FINAL

LEBANON CITY COUNCIL
OCTOBER 25, 2023 – 6:30PM
SPECIAL MEETING WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION AND DOWNTOWN LEBANON TIF ADVISORY BOARD
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL OR REMOTE VIA VIRTUAL PLATFORM
LEBANONNH.GOV/LIVE

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Councilor Chris Simon, Councilor George Sykes, Councilor Erling Heistad, Councilor Doug Whittlesey

EDC MEMBERS PRESENT: Bill Dunn (Chair), Kevin Purcell, Dan Nash, Andy Key, David Newlove, and Chip Brown

TIF MEMBERS PRESENT: Barry Schuster (Chair), Christine Haidari, Victoria Smith, and Councilor George Sykes

STAFF PRESENT: Mayor Tim McNamara, Assistant Mayor Clifton Below, City Manager Shaun Mulholland

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1. **Meeting Access**

   A. **To participate in this meeting, please join live via Microsoft Teams or call 929-229-5356 (access code: 622 750 274#). If you have trouble accessing this meeting, please email Shaun Mulholland.**

2. **SPECIAL MEETING:**

   A. **Guidance and Further Direction on the Future Redevelopment of Municipal Parking Lots Behind City Hall**

The City Council meeting was called to order at 6:32PM. The Economic Development Committee, and TIF Advisory Board also called their meetings to order at 6:33PM.

Mayor McNamara explained that this is a discussion regarding the ultimate utilization or non-utilization of the parking lots behind City Hall. The EDC and TIF previously received three proposals for these lots. The sentiment expressed at the time was that none of the proposals did as was hoped. There has been a lot of public input regarding maintaining public access to the riverfront, and none of the proposals seemed to thoroughly address that. There has been recent discussion regarding affordable housing projects on the 20 Spencer Street property and the intention is to reconsider the parking lot areas at the same time.

Clifton Below, Ward 3 and City Council, recused himself from the conversation due to ownership interest in 1 Court Street.

Barry Schuster stated that the three projects presented allowed for a great comment period. These comments discussed preserving and enhancing access along the river. Some or all of the lower parking lot was suggested to be used as green space. There was discussion regarding access through the tunnel in this area. This is an important opportunity and some portion of this could be parking/development. The City has a number of developers seeking housing projects.

Bill Dunn explained that the groups met frequently and invited other City boards/commissions to discuss conceptual ideas. As RFEI was sought to allow for visual representations of the proposed options. Access to the river was the consensus item among all. Parking was split approximately 50/50. There was discussion regarding mixed uses and housing as well, but there was some concern regarding potential scale and massing. If this project was to be broached through an RFP process again, the request should be more specific as to wants and needs. This also needs to be a project that the City Council wants.

Chip Brown, EDC, reiterated that the origin of this process was not to create a development with a park, but rather a park with a discussion on how to fund it. If the City wants the majority of this area to be a park, there needs to be a true discussion as to the cost and scale.

Mayor McNamara stated that he would like to consider a use value on parking in this area and how much is really needed. Mr. Brown stated that the City has done a number of parking studies, and it is key not to remove needed parking. The waterfront currently has no access and is paved. The back of the City is to the water. There is value for all existing and future development and the tax base to create a waterfront park.

Mr. Schuster stated that one idea is to keep the parking below and put a park on top. The roof of a parking garage could be transformed into a park.

Victoria Smith, TIF, stated that the park along the river would be an incredible amenity. A subcommittee researched this idea and found overwhelming information regarding municipalities and the economic engine of parks. There was a question as to how to combine this with necessary parking.

Dan Nash, EDC, if necessary parking is removed, people may park in inappropriate places or not attend Downtown events. If a park is desired in this area, the City should examine how this fits into the larger picture. There is an area nearby at the end of Spencer Street that could be used for a park. He stated that he would hate to lose valuable parking behind City Hall. If a park/green space is proposed, this could be limited to 50’ near the river itself. The LOST fund may be a great way to great this river environment. If the City is going to obtain waivers from the Shoreland Protection Act, it seems unjust to only allow this for City projects and not others along the river, as the process is expensive and difficult.

Councilor Sykes asked what the metrics are to measure the effectiveness of parking in this area and how much is needed. City Manager Mulholland noted that there is data showing this

information, but it only shows a snapshot in time. A more comprehensive parking study could be undertaken. Mr. Brown stated that he believes the last parking study completed was around 2018. He asked if any of the parking studies capture peak hours for parking. City Manager Mulholland stated that this has not been studied in the past but could be as part of a future study. The City could complete its own traffic study and then bring in a developer to design what the Council wants.

David Newlove, EDC, stated that he oversees parking at Dartmouth College. He agreed with a parking study that evaluates parking at certain days and times. Peak days can then be managed through parking enforcement.

Mr. Schuster stated that, as RFPs were going out, he spoke to two landscape architect firms. These firms responded that it appears development/housing was being sought and declined to provide information, though found the project and site interesting. More in-house work could be done to scope out the City's ultimate desire before sending out another RFP.

Mayor McNamara asked how specific the scope should be.

Mr. Dunn noted that the City is going through a period of transition. The parking studies in hand only speak to certain points in time and some of these considerations may no longer exist. The City Council needs to make a prioritized value judgement as to what it wants to see. It cannot be on the EDC to create the entire vision, though the group can research the topic.

Mayor McNamara stated that income-producing property and riverfront access seemed to be the top two items of consideration, but parking now also appears to be a vital consideration.

Councilor Below agreed that groundwork needs to be laid before an RFP is considered again. Utilizing parking at different times may be an item of interest. The City needs to have the ability to recreate the river's edge. A riverfront park can be a great feature, but this area of the river is fairly flat and not necessarily very interesting, as opposed to the nearby falls area. A shady corridor to connect the rail trail and the Greenway is equally important.

Councilor Whittlesey noted that the City Council has heard many passionate ideas from others but has not yet created its own vision. He stated that he likes the idea of river access, but this part of the river is not necessarily the most picturesque. There is likely a certain amount of green space and riverfront access that could be considered, along with parking and a mixed used building. Some of the RFPs contained a certain amount of massing and aesthetics that do not fit with this area. Design elements that reflect the history of this area should be considered.

Mr. Schuster stated that adjacent landowners to this project may have input as to how best to access the riverfront in other ways. The river has many benefits.

Ms. Smith noted that TIF previously met with the developers of the Lebanon Woolen Mills who are interested in creating a riverfront park in that area and wanted to know if TIF would like to use funds to help develop it. This could also be consdiered as part of this project.

Mr. Dunn noted that he spoke with the Tree Advisory Board, which would like to create a canopied area to connect the rail trail and the Greenway. One RFP included a pedestrian crossing over the river. This would encourage organic development across the river.

Councilor Below noted that a traffic study should take into consideration current use of the area, capacity, and how it can be managed moving forward.

Mr. Schuster suggested that the City Council could project timelines for future traffic studies. In the meantime, listening groups with the public to accumulate more ideas could be undertaken. Councilor Whittlesey suggested online polls as well.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

The Committee discussed the layout and potential technical aspects of the 14, 28 and 30 Main Street parcels.

8. ADJOURNMENT:

Councilor Whittlesey MOVED to adjourn the meeting. SECONDED by Councilor Heistad.
**** The Vote on the MOTION was approved unanimously.***

The Economic Development Commission and TIF Advisory Board subsequently adjourned.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude
Recording Secretary