

AMERICAN FORK CITY COUNCIL
AUGUST 6, 2019
WORK SESSION MINUTES

Members Present:

Bradley J. Frost	Mayor
Kevin Barnes	Council Member
Barbara Christiansen	Council Member
Rob Shelton	Council Member

Staff Present:

David Bunker	City Administrator
Wendelin Knobloch	Associate Planner
Terilyn Lurker	City Recorder
Kyle Maurer	Finance Officer
Eddie Hales	Fire Battalion Chief
Tim Merrill	Legal Counsel
Adam Olsen	Senior Planner
Darren Falslev	Police Chief
Scott Sensenbaugh	Public Works Director

Also present: Randy Sant, Todd Brightwell, Josh Walker, Kristina Weisman, and one additional person.

WORK SESSION

The purpose of City Work Sessions is to prepare the City Council for upcoming agenda items on future City Council Meetings. The Work Session is not an action item meeting. No one attending the meeting should rely on any discussion or any perceived consensus as action or authorization. These come only from the City Council Meeting.

The American Fork City Council met in a work session on Tuesday, August 6, 2019 in the City Administration Office Conference Room, located at 51 East Main Street, commencing at 4:00 p.m.

Mayor Frost called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. He excused Council Member Staci Carroll and Council Member Clark Taylor and explained that because of their absence the second agenda item would not be discussed.

1. Report on the Downtown Economic Development Study

Randy Sant and Todd Brightwell have been retained to put together an economic plan for American Fork's downtown area. Over the last few months, they have met with City staff to get their ideas and feelings on downtown; they were invited and attended a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce in June and got valuable feedback from the business community. They will start meeting with key property owners downtown. This is the first of two meetings they intend to have with the City Council. Before developing the economic plan too extensively, Mr. Sant and Mr. Brightwell wanted the input and feedback from the City Council on the issues to be discussed. Mr. Sant and Mr. Brightwell asked the Mayor to organize a group of residents (an economic development committee) to outline its goals and objectives for American Fork's economic development of the downtown area. Once they have that formulated, they will be back before the City Council.

Todd Brightwell stated his name for the record and mentioned that Randy Sant had attended the local Steel Days Event. Mr. Sant voiced his amazement of the number of participants he observed. He believed that this energy should be matched and focused on the development of the downtown area.

Council Member Kevin Barnes pointed out that the event used to be held downtown.

Mr. Sant acknowledged the history of the event and explained that his interest in attending was to have a better understanding of community participation. He believed that it will be important to move different communities and livelihoods towards the downtown area for its development.

According to Mr. Sant, the purpose of the meeting was to brainstorm; there was no right or wrong answer. Mr. Sant and Mr. Brightwell wanted to see if there was common ground between the groups that have met already. He then opened the brainstorming session with the question:

When they hear “downtown” what enters their mind?

Mayor Frost stated that downtown is the gateway to the community. He believed that a community’s character is gauged by the character of downtown. When he travels through a rural community, he feels that he can take the temperature of the town when he hits downtown and must slow down to 35 miles an hour.

Council Member Barnes suggested that his conception of downtown depends upon what area is defined as downtown. If downtown extends beyond main thoroughways such as State and Main Street to include residential areas to the north and south, that would change his conception. He recognized this description might offend some people, but he associated that word “old” with downtown because of the old buildings that he felt were not well maintained and inviting. He also recognized downtown as a central location for the community.

Mayor Frost asked for clarification as to if Mr. Sant was inquiring about their thoughts relating to downtown in the past, present, or future. Mr. Sant responded that he was seeking the council’s impression of downtown today.

Council Member Christiansen asked if he is seeking their impressions specifically of American Fork’s downtown. Mr. Sant affirmed, yes, that for the purpose of the economic plan, he and Mr. Brightwell had defined downtown as 500 West to 100 or 200 East.

Council Member Shelton viewed downtown as neglected. He expressed that when he was a kid, the economic area moved from downtown over to the east side of town where Fred Myer and Albertson’s used to be located. Then the economic area moved to near the Meadows. He recognized that there has always been a group of people that wanted to revitalize downtown, but this was never prioritized. Thus, there has been deterioration of the buildings that brought the word neglected to mind.

Council Member Christiansen voiced that people always used to say that it was unfortunate that there were different economic sections of the City that brought them through downtown to get from one to the other. However, as someone who worked on Main Street for many years, she noted that there was an energy to have people walking past. She seconded the “neglect.”

Mr. Sant then asked:

In the City Council's opinion, what caused the neglect?

