

City of Mesa

Downtown Vision Ad-Hoc Committee

57 E. 1st Street
Visit Mesa Conference Room
120 N. Center Street
Tuesday, December 9, 2014
3:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Jo Wilson, Chair
Debby Elliott
Lorenzo Perez
Steve Chucri

STAFF PRESENT

Natalie Lewis
Jim Smith
Sara Sorensen
Jeff McVay
Gail Vangen

ABSENT

Charles Huellmantel
Rich Marchant
Marco Meraz

MEETING MINUTES

1. Call to Order

The Downtown Vision Ad-Hoc Committee meeting was called to order at 3:01 p.m. by Chair Jo Wilson.

2. Hear a presentation by and discuss feedback from the Neighborhood Economic Development Corporation (NEDCO)

Terry Benelli, Executive Director of NEDCO, and NEDCO staff provided a movie presentation regarding the history of downtown Mesa from the late 1800's to the present.

- a) Downtown Mesa grew and prospered up until about 1978 when the focus began to shift from downtown to the suburbs, driven primarily by the opening of Fiesta Mall and the Superstition Freeway (diverting traffic away from Main Street).
- b) The 1990's were tough and a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) was needed. NEDCO was formed in 1997.
 - NEDCO is a CDFI that is certified by the US Department of Treasury to provide alternative financing programs anywhere in the state of Arizona. A CDFI's purpose is to use this alternative financing to promote economic revitalization and community development.
 - The City of Mesa contracted with NEDCO to provide unique and tailored downtown business assistance during the Light Rail construction process.
 - In addition to funding, NEDCO provides development assistance: education, networking and support.
- c) NEDCO staff reviewed the 15 development plans that were developed over the years and stated that the Downtown Vision Committee is a part of this long-term process, and noted recent momentum and shared drive to bring more locals, students and visitors to the downtown area. Light rail will be another tool to add housing, jobs and new markets to downtown.
- d) NEDCO's resources have not been fully utilized. Where NEDCO has and can be helpful:
 - Leverage: NEDCO can exponentially leverage resources in a way that other organizations can't. NEDCO believes in leverage and since 2012 has leveraged 2.8 million invested in downtown.
 - Events: To respond and support City Council's 2008 economic development strategic initiative, NEDCO shifted its focus to creating more downtown events, restaurants and 1,500 new housing units.

- Business Retention: In 2011, NEDCO contracted with the City to develop a business retention program which included marketing/branding, business plans, and signage for both new and old businesses. As a result, downtown Mesa has the lowest failure of any town experiencing Light Rail construction.
 - Forward Progress: NEDCO has applied for CDBG funding to continue their work towards 1,500 new housing units, TOD and creative placemaking. “Creative placemaking is the act of people coming together to change overlooked and undervalued public and shared spaces into welcoming places where community gathers, supports one another, and thrives.”
- e) NEDCO staff discussed the first downtown Mesa Urban Development Summit. Key recommendations and/or insights from this summit included:
- Form Based Code should be mandatory instead of opt-in like it is now. Provides a designation of arts and culture, entertainment district – provides additional tools.
 - Adaptive Re-use – is difficult and can be daunting.
 - Suggested the City to fund a Building Code Analysis.
 - Adaptive use time-to-market adds business attraction appeal.
- f) In conclusion, NEDCO believes they can be a key factor in the success of revitalizing downtown Mesa. Light Rail through downtown is unique and should be taken advantage of. They requested that adaptive reuse of property be a priority, along with Code Analysis, mandatory Form Based Code and training for City departments that deal with TOD. Creating a vision statement similar to HEAT initiative, but unique and tailored for downtown, would be helpful to ensure all downtown partners are following the same blueprint for future of downtown.

3. Hear a presentation by and discuss feedback from RAILmesa (Retail, Arts, Innovation and Livability)

RAILmesa is a neighborhood group started in 2011 that advocates for increased citizen participation, responsible development of housing, transit options and the creation of quality jobs along Mesa’s Light Rail Corridor.

- a) Discussed Mesa’s Urban Garden, located in the heart of downtown, adjacent to Benedictine University, Mesa Integrated Health Center and the City of Mesa Municipal Court at 1st Avenue and Hibbert. Mesa Urban Garden is a community organization that provides fresh produce directly to the community and local food banks.
- b) Believe community outreach is a key component to celebrate the vision and opening of the Light Rail.
- c) Discussed the perception by people who live here; the downtown area isn’t good. There are not enough good restaurants and the ones that are here aren’t always open. A walking-audit indicated inadvertent negative messages are conveyed by downtown signs. Suggested changing the language to be more pedestrian friendly.
- d) Realized Mesa didn’t have a downtown advertising campaign – so they started one: “Downtown Mesa – if you knew it, you’d do it.” No funding for this campaign.
- e) Requests that marketing, advertising and promotion be a key component of the DVC ‘s vision and that the creation and execution of a comprehensive advertising campaign be a priority. Stated the “time is now” not when Light Rail is operating through downtown.
- f) Make it a priority to develop a strategy similar to the HEAT Initiative.
- g) Make the addition of 1,500 housing units the highest priority.

