significant historical value.

Maggie Gregg indicated she had communicated with the family and the proposal was to purchase the property from the family and then resell to an interested investor. She indicated the structure could be contributing and there would be protective covenants for the property moving forward.

Commissioner Hagle asked Mr. Howard and Ms. Gregg if they had seen the property. Neither of them had seen the property in person due to the Stay at Home order regarding COVID-19, but they did indicated they were able to review reports provided from the Town of Beaufort Building Inspector and the Fire Department. Commissioner Hagle also asked if PNC would be securing the exterior of the building and rehabilitating the inside or would they immediately sell the property. Mr. Howard responded the idea was to take care of immediate particular needs and then allow the buyer the opportunity to take advantage of the tax credit available for restoration. Mr. Howard indicated the exterior of the building would need to be preserved before selling the property.

In response to a question from Commissioner Hollinshed regarding the immediate needs of the structure, Town Planning and Inspection Director Kyle Garner indicated the most immediate needs were to repair or cover the window openings as well as cover the outside of the top floor since the siding had recently been removed. Commissioner Hollinshed also asked about if the family was selling the property directly to PNC or if not how long might the property remain on the market before a buyer is found. In addition, she also asked about what party would be responsible for the structure until it is purchase by PNC or an investor. In response to her questions, Mr. Howard indicated the actual closing make take some time while title work is completed.

Town Attorney Arey Grady indicated it was not unusual for the time period to be around six months time. He also asked about what party would be responsible for the weather insulation. Mr. Howard indicated PNC would with with the family and the town on how best to deal with the securing of the outside of the building.

Commissioner Hollinshed asked about what if the action did not come to fruition. Mr. Howard indicated the building would need to be condemned and demolished. Town Attorney asked about a partition proceeding if the owners were not all on the same page. Ms. Gregg indicated that would not be an issue since all family members are on the same page. Mr. Myrick indicated there was a verbal offer to help the family with this property. Mr. Howard indicated if the town was in agreement and the family was also in agreement then a contract could be agreed upon with forward movement. He did indicated he thought it may take some time to get a contract in place since the family was large and all signatures would be needed.

Commissioner Hollinshed stated a contract should not take that long making a title change easier since there would not need to be a partition proceeding. She also asked about what kind of covenants would be placed on the property.. Ms. Gregg indicated PNC would help the owners plan out the rehabilitation of the structure.

Once again, Commissioner Hagle asked which party would be responsible for the structure until the closing and how long might the closing take before completion. Mr. Howard responded it could take two to three months if it did not go to partition. Mr. Howard further commented the second story will not be coming down but will be looked at for rehab. He asked if the siding was off the building.

Town Manager Day indicated the structure was cinder block on the bottom there was siding on the top part. Commissioner Hagle asked who will protect the building until it is sold. Mr. Howard indicated he was at a disadvantage since he had not seen the building and it would all need to be

figured out and money raised. Mr. Howard also commented the renovation process would look worse before it got better.

Commissioner Harker asked if the contingency plan was for partition if agreement could not be reached with the family members. She also asked about how it would be preserved or sealed prior to obtaining the property from the family and if PNC was prepared financially to deal with the family. Commissioner Harker also asked how long a capital campaign would last and if PNC would be able to save any of the history on the inside of the building.

In response to questions, Mr. Howard indicated plastic wrapping such as Tyvek could be used to weatherproof at the time of ownership. Commissioner Harker indicated she did not believe it would hold up that long. Commissioner Carter stated window glass had already fallen out onto the sidewalk and it was a safety hazard. Mr. Howard indicated the money will be figured out but a contract would not be signed without money in hand to perform the weather proofing.

Ms. Gregg indicated PNC would work with the family for a price agreement and start the funding process. In response to Commissioner Harker's question about historical attributes, Mr. Howard indicated the structure would have protective covenants. He indicated understood the upper floor was more likely a private living space. He indicated the building could be right for mixed use.

Commissioner Hollinshed asked for Mr. Howard to elaborate on his statement and what was the history of the building. Mr. Howard indicated Davis Cecelski's article referenced it was a hotel catering to the African-American people for lodging but it was not a green book lodging facility. Commissioner Harker indicated there were few properties that allowed insight into Black History and this structure was an anchored piece for the community. Ms. Gregg indicated the article was a great starting point because interested investors want to know as much information as possible.