Council Member Shelton said it seemed to be more cost effective to build a new building rather than renovate, so from his perspective that drove the development to other areas. Additionally, there was the arrival of box stores like Walmart and Home Depot who had tax incentives and breaks for being in areas like the Meadows. He continued that American Fork had established a downtown development loan program. When the library and post office sold, the City set the money aside as loans for downtown businesses to better their buildings. In his opinion, however, the program wasn't well advertised and executed. He was unsure if they even still maintained the program. Additionally, the Mayor had asked Council Member Shelton to liaise with the Downtown Business Alliance, an incorporated group who were intended to represent and advocate for downtown. When Council Member Shelton approached members of the group about revitalizing the area, they stated that it wasn't of any use because the property owners did not want to spend the money. To summarize, Council Member Shelton explained that the "neglect" occurred for two reasons: (1) the City offered incentives for development in other places and (2) a lack of interest in renovation of existing businesses in the downtown area.

Council Member Christiansen added that the logistics of building in downtown are more complicated because of the multiple entities and parties a business/builder would have to deal with as opposed to single property owners in other locations.

Mayor Frost added that part of the neglect was due to parking. According to him the expansion of the downtown area was constrained on the sides because of limited parking.

Council Member Rob Shelton explained there has been a group, the Bank of American Fork in particular, that tries to preserve the character of downtown's building. During their last remodel, under the direction of Rick Beard, the board had a debate whether to relocate and build their headquarters elsewhere at less cost than remodeling, but the board was ultimately committed to staying downtown. Council Member Shelton mentioned that he maintained contact with Mr. Beard during the remodel process and heard him voice that renovating gets more and more expensive because it's like "peeling back an onion." You take one thing away and you find a new problem underneath. During the remodel of the Bank of American Fork they found some beautiful roofing tiles that they restored, but they also discovered some structural issues that lead to unanticipated expenses.

Mr. Sant explained that code was probably a challenge for most building renovations. Because codes are laws to meet safety issues, there is not much flexibility for developers.

Council Member Barnes considered three cities: Richfield, Lehi and Provo. In the 1970s his father-in-law purchased a motel in Richfield whose downtown was booming. At the time, Highway 89 went through downtown and there wasn't a freeway to bypass going through the town's center. As soon as the freeway was built, new stores were built near the freeway's exits which killed downtown. In contrast, both Lehi and Provo have made intentional efforts to revamp their downtown spaces. Both have resurfaced the roads through downtown and created centralized architectural features and walkways. Ultimately, without expanded parking, Council Member Barnes feels there is no point

in trying to revitalize American Fork's downtown because "people just are not in the mood to walk two blocks anymore."

Council Member Shelton added some additional history to downtown's development. Dale Gunther took him down to his basement office and showed him an entire file cabinet of the reiterations of the downtown plans over the last 50 years. It seemed, the City does a great job with getting a plan, but for whatever reason there has never been the execution of the plan which Council Member Shelton feels maybe the economics, or the lack of momentum.

Randy Sant directed the Council to a new question:

How does the Council believe they could get execution?

Council Member Shelton voiced excitement about the momentum in Provo. He explained this was in part because Tabernacle burned down and the church chose to build a temple that generated some momentum. They had a Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) that help level the economic playing field. He also stated excitement about being named an Opportunity Zone. American Fork falls within one of only two counties in the state to be named that. He explained that he recently met with a developer who has done a project in Provo that utilized both the CRA and Opportunity Zone designation. Through the CRA they were able to get an eight-cap interest rate, a rarity in the Opportunity Zone. He concluded that the question for him is how to leverage available tools to create incentives to gain momentum.

Mr. Sant stated that the available tools for revitalization have not been taken advantage of. He recommended the establishment of a Community Reinvestment Act (CRA).

Council Member Shelton stated that a Transportation Reinvestment Zone (TRZ) was also an option. He recognized that these sorts of incentives exist, but that the downtown economic development plan would bring together these multiple incentives. By combining opportunities together that would create the momentum.

Council Member Christiansen stated that one of the concerns is property owners who don't feel they benefit by making improvements and business owners who would like to make improvements but who cannot because it isn't their property. They needed an entity to drive the desire for improvements forward.

Mr. Sant then asked:

How would you define the physical location of downtown?

Mr. Brightwell clarified that they are not seeking the technical definition of the downtown space, but the perception of both locals and outsiders of where downtown American Fork is.

Council Member Shelton stated that as a kid he viewed downtown as where Parker's Drive-In and the Golden Coral were located because that was where the economic activity occurred. He also recognized that Christensen's, where Boy Scout meetings were held, was a feature of his childhood memories, but it was an old dilapidated building even then. As kids, they ventured towards Hart's Gas Station and Fred Meyer on the east end of American Fork. In contrast to this was the historic downtown as designated by the City as the area ranging from 100 East to 300 or 400 West. Thinking

futuristically, he viewed the entire State Street corridor from east to west beginning where the Maverick gas station is located near Pleasant Grove through historic downtown to the two freeway exits. Council Member Shelton explained that is what he envisions over a 20-year period, but for the purposes revitalizing downtown for this discussion, he thinks of the CRA boundaries.

