

Aiken City Council Minutes

WORK SESSION – COMMITTEE MEETING

Crosland Park / North Side

August 25, 2014

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Diggs, Ebner, Homoki, Merry, and Price.

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Stuart Bedenbaugh, Sara Ridout, Glenn Parker, Wade Brodie, Tommy Paradise, Emory Langston, and Maayan Schechter and Michael Ulmer from the Aiken Standard.

The meeting was called to order at 5 P. M. Councilman Ebner moved, seconded by Councilman Merry that the meeting come to order.

Mr. LeDuc stated he would not be present at the Council meeting on September 8, 2014, and said he wanted to meet briefly with the Crosland Park / North Side Council Committee to discuss a proposal. He said the proposal was introduced at an Aiken Corporation meeting. They were instrumental in wanting to get something done with the Crosland Park / North Side area. He briefly reviewed the previous meeting. He said at the last meeting Pat Cuning and Tim Simmons were present. Mr. Cuning was thinking of something simple that we could possibly do with staff. However, Mr. Simmons was looking at something very elaborate, such as getting a land planner and looking at the 550 homes and entire area and doing a total land plan. He said the cost to do a major land plan of that size would cost at least \$100,000. He said we started wondering if there was something in between that could be done. Sometimes it is hard to see the problem because you are so close to it. Bringing from the outside some diverse experts who deal with this sort of thing is a way to attack this problem.

Mr. LeDuc stated he had had an opportunity this past year to work with a group called Urban Land Institute (ULI). There are about 300 professionals who are a part of this non-profit association in South Carolina. ULI is in every state and several foreign countries. Their sole purpose is to help cities and areas who have problems and challenges move forward. The group is made up of engineers, architects, landscapers, transportation planners, urban planners, developers, financial people, and people in education. It is a major diverse group that goes into a community and works with a community to see how to solve the problem. He said the group can do a two day retreat. They bring in a panel of six to seven individuals with multi-discipline backgrounds. Before they come they get a list of questions as to the concerns of the community. They get a problem statement, criminal statistics, rental statistics, mapping and about 30 to 40 pages of background material ahead of time to study before coming to the area. When they come into the area, we would do a tour, give them a briefing, and meet with community leaders. They would probably interview about 30 individuals in government, business, etc. to try to get a handle on what the problem is. That evening they would do a brainstorming session on what they have heard to try to start to come up with some preliminary thoughts. They do some interviews again the next day. They go back into the brainstorming. About 4 or 5 p.m. they would have a public presentation on what they think could be done and make a presentation to the community. They follow that up with about a 30 page document of their ideas.

Mr. LeDuc stated when you hire a firm you usually have two or three people who come to look at the problem. He liked working with ULI, as you are working with a diverse group of about six or seven people. He said the last time we did something like this we did a charrette in the Toole Hill area, and we got some nice results. They brought in two or three people who were basically urban planners. He said we did the same thing for the study on Union Street. He said ULI is somewhat more unique, in that they bring in several individuals from several different companies from around the state. When he worked with them they came up with some unique ideas as to how to make some changes in the New Ellenton area. He said the group is willing to come to Aiken. They see this problem as not just in Aiken, but as a universal problem throughout South Carolina,

where we have neighborhoods that are dying and struggling like Crosland Park. It is hoped that by bringing together a team, they will come up with a unique solution that could be transportable to other areas of the country. He said if Council decides that ULI is the direction to go the cost would be \$10,000. A copy of a proposed contract had been distributed to the Councilmembers for review. They would bring in a panel. They have given us three possible dates for the 2-day event, with two in November and one in December, 2014. He said he was suggesting this for Council's possible consideration, since Council had asked him to try to resolve some issues.

Mayor Cavanaugh commented that the proposal did not seem to be a lot of money for what the city could possibly get out of the event.

Mr. LeDuc stated he felt the panel could come up with ideas, thoughts and direction as to where we may need to go. He said if Council decides to use the group, staff would set up the interviews for the 20 to 30 persons to be interviewed. He reviewed a possible schedule for the meeting.

