



GENERAL & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES

May 12, 2009

The General and Economic Development Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on May 12, 2009 at 7:34 a.m.

COMMITTEE PRESENT

Dave Richins, Chairman
Alex Finter
Scott Somers

COMMITTEE ABSENT

None

STAFF PRESENT

Kari Kent

1. Items from citizens present.

There were no items from citizens present.

2. Hear a presentation, discuss and comment on preliminary downtown vision, goals and priorities, and provide these comments to the Downtown Mesa Association for consideration during the upcoming downtown visioning stakeholder discussions.

Assistant to the City Manager Natalie Lewis stated that the Downtown Mesa Association (DMA) is leading a comprehensive outreach process to gather information regarding a vision and goals for downtown Mesa. She noted that the City is a major stakeholder in the downtown area, and she displayed a PowerPoint presentation (a copy is available for review in the City Clerk's Office) to review the preliminary ideas.

Ms. Lewis recalled that downtown Mesa was a topic of discussion at the Council's Strategic Planning Workshop in August of last year, which resulted in a strategic initiative that focused on economic development, innovation, being business friendly, utilizing strategic tools and redeveloping older and vacant areas,. She noted that subsequent discussions were held with the Council, staff and the DMA. Ms. Lewis said that the Committee's input would be incorporated into the submittal to the DMA and that the Council and City staff would have the opportunity to participate in DMA's outreach process.

Ms. Lewis referred to the following vision statement, which she noted requires some refinement:

Downtown Mesa is the soul of our community, where our heritage and future have come together to form a unique and thriving urban environment. It's distinctive history and high potential for sustainability encourages all types of economic and social activities. Its setting as a destination district connects residents and visitors with dynamic opportunities for shopping, dining, working, learning, entertaining and living.

Ms. Lewis noted that discussions have focused on the fact that downtown Mesa belongs to everyone in the City and that the history of Mesa should be linked to the future. She outlined the following goals and provided details of activities that support the goals:

- Thriving Urban Environment – arts and culture, downtown historic neighborhoods, diverse cross-generational attractions, a clean and safe downtown, outstanding entertainment via orchestrated signature and special events, and a variety of restaurants and nightclubs.
- Diverse Economy – the right balance of jobs, high wage jobs, residential living and services, and specialty retail.
- Connectivity and Accessibility – accessible by walking, riding the light rail and buses, biking, and driving in addition to being accessible from the freeway.
- Progressive Stakeholder Leadership – ownership, pride and involvement, code and policy updates and environmental stewardship.
- Regional Destination and Visibility – proactive marketing and community-sponsored events and attractions.

Ms. Lewis reviewed the list of priority projects (see Attachment 1).

Chairman Richins suggested that barriers to downtown development should be identified and that the City should be flexible in addressing certain issues, such as fire regulations, without compromising safety.

Committeemember Finter explained that the Fire Department addresses engineering, education and enforcement, and he suggested that an early focus on engineering would result in a smoother development process. He questioned the manner in which the proposed vision for the downtown area would interact with the City's current processes.

Committeemember Somers stated that priority projects should be translated into action plans, and he expressed concern that staffing levels were insufficient to accomplish the goals and coordinate the effort.

Assistant Economic Development Director Shelly Allen noted that the DMA is implementing the changes to the concept plan from a community aspect in the absence of the Town Center Development Office. She said that the Planning Department would be responsible for implementing some of the land use goals.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that the DMA may not have the necessary skill sets to execute the plan; and that the City is the ultimate authority relative to zoning.

Chairman Richins stated the opinion that the property owners should lead the effort and that the City, as a property owner, deserves a seat at the table.

Additional discussion ensued regarding the fact that the purpose of the effort is to bring all of the stakeholders to the table; that the key is to reach a common vision and establish priorities; that the Downtown Mesa Association is reorganizing their staffing in order to facilitate special events and implementation; and that the priority projects should be broken down into action plans.

Committeemember Finter noted that the plans are in the preliminary stage, and he expressed the opinion that the effort is moving in the right direction.

Chairman Richins invited a member of the audience to come forward and present his comments.

Ryan Daniels, representing a solar energy company, said that the revitalization of downtown San Diego utilized key events and anchor attractions to draw people to the area. He added that reduced fees and providing incentives for sustainability and "green" development, such as the use of solar energy, served as catalysts for development of the area.

Chairman Richins said that plans and visions send a message to the marketplace regarding the desired type of development. He added that Councilmembers should take the lead in promoting development. Chairman Richins also suggested that a commuter rail station could be considered for the downtown area as transit options are reviewed.

Committeemember Somers expressed the opinion that the future of the downtown area does not depend on any one major project, but rather a combination of elements.

Chairman Richins said that San Diego's success was the result of a combination of factors, including brave entrepreneurs who were willing to make an investment in the downtown area.

Committeemember Finter reported that a recent Friday evening event in downtown Mesa was very well attended, and he expressed the opinion that these types of positive events can continue and be developed further.

Additional discussion ensued relative to the fact that staff has facilitated many of the efforts by removing barriers to development; and that a broader vision is needed relative to the possibilities available for the downtown area.

Ms. Lewis stated that the Committee's comments would be incorporated into information provided to the DMA, and she added that the City and the Council would continue to be involved in the process.

Deputy City Manager Kari Kent said that coordination would be a key focus area as the plan is implemented.

Chairman Richins stated the opinion that the Committee and the Council should display leadership in this area, and he thanked staff for the presentation.

3. Adjournment.

Without objection, the General & Economic Development Committee meeting adjourned at 8:10 a.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the meeting of the General & Economic Development Committee of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 12th day of May 2009. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

LINDA CROCKER, CITY CLERK

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Attachment (1)