Council Member Christiansen said that she views downtown the same. Historically it has been the area between 300 West to 200 East and 100 North to 100 South. Things have changed and expanded – there are things out on 500 West. She, however, does not necessarily consider that downtown.

Council Member Barnes specified that there are multiple perceptions of downtown depending upon if someone is talking about businesses or if one “lives downtown.” Residential downtown extends a couple of blocks more either way. If one is defining the business district, it would be the half dozen blocks through the middle of town. He didn’t think people thought of the area east of the Tabernacle as downtown.

Council Member Christiansen said that one thing that defines downtown is the type of architecture and structure. Features she associated with a downtown space included a wide sidewalk, business zoning near pedestrian traffic, etc. For her, the other areas don’t feel like a downtown space because they seem more commercial. This difference in zoning doesn’t change the use but changes the feel.

Mayor Frost specified that he recognizes the opportunity to expand economic development and what thus, what is considered downtown, but the heart of it was the small area from 300 West to 200 East. He recognized that the City’s development and feel was somewhat dependent on the presence of state roads that the City had to comply with.

Mr. Sant agreed that state roads can pose challenges. He further stated that the allowances of the state would ultimately dictate what could and could not be done on that road. He then redirected the council to address what they believed were the downtowns biggest weakness, strength, and threat.

Mr. Sant acknowledged that one of the weaknesses to the downtown area that the Council had already identified was parking.

Council Member Christiansen voiced that people don’t come and shop in the middle of the day and nothing is open later in the evening. Downtown businesses should choose an evening where they all extend their hours to be more accessible to residents’ new life rhythms.

Council Member Shelton felt that that the nature of the thoroughfare (size and atmosphere) was a weakness. According to him because it has a commuting atmosphere – everyone is driving from point A to point B – it is not a destination. The space has lost the anchors, and instead only has mom and pop shops. There isn’t a specific service that residents need located in the downtown space, so residents are not attracted to stop.

Council Member Barnes said that the words he thinks of are old and dilapidated. He contrasted an older grocery store located in downtown compared to a Smith’s in Lehi. After noting that residents will go from American Fork to the Smith’s in Lehi to go shopping, he asked, why a resident would make that trip. In his opinion, residents travel these extra miles not because it’s cheaper but because the atmosphere is nicer; it was bright, big, airy, and had a better selection. He saw that residents got two different experiences by going downtown compared to the Meadows. Council Member Barnes

added an additional weakness: the road. He recognized that it divided downtown making it difficult to get from one side to the other.

Mr. Sant moved the conversation towards downtown's strengths.

Mayor Frost said that the level of transportation was both a strength and a weakness. There was a lot of traffic through the downtown space. He recognized that around five o'clock State Street begins backing up which could create visibility for businesses. He hoped that planners could consider transportation patterns and try and utilize them to the City's advantage.

Council Member Shelton said that he sees three strengths. One, there is a strong interest in the community to see something happen. He acknowledged that there have been a few more plans for development by owners and a little more energy. Two, the CRA/TRZ and three the Opportunity Zone.

Council Member Christiansen said that from a public point of view a strength of downtown was its character; it is different from the box stores. According to her, it has a different feel; one feels welcome.

Council Member Shelton said that a program he would like to see the City leverage more is the PARC Tax for downtown. He expressed that he was impressed by how the rooftop concert series implemented in Provo created a nightlife for the area.

Mr. Sant stated he doesn't like to talk about threats, because they can overcome threats. They usually find that some big development has drawn residents away from downtown. He recognized the added services of the Meadows, but how this detracts people from downtown and inquired if there were any other threats to downtown that the Council believed they could overcome?

The Council focused their response first on the road believing that it was a threat that there "wasn't anything they could do about." Mr. Sant voiced that he believed there were solutions to the road. Council Member Christiansen voiced that in San Antonio, there was a river between their primary shopping areas, but that the overcame this through bridges connecting both sides of the river. These features provided that space with some character.

Council Member Shelton mentioned a proposed TOD. He perceived that the two efforts have competed for attention in regard to creating CRAs. He hoped that one would not outshine the other. He hoped there would be pros and cons to each area.

Council Member Barnes clarified the location of the proposed transit-oriented development (TOD) for Advisers Consultants on 200 South on the other side of the freeway and described how the area was all farmland making it easier for development than the downtown space.

Council Member Shelton reiterated that although he sees the concern for competition between the two development areas, he thinks that by holding both areas in mind, they can be developed to serve different purposes and strengths making both spaces relevant and trafficked by residents.

