

# **VEHICLE PARKING DISTRICT ADVISORY BOARD**

*Meeting Minutes – February 16, 2023 at 8:00 AM*

## **A. Call Meeting to Order**

Connie Geary called the meeting to order at 8:02 a.m.

Geary informed the public about the location of the current copy of the Open Meetings Act posted in the meeting room and accessible to members of the public.

Roll call found the following Board members present: Connie Geary, Stephanie Bates, José Nuño, Tracy Kaczor, Pat Carney (alternate), Steve McNally (alternate – participating via zoom) and Amy Renter (ex-officio). Members Absent: Doug Stebbing.

Guests: Mayra Mendoza, Sherry Ruden, Scott Adams, Justin Eckert, Michael Behrens, Stephen Sunderman, Brad Segal (PUMA), and Amanda Kannard (PUMA). Staff: Steven Rames, Anna Allen, Nick Stevenson, Mikah Wheeler, and Candice Alder.

## **B. Approval of Agenda**

A motion was made by Pat Carney and seconded by Stephanie Bates to approve the agenda. Roll call:

Ayes: Connie Geary, Stephanie Bates, José Nuño, Tracy Kaczor, Pat Carney (alternate), and Steve McNally (alternate). Nays: None.

## **C. Approval of Minutes**

Stephanie Bates made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Tracy Kaczor. Roll call: Ayes: Connie Geary, Stephanie Bates, José Nuño, Tracy Kaczor, Pat Carney (alternate), and Steve McNally (alternate).

Nays: None.

## **D. Financial Report**

a. None

## **E. New Business**

a. PUMA update and presentation

Brad Segal and Amanda Kannard with Progressive Urban Management Associates (PUMA) participated via zoom and provided an overview of the progress to date including community outreach, key takeaways, various district management and governance structures, and proposed next steps.

Currently in step one which includes BID feasibility, review of past plans, community outreach, and a draft management plan. The second phase, which can be implemented if the downtown stakeholders choose to move forward, is the legal formation of a business improvement district.

## **Community Outreach**

Community outreach to date includes nearly 800 inputs collected through a variety of ways. PUMA reps were able to meet with nearly 100 stakeholders in person, direct meetings with the steering committee, and a community survey with 714 responses.

## **Key Takeaways**

Downtown has undergone significant revitalization, but some challenges remain including empty storefronts, struggling to attract and retain younger demographics, decreasing commercial and residential affordability. Respondents also identified several improvements that needed to be made including increased lighting, improved parking experience, and side street enhancements. The community would also like to see empty storefronts filled, continued events, and improved safety throughout the downtown. There is an opportunity to relieve fatigue burden on volunteers serving the downtown.

## **District Management and Governance Structures**

Reviewed several structure options including a BID, Riverfront District, and Creative District. Developed revenue targets to gauge need in the downtown. The current Vehicle Parking District provides approximately \$100,000 per year to manage the parking experience in the downtown and provide resources to the Downtown Norfolk Association for marketing purposes. PUMA reps reviewed what resources would be available with an additional \$75,000 income for the downtown and found that in addition to the current resources, the downtown district would also be enabled to hire a part or full time manager, more support for events in the downtown, and local marketing. With an additional \$125,000, the district could accommodate current services, hire a full time manager, increase marketing beyond local reach, and leverage grant funds for additional investment.

Brad indicated that procuring additional financial support from stakeholders on the side streets did not seem as strong as property owners along Norfolk Avenue so PUMA is exploring the retention of the current Vehicle Parking District and an overlay of a BID along Norfolk Avenue.

The first option is to work with the existing Vehicle Parking District boundaries. This option does not allow for additional revenue for improvements. PUMA explored the expansion of the district to include additional businesses in the district and found additional funds that could be generated, but the additions are particularly costly to few east Norfolk Avenue businesses near the river.

They also explored keeping the current VPD in place and layering a BID along Norfolk Avenue. Assessments are not necessarily linked to value of property so PUMA is proposing to use street frontage as the assessment, which includes approximately 5,000 linear feet between 1<sup>st</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Street. PUMA then applied the revenue goals of \$75,000 and \$125,000 to the model. By staying on Norfolk Avenue, PUMA believes it applies assessments to properties with the highest occupancy rates and rents. The use of a BID also requires initiative from the property owners to sign petitions that they want this and then go on to request the BID from the City via ordinance.

Also looked at wrapping frontage around the buildings to the alleyways to calculate an additional 4,000 linear feet in the model. This model does shift the burden primarily to property owners with corner properties.

Riverfront Development District has some of the same abilities as the VPD or BID models, but the boundaries must be within a half mile of the river. Concern that interest for the downtown may become diluted with the extensive geographical boundary that this could accommodate.

## **Governance**

PUMA reps encouraged downtown Norfolk stakeholders to examine and evaluate the best structure that includes the use of a non-profit to bring multiple organizations together to avoid duplication of efforts

and increase financial leveraging opportunities. The BID could then form an Advisory Board that could consist primarily of property owners and business owners since they will be the primary funders of the district.

