

Aiken City Council Minutes

May 12, 2003

WORK SESSION

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Clyburn, Cuning, Smith, Sprawls and Vaughters.

Absent: Councilmember Price

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Bill Huggins, Larry Morris, Leasa Segura, Sara Ridout, Josh Gelinas of the Augusta Chronicle, and about 15 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M. He stated Council had two items that they would like to discuss in the work session.

TOOLE HILL LAND PLAN

Burgess Design Studio
Northside Redevelopment
Design Consultant

Mr. LeDuc stated he would like to introduce to Council the design team for the Toole Hill land design plan. The firm is Burgess Design Studio from Davidson, N. C. In the course of developing an overall 10-year housing plan for the Northside area, the idea emerged to hire an architectural and design firm to actually develop a land and architectural design plan primarily for the Toole Hill area. We felt that such a plan could address all design elements of the neighborhood and would provide the best opportunity to truly renew the northside. Until now, most of our efforts have used a scattered site approach, with funds applied in areas as property became available and as immediate concerns needed to be addressed. While this approach has met with success, it does have a limited overall impact on distressed neighborhoods. We have found that new or first time home buyers are not inclined to purchase new affordable homes in very distressed neighborhoods, even if heavily subsidized mortgages are available.

With these issues in mind, the Aiken Corporation agreed to fund up to \$15,000 to hire an urban design consultant to come in and help us develop a detailed design plan for the initial two block area of Toole Hill that we had identified as having the highest concentration of substandard buildings and vacant lots in the City. The plan will also take into account a six block area adjoining this core area. The work will concentrate on development of an urban land design for the target areas, with emphasis on lot layout, landscaping, traditional neighborhood design elements, and will include a number of architectural designs for new homes. Also, Aiken Corporation added an addendum to the proposal request to include an area centering on Chesterfield Street between Hampton Avenue and Barnwell Avenue, from Newberry Street to Fairfield Street. Representatives from the Housing Committee of Aiken Corporation interviewed three firms that had responded to our Request for Proposals to develop a plan for the area. With staff input, the Committee accepted a proposal from the Burgess Design Group, based in Davidson, North Carolina.

The firm has extensive experience working with affordable housing and historic projects. The work will concentrate on development of an urban land design for the target areas, with emphasis on lot layout, landscaping, and traditional neighborhood design elements. The design team features John Burgess of Burgess Design Studio and Christian Sottile, a Savannah architect with extensive experience in historic preservation. Mr. Burgess will serve as project manager, and Mr. Sottile will be our project designer for this effort. The team will conduct a three-day planning process, known as a charrette, from May 12 to May 15 in Aiken. The schedule for these sessions includes meeting with the neighborhood groups. Tuesday they will start the process with the design, inviting the public to meet with them. On Wednesday they will be working in the Chesterfield area. On Thursday they will complete their charette and their design preview and will hold a

closing session at 6 P.M. with their final design. He said the team members are present and will review the process and what they are doing.

Mr. Burgess introduced the team members and reviewed their process in looking at Toole Hill and the surrounding area. Mr. Sottile reviewed some of their previous work and showed some pictures of their prior work, including some work in Bluffton, SC, Savannah, GA, Columbia, SC, etc. Mr. Sottile stated the team was focusing primarily from Church Street to McCormick Street and from Hampton Avenue to Eustis Park, and most specifically the two blocks at the corner of the intersection of Edgefield and Morgan Street. He said the Chesterfield area looks at the blocks primarily from Hampton Avenue to Richland Avenue and from Laurens to Fairfield Street. They looked at housing designs and density of areas. He reviewed a proposed mission statement for the areas. They invited Council and citizens to come by on Tuesday afternoon between 2 and 3 P.M. to see some preliminary design concepts for the area. The final session will be Thursday at the Housing Authority at 6 P.M.

VENTURES SPEC BUILDING

Industrial Park
U.S. Highway 1 N
Airport
Spec Building

Mr. LeDuc stated Council had talked last year about the opportunity to possibly raise \$500,000 to be used for work on the alternate runway at the Municipal Airport. He said the city is paying 5% of the cost of the lengthening and strengthening of the major runway. He said the city is still working on trying to get an ILS for the airport. He said these things do take money.