In conclusion, Diane Warner, NEDCO Board President, informed the Committee that Terri Benelli was stepping down as Executive Director and has accepted a new position as Executive Director at Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) in Phoenix. She thanked Ms. Benelli for her leadership and said NEDCO will continue what she started. She added that it is critical the City continue its funding. Folders containing documents from the presentation and flash drives with all the plans and studies that have been done were provided to members of the Committee.

Discussion took place regarding the presentations so far. Augie Gastelum commented that Mesa has the opportunity of a lifetime with Light Rail and would like to see the committee establish a plan on how to take advantage of it once the current extension is complete.

4. Hear a presentation by the Consolari team and discuss feedback on the Consolari project and proposal for downtown Mesa.

Senator Bob Worsley and Ms. Christi Worsley provided a presentation and discussion on a project named Consolari. In Latin, it means to allay or assuage grief, to console, soothe or comfort. The project is fueled by partnerships with New York City's Lincoln Center, the Mesa Arts Center, Mesa Public Schools and other entities and would transform a ten-acre auto dealership, located just east of the MAC in order to expand on the one of the nation's premier performing arts destinations. Consolari proposed discussion highlights included:

- a) World-class, 42,500-square foot concert hall to compliment the MAC in order to accommodate hundreds of instruments and singers at a time.
- b) 500 seat-recital hall, 10,000 sq. ft.
- c) 150 seat recital hall, 4,000 sq. ft.
- d) 900-student music campus for Mesa Public Schools
- e) Cutting-edge research on the ability of music to help people suffering from autism and dementia
- f) Gardens and lawns totaling more than 200,000 sq. ft.
- g) An area fronting Main Street that would host crowds watching the concerts on a 7,000 sq. ft. digital screen
- h) 30,000 sq. ft. of retail and restaurant space
- i) Cost to locate in Mesa is \$250,000,000 as compared with \$500,000,000-\$650,000,000 in Scottsdale or Phoenix
- j) Also talked about moving kids from ASU to downtown Mesa for architecture, CAD, and engineering.
- k) Talking with Steve Tether from Vanderbilt about building a new dream campus in downtown Mesa.
- l) 5013c has been formed to raise funds. ASU will help lease the spaces, Lincoln center will pay to use it, the City will own the land.
- m) Not something they will take to the City to build and bond. Trying to get wealthy groups to invest.
- n) Timeline – Open for students in 2016, K-12, Mesa Public Schools. If the site drags out it'll be 2017. With adequate fundraising, concert hall projected to be completed in 2019.
- o) Restaurants and hotels will be needed, but you can't ask them come now – they will need added market demand, which the Consolari will provide.
- p) P&L is projected, as well as jobs, operating budget and estimated people that will come. Help is needed to take that information and figure the ramifications regarding hotels and restaurants.

In conclusion, Ms. Worsley stated that the biggest concern is what is planned to be put around Consolari.

Discussion continued regarding the church and what they are doing around the Temple and that it would be helpful if they would come to the table and be more transparent.

5. Committee discussion and possible direction to staff or committee assignments relative to: 1) Parking and way finding; 2) Unique and creative development opportunities, particularly transit-oriented development for housing or mixed uses; 3) Restaurant/Bar opportunities; and 4) Committee discussion about adding other categories for later discussion and/or follow up by the Committee at future meetings.

Chair Wilson discussed possibly putting an agenda item on each meeting for discussion about things not on the agenda, but substantive items that need discussion. This can include conversation about previous presentations. Some of you have certain expertise that we would like you to bring to the table during these discussions. A "dashboard" of speakers and presentations and key points would be helpful. Chair Wilson stated that it is apparent that the groups that have done presentations to date have patterns and commonalities. The Committee's goal is to bring those together to form a common vision.

6. Confirm next meeting date: December 16, 3p.m., Visit Mesa Conference Room

Confirmed

7. Discuss and provide direction on the primary agenda items next meeting:

- a) **Presentation and discussion by the City's Economic Development Director**
- b) **Presentation and discussion by Transit Director related to an update on light rail. (Note: cont. to 1/27/15 at the 12/16/14 meeting)**
- c) **Presentation and discussion relative to community outreach plan and timeline.**

In addition to the above presentations, there will be an Arts presentation (Note: continued at the 12/16/14 meeting to Jan. 27, 2015 meeting). Next meeting the meeting/goal timeline will be revisited and ideas for community outreach in January and February will be discussed and what is needed to make a recommendation. Will have a list in January. Committee Member Marchant requested statistical information regarding the Light Rail – what it really means for downtown – stops, passenger numbers and demographics of riders. Chair Wilson stated that perhaps Metro Light Rail should be brought in to do a presentation and that Jody Sorrel, City of Mesa Transit Services Director, would be there next week to start the conversation.

8. Chair Wilson asks for any items from citizens present.

Nancy Thompson stated that she lives in the Washington and Center neighborhood and they have a “quality of life plan” for the neighborhood. She commented that the Consolari plan is a very good idea because it benefits kids in school, aids in healing, and comforts veterans and displaced families. “I think the benefit of healing is priceless.”

9. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 5:02 p.m.