Commissioner Carter indicated she was a child when the building was first built and it was originally a family home. She indicated she often knew of the family taking in travelers and giving them a place to stay. She did express concern the family has had many opportunities to sell but was not able to get agreement from all involved. Commissioner Carter indicated if the building was to be preserved, then a stabilization of the outside would need to take place immediately. She also asked what would happen if they had to go to partition. Mr. Howard commented if partition process became the issue they would do not arm twisting and if PNC did not buy then the town would tear it down. He indicated he hoped it would not get to that point but it would take some time. Commissioner Carter indicated if an agreement could not be reached then nothing could be done but demolition. She continued by saying a vote had been taken on two occasions to demolish and it was time to face reality.

Town Attorney Arey Grady indicated there was a recorded demolition ordinance. In response to a question from Commissioner Carter, Town Attorney Grady indicated he would look to PNC for a time for the process but he had heard 90 days in a previous statement. He asked what would be done in the interim and by whom. He did suggest the Building Code Administrator, Tobbie Bowden, provide some input on how to best weather proof the building.

Commissioner Harker indicated she was in agreement to allow PNC due diligence for 90 days. Town Attorney Grady indicated he heard 90 days but no commitment to that time frame so a possible extension could be needed. Commissioner Hagle indicated the structure needed to be secured immediately.

Mr. Howard asked if there was an engineering report on the building. Town staff indicated there was not a report that had been provided. Ms. Gregg indicated a potential private buyer had an engineering report. Once again all commissioners asked about what party would be securing the building which needed to be done immediately. Commissioner Carter asked what would be the plan after 90 days if movement had not been made.

Town Manager Day indicated a specific period of time need to be decided upon to secure the outside and for the process of purchasing to take place. The board agreed on the 90 days with the 30 days to weather proof to run concurrently. Once again the question was asked who would

pay for the weather proofing. Mr. Howard indicated the town was putting PNC in a bad position to pay for something before the property had been acquired.

Family member Stephanie Dauway thanked the board members for allowing the family to speak on the matter. She indicated she was the family spokesperson. Ms. Dauway indicated there were only three to four family members from which to get signatures. Ms. Dauway indicated they were all in agreement with the proposed plans. Ms. Dauway indicated the family was securing funding through fund raisers and donations for shoring up the structure and were in a position to work with PNC.

Commissioner Carter it was great the family had the funds to help stabilize the outside of the building. Commissioner Hagle asked if the 90 days were definite or if the town should allow for an extension. Town Attorney Grady indicated to stick with the 90 days and cross the bridge for an extension if needed. Additionally, he added if all of the family members were in agreement with the proposal of selling to PNC, then the contract execution should only take a few days or weeks. Commissioner Harker indicated she was grateful the commissioners were taking another look at saving the structure.

Mr. Howard indicated he was appreciative of the town and the family having this conversation but did indicate it would take some time to bring the funds together in order to move forward. Ms. Gregg thanked everyone for talking about the structure and challenges.

Items for Discussion and Consideration

1. Update on COVID-19 Conditions in Carteret County

Mayor Newton read the information below.

February 28th – We started COVID-19 public dialogue during town retreat

March 2nd – Launched our first COVID-19-specific update video

March 3rd – First COVID-19 case in North Carolina

March 17th – Beaufort declares State of Emergency

March 19th - Carteret County Board of Commissioners declare State of Emergency

March 20th – First COVID-19 case in Carteret County

March 23rd – Issued stay at home proclamation effective March 25th

March 27th thru 29th – Flood of visitors to Beaufort with many not adhering to COVID-19 social distancing and hygiene measures

March 29th – Stay at home proclamation restated and amended to include road closures effective March 31st

March 30th – Carteret County Board of Commissioners amended their March 19 State of Emergency proclamation late Monday afternoon to prohibit the rental of a hotel room, motel room, rental housing unit, condominium, RV campsite, primitive campsite, or similar accommodation for less than 30 consecutive days through April 29, effective at 5 pm today, March 30

April 3rd – Rachel Carson Reserve closes

April 9th – Checkpoint on Turner St begins

April 19th – Checkpoint on Turner St discontinued

April 20th – Barriers removed on Highway 101 and Live Oak St

April 22nd – Restated proclamation to start to reduce measures on April 24th to match Governor Cooper's executive orders

- Today, April 23rd, the Carteret County Health Department is reporting:

o27 total cases

o19 have recovered

o5 active positive cases

o3 deaths

- Across the county, cases have been consistently stable at 5 active positives

- Our measures have been implemented based on data and our current posture to reduce measures is similarly based on data and consultations with medical professionals

- Our decisions have not been based on emotions or politics

- We continue to monitor data at both county and state levels, and should the threat increase, we are prepared to respond according to threat levels

COVID-19 Threat Levels

Level 1 – Manageable number of positive cases in Carteret County. Heightened awareness. Open vehicular access through Beaufort’s three entry/exit points. Social distancing (including hygiene) and Governor Cooper’s executive orders and/or town emergency proclamations are in effect with restrictions imposed that close or limit the operation of businesses.