Mr. LeDuc stated last year we discussed the possibility of the City constructing a speculative building at Ventures Industrial Park. Funding for this project would primarily come from a \$400,000 grant that we have received from Aiken Electric Cooperative. The 50,000 square foot building with tilt-up concrete walls, would be constructed on a 14 acre parcel opposite Newman Technology. This building could be expanded by 80,000 square feet to a total of 130,000 square feet in size. This type of project has been very successful in other parts of the state, with one city having over 60 firms visit their location, with over 20% of them deciding to locate within the area. According to the Department of Commerce, a majority of the spec buildings sell within a two year period, plus it gives the community the opportunity to market other industrial property. The building design which has been selected by the staff and the Economic Development Partnership will be constructed by Fitz and Goodwin for a cost of approximately \$713,000. However, the City, along with the County, will be able to reduce this price to \$675,000 by completing some of the rough grading and site work. To complete this project, the City will need to borrow approximately \$275,000.

We discussed a possible loan with three different agencies who are willing to lend us this money. The Lower Savannah Council of Governments and Aiken Electric Cooperative can both lend the money with payments to be made monthly at approximately 2% to 3%. The Savannah River Regional Diversification Initiative (SRRDI) is also willing to lend us funds at a higher interest rate, however, no payment would be necessary until the building is sold at which time a balloon payment would be made. Based on the building and land cost, we should be able to sell the speculative building at \$900,000 or more, which should leave the City with over \$500,000 available for other projects. Upon sale of this building, the vast majority of these funds would be used to pay back any money owed to overlay the secondary runway and for the extension and strengthening of the primary runway at the Municipal Airport. He said he would like Council to determine whether or not to move forward with this project, and, if so, under what conditions Council would like for us to borrow the \$275,000 needed to complete the construction.

Mr. LeDuc stated he felt the risk of a balloon payment was better in view of the fact that the loan would be paid when the building is sold. He pointed out a spec building brings additional clients, and even though a client may not buy the spec building they may stay in the area and build another building.

Council discussed the proposed building and the loan possibilities, and it was the consensus of Council that the balloon loan would be the best, even though the interest rate may be higher. This would allow the city to pay the loan off after the building sells, rather than making monthly payments on the loan until the building sells. Council had concern as to where the money would come from to make monthly payments until the building sells.

DOWNTOWN

Ribbons Memorial Day

Mr. LeDuc stated Julia West had asked if the city was interested in putting up bows in the downtown area for Memorial Day. She had made some bows as examples of what could be placed in the downtown area. She had stated she would donate her time and get a group to put them up, but asked if the city would pay for the material. She had estimated the cost to be about \$3 for each bow. Mr. LeDuc said if Council was interested he would suggest that the bows be placed at intersections in the downtown area.

Council discussed the request and felt it would add patriotism to the community. It was the consensus of Council to allow Ms. West to place bows at the downtown intersections with the city paying the cost of the materials.

RECREATION COMMISSION

Gibbs, Johanna

Councilman Sprawls stated he would like to nominate Johanna Gibbs as his appointee to the Recreation Commission.

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REGULAR MEETING

May 12, 2003

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Clyburn, Cuning, Price, Smith, Sprawls and Vaughters.

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Bill Huggins, Ed Evans, Larry Morris, Anita Lilly, Ron Shelley, Kim Coleman, Sara Ridout, Philip Lord of the Aiken Standard, Josh Gelinas of the Augusta Chronicle and about 20 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M. Mayor Cavanaugh led in prayer, which was followed by the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Cavanaugh stated Council needed to approve the agenda. Councilwoman Clyburn moved, seconded by Councilman Sprawls and unanimously approved, that the agenda be approved as presented.

MINUTES

The minutes of the work session and regular meeting of April 28, 2003, and the budget work session of May 5, 2003, were considered for approval. Councilman Smith moved that the minutes of the meetings be approved as written. The motion was seconded by Councilman Cuning and unanimously approved.