

City of Washington
Economic Development Commission Meeting
Tuesday, May 26, 2020 – **Minutes**

REMOTE WEB MEETING

Present: Chairman Kristy Howell, City Administrator Ray Forsythe, Planning & Development Director Jon Oliphant, Elizabeth Heider, Troy Reed, Barbara Plata, Randy McGuire, Brad Mahoney, and Audrey Miller

Not Present: Joe Russell

AGENDA

1. **Call to order:** Chairman Howell called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Troy Reed made a motion to approve the minutes. Elizabeth Heider seconded the motion. All approved. Motion carried and minutes were approved.
3. Business Items:
 - A. **COVID-19 Discussion.** City Administrator Ray Forsythe discussed the latest information received from the Governor's office which is that the restaurants and bars are allowed to reopen with outdoor seating in addition to the already allowed carry-out option. The police department is distributing guidelines to the businesses and a press release will go out tomorrow. The guidelines follow the Governor's directives while trying to be as flexible as possible. Chairman Howell asked for the committee members to share their thoughts on what direction the committee should take and what should be on the agenda and its goals. Troy Reed commented that not every business knows about Washington and what it has to offer. As a committee, are there businesses that we want to come to Washington? What were the factors that led to the existing big businesses coming to Washington? Director Oliphant explained that every retailer looks for a certain set of demographics but then it will vary in detail depending on the retailer. Another factor is the traffic counts during specific times of the day. The greater number of houses and business in an area is a large factor. Troy agrees with Chairman Howell that we need to maintain the businesses we have and help them be successful. He presumes that Washington is probably short on rooftops for some of the major retailers. Director Oliphant also explained that one of the factors is the information from surrounding areas and municipalities. A disadvantage is having the bigger towns like East Peoria and Peoria nearby where retail locations are already in close proximity. A good focus would be developing the unserved areas. Troy asked if there a list or information on the number of houses in the subdivisions, available lots and how many are being developed. Director Oliphant stated the list is focused more toward planning and the number of building permits. There is information on the number of commercial properties available on the website and through an Ameren program but the information has not been gathered for the residential areas. Randy McGuire agrees there needs to be a dual focus for the committee. Brad Mahone agrees with previous comments. Elizabeth Heider also agrees. Things have changed from the initial conversations regarding forming the committee and

the focus was bringing in new business to the current situation where the focus needs to be split between maintaining what is current while still trying to bring in new business.

Chairman Howell would like to have the committee develop a plan and/or goals and direction. She would like to know what properties are available and what is the City missing or what can it use. She suggested breaking up into specific groups within the committee. She asked if Director Oliphant could share the list of commercial properties and buildings that are currently vacant and available with the committee. He stated that he would take it a step further and add the land that is available as well since it is difficult to find newer construction that fits the need of prospective businesses and that building is sometimes more beneficial than moving into an existing location. He also stated that another factor was the pricing of some of locations is much higher than some of the surrounding areas.

Administrator Forsythe discussed the Comprehensive Plan and the need to have input from the residents and businesses. He also discussed the impact of COVID-19 on some of the businesses and the trickle-down effect. Chairman Howell commented that after reading the Council Goals and considering the Comprehensive Plan, that she would like the committee to develop a strategy. Randy McGuire asked if the document that she referenced was sent out to everyone. She confirmed it had and will gladly email it again. Elizabeth confirmed it was sent by Director Oliphant on May 5th. Randy wanted to confirm his email was listed correctly. Chairman Howell suggested Director Oliphant email the list and then the committee make notes on what they see is missing and then guidance on how to pursue those businesses. Administrator Forsythe commented that sometimes prospective business or developers would rather talk with local business owners versus City officials and he believes this is one of the reasons the EDC committee will be beneficial and they will have the opportunity to have those meetings.

Chairman Howell shared her idea of having a place similar to Heritage Square and Junction City from the Peoria Heights area developed in the Mt. Vernon Plaza location. Director Oliphant commented that a project like that would need someone with a vision and the financing. Someone like that would typically be looking to the public sector for additional assistance beyond what the City would have available from an Enterprise Zone or the TIF district. He also stated that from a City and Council standpoint that there would be a need to be cautious and selective and to monitor how the funds are distributed, what is being incentivized and what businesses will be brought in. Chairman Howell asked how do you court a developer and control who leases. Administrator Forsythe explained that in the past, he has done sales tax agreements and puts limits on the incentives. Troy asked if there was anyone currently in Washington who has a sales tax incentive. Administrator Forsythe stated he did not believe there were any in place at the moment. There was a discussion regarding the various ways to do incentives. Administrator Forsythe commented that is much easier to have areas developed when the vision is placed on paper and shown to the prospective and current owners.

Administrator Forsythe talked about the COVID response plan that was brought before the Council which was primarily to show there was enough funds to operate the City. He discussed the sales tax revenue, the State's three-month payment delays, the projections and the advantages Washington has over other communities regarding the sales tax and

the bigger retail stores. There was a discussion regarding the COVID impact on the smaller businesses such as the retaining/gaining employees and the expenses versus the profit margins. Chairman Howell discussed the Chamber's perspective and how they have been communicating with the members and industries regarding the guidelines and suggestions to help entice customers to visit the businesses. There was also a discussion regarding the Governor's reopening plan for churches versus businesses and the need for the businesses to contact the Governor's office.

Chairman Howell requested Director Oliphant email the Committee the list of empty properties. She then suggested the plan that the Committee update the list when they are out and about and also create a list of businesses or industries they would like to see in Washington. The Committee discussed when to have the next meeting. The committee agreed to meet next month on June 30th at 5:00pm.

4. Other Business: *None*.
5. Member Comments: *None needed*.
6. Adjournment: Randy McGuire made a motion to adjourn. Barbara Plata seconded the motion. All approved. Meeting was adjourned at 6:10 pm.