McNally indicated he is interested in BID side street expansion to help offset improvements such as sidewalk and street improvements and enhanced lighting to the side streets. McNally reminded the group of the partnership where VPD, property owners, and the City worked together to contribute 1/3 each of the improvement money needed to improve. McNally expressed a desire to see the BID extended to Madison and Braasch and work to provide enhancements and focus to those areas. Adams agreed that those on side streets are likely not as excited because improvements were not made to their areas. PUMA shared that the group does have the ability to bond for more improvements. McNally pointed out that if side street businesses were not included in the BID they would not be eligible for bonding improvements through that source of funds. PUMA suggested a phased approach to a BID where Norfolk Avenue was initially targeted and after costs associated with improvements to the side streets were identified, perhaps expand BID boundaries to encompass more areas. Felt the frontage versus the VPD expansion was more fair and equitable to the east Norfolk Avenue businesses like the Foundation, Hy-Vee, etc. PUMA also indicated that non-profits would also pay the special assessments and indicated that in Lincoln everyone pays the assessments including non-profits, the City, and the private sector. Conversation was had on the natural increase in assessed value positively contributing to the overall budget of the VPD.

Alder asked Brad and Amanda what the best next steps would be in the process. Brad indicated most communities form a smaller group of approximately 6-9 property owners to explore further how they would like to proceed. Suggested having VPD, DNA, and Creative District representatives to discuss PUMA feedback and explore what the representatives would like to do. Shared that it will take work to show demonstrated support from the property owners to move something like this forward and convince City Council members to move it forward in an environment where it is difficult to get traction for new fees and assessments. PUMA suggested it would also take support from the City to explore partnerships to move the district forward on physical improvements such as bonding for additional improvements indicating that not one entity can take it on alone.

PUMA recommended getting the BID formed along Norfolk Avenue and working on the governance structure of the district to encompass the activity under one non-profit umbrella. Suggested pulling governance out of City Hall to allow property and business owners to have as much latitude as possible by combining resources of the VPD, DNA, and Creative District into one place. Current structure of the DNA is a 501c6, which is a typical business district non-profit status. PUMA suggested they work to establish a 501c3 to leverage even more financial opportunities.

Geary asked if subcommittees would be established to include more opportunities for input. Brad indicated that the different advisory groups would not necessarily need to meet as often since the day to day is operated out of the non-profit. Could have VPD advisory meet quarterly, may also have a committee that focuses on marketing efforts, this format could help streamline processes. The “umbrella” board would put together a consolidated budget using the various revenue sources. Funds would be allocated to the different areas that need attention. VPD and BID are looked at as sources of revenue rather than organizations. The DNA becomes more of a committee under the umbrella to provide the business voice and energy. The Creative District also adds a dimension that makes the downtown different.

Mayra shared that the Creative District is also looking to establish a paid position to help implement the goals of their grant award. Amy shared that it is very cumbersome to maintain a board and costs an extra \$1,000 to insure the board. Downtown manager could maintain insurance for the various events. VPD and BID would require additional bookkeeping to ensure they are compliant with the state statutes. Special event sponsorships could be run through 501c3 and could raise funds for public art, and to apply for grants.

Adams suggested that if there is a special assessment that resulted in a paid position, there may be less volunteerism to implement events. He indicated that many grants are to start something, but not necessarily maintain them. Ruden indicated the paid position could serve as a grant writer for the downtown and if the person hired does not have those skills, they could hire that service out.

Geary thought that depending on how much they want to raise, they may only have enough to fund a paid position. Alder suggested each group really dive into the needs of their entities to form one job description and ensure the group is on the same page and able to clearly communicate what the additional funds will pay for. Geary asked Alder's thoughts on pulling the management out of the City. Alder indicated as the City grows and economic development continues to assist various geographical districts, she has concerns that the team will be doing less focused economic development and more administration for the various districts. She indicated that if a downtown position was created through the assessments and it is the desire of the district for the position to be a part of the City staff, she would prefer that the position remain in economic development due to the high concentration of businesses in the downtown. Discussion was held on the oversight of tax dollars by a non-profit entity and whether or not a board that meets once a month could ensure the proper oversight that is needed for something like this to run smoothly. It was agreed that it will be very important for everyone to reach a consensus to ensure the connection between the City and the downtown. Geary suggested it may be hard to separate some of the activities such as the various contracts like snow and trash removal between the City and the downtown. Adams asked if the Chamber should be a larger part of the conversation with their staff in bookkeeping and marketing and asked if they could play a role in the umbrella of the downtown. Alder indicated she would try to pull together the steering committee in two weeks to continue the discussion.

**F. Old Business**  
a. None

**G. Adjourn.**

Bates made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Kaczor. The meeting was adjourned at 9:33 a.m.

The next VPD meeting will be Thursday, March 16, 2023 at 8:00 a.m. at the City of Norfolk Administration building at 309 N. 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Norfolk, NE.