

Public Meeting - Meeting Notes

January 31, 2011

7:00 p.m.

Council Chamber

1. Criteria addressing “ complementing surrounding business” needs clarification - what businesses are complementary
2. Criteria addressing creating a positive image should be weighted with a higher value than it has now
3. It is important to address first things first - ‘...Address the junkyard on the waterfront before installing expensive decorative fountains...’ - Improve signage downtown, address downtown security, improve parking situation, pave streets, address NPU’s sewer connection fee
4. Why does code correction not apply to first floor space? example: the City Perk location has restroom access issues - cannot be used as an eatery until restrooms can be used
5. Norwich has ‘districts’ already - i.e. Arts District, and the plan should address locating businesses - take advantage of what’s already there and build around it
6. Attract residents with quality of life improvements - i.e. coffeehouses, bookstores, places to gather
7. Reinforce the lost revenue numbers from rentals (page 15 of plan) connect vacancy rates to high taxes
8. Better describe Prime Economic Driver - Grow dollars coming into town is important keeping dollars here (recycle) is important too
9. Clean up downtown - literally and figuratively - if we want business and residents to come here
10. City needs to address Social Service issue
11. Do not want non-profits included
12. The evaluation committee should be all ‘new faces’
13. Address costs of NCDC administration
14. Blight officer needs to enforce the regulations we already have in place
15. Include examples of what non-profits would be eligible (entertainment venues and/or attractions)
16. Not all non-profits should be excluded - 501s could also be galleries, libraries, etc. Non-profits are not necessarily social services
17. Kudos for developing the programs and tools that will help businesses and developers
18. Consider businesses that play off Casino traffic - boutiques, gift shops, etc. Bring traffic to downtown with places to visit and stop
19. Work to retain businesses like Chacers - work with businesses that are already here, investing their time and money in Norwich
20. How will this get people to come to Norwich? Why would anyone come here?
21. Hold events etc. at existing venues - bring new business to existing businesses

22. Norwich needs 'new blood' - new faces working on development - attract younger people to help implement the plans
23. Re-examine zoning issues - zoning could be another tool
24. Take advantage of the existing infrastructure i.e. fiber
25. This is not an isolated effort - to succeed we need involvement from zoning, parking, planning, community - this plan does not (and cannot) address everything - it took decades to get to where we are, it will take decades to get where we want to be
26. Page 5 references preserving the culture and history - implementation needs design guidelines
27. What is the overall vision? What are we trying to build? How will the three tools be used to 'build' the vision
28. Page 16 discusses the requirement to demonstrate need for funds - what if a Max's wants to locate here? They don't need the financing - can we find a way to get them here using this plan?
29. Engage private businesses in promoting Norwich
30. Conventional lending is not always available for start-ups - they can't leverage what they can't get
31. Also need a good marketing plan in the requirements

Public Meeting - Meeting Notes

February 5, 2011

9:00 a.m.

Central Fire Station

32. Criteria addressing "ability to meet financial obligations": Are we going to require Performance Bonds? (will be considered)
33. Are we benchmarking other successful communities (i.e. Portsmouth NH)? (yes, we have talked to officials in a number of cities and municipalities with similar programs, they have been generous in sharing lessons learned and we're building the implementation tools with those lessons in mind)
34. Are these programs similar to New London? (NL is not as focused on downtown as this plan - we're planning to use their reimbursement approach for lease rebates, meeting with businesses when we deliver the checks - this should be very good for business retention)
35. What's available for ground floor rehabilitations? (The loan program and lease rebates are both available for ground floor uses)
36. Comment: We can do all the rehabilitation we'd like to do, the missing piece is the tenant.
37. How are these programs accessed? Who goes to these programs first the property owner? The business owner? The plan needs a flowchart showing how the programs can be accessed.

38. Is there a downtown inventory? What information is available? What information is needed? (There is an inventory that is as accurate as we can make it without doing a walk-through of each property - we are talking to building owners and are gaining access to the spaces, the inventory is then updated. We don't know space by space what code issues exist)
39. What is included in the admin cost? Cost of financing? (A budget needs to be - and will be - developed that estimates the cost of marketing and other tools)
40. The Community-Wide Economic Development Plan needs to be adopted by Council.
41. Comment: Norwich citizens and City Departments must remember that these programs are not the only solution and the City is not absolved from working with landlords and businesses - every employee of the City needs to make it a responsibility to make Norwich a good place to do business.
42. Comment: The City and Property owners need to take care of what's in the downtown and clean it up.
43. Comment: Norwich has lots of smart people, we're just not very good at making the good things we have work.

Meeting Notes

February 8, 2011

8:00 a.m.

City Council Chambers

1. Can you provide specifics on programs and communities that have been looked at? (a number of communities with successful programs - Village of Monticello NY, Columbus Ohio, Fort Collins Colorado, New London CT, Hamilton Ontario are a few)
2. Are we looking at tax incentives to supplement these programs? (some exist we need to market them better - enterprise zone is one)
3. How are these programs different from Norwich's former efforts? (mostly design and administration)
4. How long ago were the other plans tried? (1980s)
5. Lease Rebates: Will we be holding firm to the lease terms being discussed in the plan i.e. 3 years or more? What is the impact of the three year min. on start up companies? Will they be deterred? (We're starting with a 'stretch' number and will address the minimum as needed)
6. If a renew option is part of the lease will it be qualified for the subsidy. (Renewals will need to go through the application process)
7. The allocation of 70%/30% don't necessarily connect - the creative class is growing
8. The disconnect (above) should be addressed to provide a more equitable allocation
9. Support from Reliance House: Intent is to be a good community partner, they support arts with gallery in their location, they would be open to discussing retail at their new location, they are a large employer in Norwich ~265 people, support the revitalization programs.
10. Bring in the Creative Community - media, arts, etc.

11. Can we attract bio-firms and other technical businesses with the assets we have, both dollars and infrastructure i.e. fiber? (we need to market the assets - need to make them part of our overall marketing plan and strategy.)
12. How do we motivate property owners to use the programs? (good question - suggestion 13 is a creative idea)
13. We may want to consider investigating holding tax increases until the newly renovated space is occupied.
14. Loans: Address what happens to the dollars after 5 years is up - will funds be re-invested? Returned to taxpayers? (We will need to meet with the comptroller and see what options are open)
15. Address the Creative Community in the documents
16. Why does Code Compliance exempt floor 1? (This is part of a strategy to have something for as many people as we can - code compliance issues can be corrected using loan money - generally first floor issues are the easier ones to address)