Town policy on Work Schedules, Compensation, and Facility Closures During State of Emergency is activated commensurate with conditions. Town offices and work facilities are closed to the public and work-at-home/essential worker procedures are exercised as long as social distancing requirements are in place. Public restrooms are open when downtown retail businesses are permitted to open to walk-in public traffic.

Level 2 – Direct threat to Beaufort based on the number of Carteret County positive and active cases and statewide case escalation. Entry checkpoint established on Turner Street. Access limited to permanent County residents and essential business activity only – entry passes or drivers license with a Carteret County address required for entry. Second home owners will exit town or shelter in place. Visitors (to include non-essential short-term guests) will be turned away.

Level 3 – Significant increase in active COVID cases and hospital resource use. Same as Level 2 with the addition of a curfew from 10:00pm to sunrise.

We are currently in Level 1 preparedness. There is nothing in current data that would suggest increased measures are warranted, but we are prepared to do so in case there is an increase in positive cases or an identified outbreak that could or would affect our community.

Our measures are imperfect solutions to an extraordinary challenge driven by an invisible threat and, at times, we have been given very little information.

We have taken this threat very seriously and will continue to do so since we have so many vulnerable citizens in Beaufort, to include those on this board.

Finally, our town staff is the definition of professionalism...ensuring normal critical town functions continue while also taking measures to defend against COVID-19. My greatest thanks to Town Manager John Day, key town staff leaders, and the entire Beaufort Town Staff.

Mayor/Commission Comments

Commissioner Hagle indicated he agreed with the comments of the Mayor and they were on target. He indicated there were some hard decisions made but it was in the best interest of all. He thanked the board for the conversation on 400 Pollock Street and he was looking forward to hopefully the building being restored. He thanked the staff for their work on all projects.

Commissioner Hollinshed asked if merchants could open as appointment only shops such as one on one. Town Manager Day indicated there was a provision in Governor Coopers Executive Order 121 allowing businesses to open as long as the can observe the social distancing between customers and business employees. If that process was doable then it would probably meet the current executive order. When the town's proclamation expires on April 29, 2020 then it could happen.

Commissioner Harker thanked the Mayor for all he was doing to keep the town safe. She indicated she liked the step plan on how to reopen Beaufort and remain safe. She urged everyone to please continue to keep up social distancing as a way to remain safe and save lives. She indicated observing the restrictions will keep the hospitals from getting overcrowded and allow time for science to develop a better understanding and possible vaccine for the virus.

Commissioner Carter indicating the social distancing, masks and hand washing were critical in fighting the virus. She also indicated she hope the town never had to resort to using barricades again which gave the

town a terrible black eye.

Town Manager Day indicated the Governor's order would end on May 8, 2020 and then there will be several weeks of phases to go through. He indicated it would be beneficial to be cognizant of measures that will need to remain in place and possibly implemented again if needed. He hoped the measures taken by the Governor would be sufficient. He indicated he believed it would be beneficial for the town to work with the Beaufort Development Association (BDA) and other organizations to best address the reopening of town.

Commissioner Carter asked about dredging. Town Manager Day indicated there was a delay due to COVID-19 and Town Planning Director Kyle Garner should be hearing additional information soon.

Mayor Newton indicated it was good to see the Randolph Johnson Park construction and how it was progressing. The Old Beaufort Farmer's Market will reopen slowly with only agricultural products being offered for a time. He indicated he was concerned about the upcoming weekend and people social distancing since we are not beyond the seriousness at this time.

Commissioner McDonald indicated he felt all comments were good. He indicated he was a small business owner in Beaufort and he was thankful for the social distancing. He stated it was hard to cut hair from six feet. Commissioner McDonald indicated he was going to err on the side of safety and keep in mind business does not need to be put before a life. He continued by saying he understood people wanting to go back to work.

Adjourn

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 4:44 pm.

Motion made by Commissioner Hagle.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Harker, Commissioner McDonald, Commissioner Carter, Commissioner Hollinshed, Commissioner Hagle

Mayor Everette S. (Rett) Newton

Michele Davis, Town Clerk