Mr. Sant asked if the City Council could provide them with more details about the TOD. Council Member Barnes explained that it has been a big deal for American Fork. It had been granted special zoning designations including higher densities and the ability to build three story buildings.

Additionally, there are requirements for walkability into the downtown area such as wider sidewalks, slow traffic. Mr. Brightwell asked who the developer was. The Council explained that there are multiple developers because there are several property owners in the 540-acre area. He suggested they make sure the developers know of the support for each area and have a clear understanding of the thought that has gone into each area's use so that they have a higher confidence level when investing in the different spaces.

Mr. Sant asked if they needed to come in to make changes to the ordinances with regards to setbacks and densities. Council Member Shelton said he would hate to limit them to a certain area or certain tools, so the Council would be open to advice about changing setbacks and densities. However, there were definite concerns by residents about higher densities, transportation, and crime rate. He would want to look at that for downtown. Mr. Sant acknowledged that implementation of downtown's development would cost money. He asked where the development of downtown fell in terms of the Council's priorities for allocating funding. Council Member Shelton said he was hoping they were close to seeing American Fork's five-year financial plan. Eight years ago, the City put \$100K into a fund earmarked for downtown's development. That only happened once because in the years since, other projects had taken priority. He would like to see a funding plan that considered and balanced the other needs of the city. He also believes that the return on investment (ROI) also needed to be considered. If the City puts X-amount of dollars into downtown, that is a much more attractive proposition than simply having a nice area to look at when residents drive through.

Council Member Christiansen stated that the timing of implementation was also important.

Council Member Barnes stated that the Mayor and the City Council are pretty much together and have good rapport that allows for open and direct discussions and be direct. Because of this, he believes that they would be able to constructively consider any good proposal that came before them.

Mr. Sant stated for a good downtown plan, there had to be someone to manage it and run it. There would be a startup cost but that it was helpful to know that the Council hoped the plan could be self-funded after their initial investment.

Council Member Shelton said that American Fork has a very good track record in creating successful developments. Because of this, he hoped they have built trust with the other entities involved such that they recognize that American Fork's development plans have been well thought out and would encourage them to support the downtown initiatives.

Mr. Sant asked if there were any other questions or comments.

Council Member Shelton asked about the economic development director that was indicated in the provided packet and explained that at the beginning of the year he spoke with each of the Council Members and three of them mentioned the need for an economic development director. He agrees that a development director could be a helpful tool to be proactive. Mr. Sant stated different cities allocate the function of an economic development director to different entities: the director of a downtown alliance, a specific economic development position, or a county staff member. He and Mr. Brightwell were not advocating for the creation of a specific position per se but wanted to indicate that the City needed to determine how they wanted to fulfill the role of who would take charge and ensure that the plan got implemented.

Council Member Shelton explained that the City has tried all those options in the past. He would like advice regarding the framework that needs to be in place to hold whoever has been assigned the task of leading economic development accountable and effective. Mr. Sant deferred and stated they would include suggestions for maintaining accountability in the plan and asked if the Council had additional questions.

Mayor Frost said he can remember one of the previous downtown plans. He felt like the previous plan proposed mostly architectural changes and articulated that in this plan the Council is seeking more depth in considering economic, social and emotional questions that had not been asked previously.

Council Member Shelton said that he would really love to see this happen in American Fork. He asked if other than the Harrington were there other groups actively looking at redevelopment. Mr. Sant stated he has been approached by a couple of groups want to take advantage of the opportunity. He explained that one of the next steps is to meet with some key property owners in the downtown area, including the Harrington. They want to look at things that will drive people to the downtown.

Council Member Christiansen emphasized the importance of having multiple entities to attract people to the downtown area.

Mr. Sant stated that it is his and Mr. Brightwell's goal not to create a plan with a way to beautify downtown, but with a plan that would give American Fork strategies, tools and goals to kickstart economic activity in the downtown area.

Council Member Shelton asked about the timeline. Mr. Sant explained that their next step is to meet with the property owners. Then, they would like to meet with a committee to flesh out development goals. Mr. Sant and Mr. Brightwell hope to have a presentation to bring to the City Council by September.

Mayor Frost asked who was intended to be on the committee. He would like the Council to suggest names to populate the committee. Mr. Sant said a good committee is between nine and twelve people. They would leave it up to the city to decide, but would encourage a combination of key property owners, business, Council Members and City staff. They would like to see more citizens than staff. The function of the committee is to come up with goal statements and see if those goals are realistic, measurable and doable.

Mayor asked Council to submit names to him. He thanked everyone for their participation in tonight's meeting.

2. Discussion on policy considerations for the proposed broadband project

This item was not discussed.

3. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:05 p.m.



Terilyn Lurker, City Recorder