Councilman Merry stated he was familiar with the group, especially the national group. He said there is a philosophical approach to urban redevelopment and reinvestment. He said these people are on the leading edge of that. He said the cool thing is the way these people do things. They involve everybody. They get a buy in from the entire community. Often they are very well received by not only the neighbors within the neighborhood, but also the development community, the institutional and government authority. They solve problems in a way that everybody gets on board. Their philosophy of infill, redevelopment and revitalization is where it all started with these people. Their philosophy is one of the things from which he felt Aiken can really learn a lot. He said whether we change the world in Crosland Park or not with this one exercise, he felt there was something to be learned from Crosland Park and all our urban environment in Aiken.

Mr. LeDuc stated they would talk about Crosland Park specifically, but they would also lead into some other things that they see in Aiken that we may want to consider. He said one comment he had received is that we don't want to come out with some expectations to the community that we are not able to follow through with. There are limitations as to how much we can spend to resolve issues, but we need to come up with realistic solutions that are affordable.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out page 2 of the proposed contract regarding the Problem Statement and Questions to be addressed by the ULI Panel. He said the questions listed are those which were developed and which they would be looking at. He said, however, Council can revise the statement and develop other questions if they would like. He pointed out that staff will give the group a lot of statistical background. He said if Council has any changes to please let him know before September 8, 2014. He said the plan is to have the item on the September 8, 2014, Council agenda for Council's approval to spend \$10,000 for the study.

Mayor Cavanaugh asked if the northside recreation facilities could somehow be worked into this study. Mr. LeDuc responded that if we want to concentrate on Crosland Park, it will take all the time. He pointed out that Glenn Parker, who is working with the Capital Projects Sales Tax Projects, especially for recreation, is also working with Clemson University and there is a possibility we will ask Clemson to come down and work with us specifically for recreational planning.

Mr. Parker stated he was meeting with Clemson next week. He said their program is a similar format to ULI. There are a couple of days of questions and answers, public meetings, and before they leave they make a power point presentation. Then in 30 days they have a document. The pricing is similar to ULI.

Mr. LeDuc stated he felt this event should focus on Crosland Park, and then the recreation facilities should be done possibly by Clemson which specializes more in recreation.

Mr. LeDuc stated the last meeting was left kind of open ended. He said he had thought about what had been stated at that meeting and had come up with this proposal as a solution.

Councilman Homoki stated the questions and issues identified in the proposal are the same things Council talked about a few weeks ago. He felt it may be to our benefit to get an outside eye to look at the issue, as we may be too close to the problem. He said last time the matter was discussed Council went around and around in a circle and did not accomplish very much. The questions were identified, but nobody had any solutions.

Councilman Merry stated funding sources were a concern to assist in the development. He said perhaps ULI could identify some incentives to help with development. He said since we have been trying to revitalize the northside, we have had difficulty in involving or bringing private investment into it. He said perhaps there have been some incentives that have been used elsewhere that could be suggested to help here. He pointed out that a TIF is an incentive. He did not know if this were a place that a TIF could be used, but the idea of freezing or deferring property taxes so that a private investor who comes in and invests money in an area to help revitalize which will ultimately raise the property values of everything in the area, is an example of an incentive. He said the people from ULI through their expertise might have some ideas and know of some incentives that will work.

Mr. Wade Brodie pointed out that a TIF was used very successfully in the downtown area.

Mr. LeDuc stated he felt this could be a great area for a TIF.

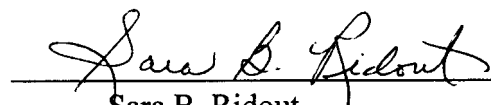
Councilman Merry stated he felt with a TIF you have to get private money being invested, not just public money. He said the private money is what creates the increase in property values.

Mr. LeDuc stated a TIF is normally described as an area that is blighted or needs major work, and he felt Crosland Park would fit into that category.

Mr. LeDuc stated the matter of requesting the assistance of ULI to hold a two-day event regarding Crosland Park and the northside would be on the September 8, 2014, agenda for Council's approval.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business Councilman Homoki moved, seconded by Councilman Merry, that the meeting adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 4:30 P.M.


Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk