

A Regular Work Session of the Danville City Council convened on April 4, 2023 at 8:45 p.m. in Council Chambers located on the Fourth Floor of the Municipal Building. The following Council Members were present: James B. Buckner, Bryant Hood, Mayor Alonzo L. Jones, Barry Mayo, Vice Mayor Gary P. Miller, Sherman M. Saunders, J. Lee Vogler, Jr., and Madison J.R. Whittle (8). L.G. "Larry" Campbell Jr., was absent (1).

Staff Members present were: City Manager Ken F. Larking, Deputy City Manager Earl B. Reynolds Jr., City Attorney W. Clarke Whitfield, Jr., and City Clerk Susan M. DeMasi.

Mayor Jones presided.

MEETING MINUTES

Upon **Motion** by Council Member Whittle and **second** by Council Member Mayo, Minutes of the Regular Work Session held on March 7, 2023, were approved as presented. Draft copies were distributed to Council Members prior to the Meeting.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

PRESENTATION OF THE SCHOOLFIELD MASTER PLAN

Director of Economic Development and Tourism Corrie Bobe, noted in 2013, the Industrial Development Authority acquired the Dan River Mills Schoolfield site. This was a multi-million square foot complex owned and operated by Dan River Mills for over one hundred years. That section of the community played a major role in a large number of families throughout the southern Virginia region as they were a part of, and grew up in, the Schoolfield Mill Village which became a part of the City of Danville in the late 1950s. Acquiring the site was a decision supported by City Council, and made by the IDA. After several years of ownership, they decided to move forward with master planning this area, predominantly focused on the 80 acre site itself and the commercial district surrounding it. Soon thereafter, an announcement was made that gaming legislation was being considered in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the City of Danville was considered as one of the cities for this legislation. As the months followed, they were thrilled to announce the Schoolfield site as the location of the Caesars Virginia resort.

Ms. Bobe noted when they began the process of looking at the master plan for that 870 acre site, it was a shot in the arm to have an anchor tenant acquire the site and bring a wonderful tourism asset. Staff knew this needed to be a community focused process given the history of the district. WRT, their master planning consultants, structured and implemented a community engagement process, engaging members of the Schoolfield district itself, and community members at large. Residents of the district came to the events and expressed their sincere thanks, saying they felt they were heard; they were excited to provide input throughout the process, what they would like to see in terms of improvements to their neighborhood and amenities they could walk to.

Ms. Bobe stated, why did they need a district plan; because now they have an anchor tenant spearheading the redevelopment efforts of the Schoolfield District which will draw a large number of visitors into the community every year. In addition, there were over 800 residential parcels in this particular district; community members who have been living there just recently, or maybe fifty years. It was important to refocus their efforts now they have seen such success in the River District, on another historic commercial area of the community. Looking at the District Plan, they wanted to see how they could leverage the new catalytic investment, the new entertainment resort, to generate additional private sector development in the commercial areas of the

Schoolfield District and adjacent commercial throughfares. They looked at, with new visitors coming into the community, how can people come in and out of the community, what would they see as part of that process and how to package that all together and give the Schoolfield District a new brand and a new life.

Ms. Bobe explained with the district plan, they looked at the corridor, as visitors came in and out of the community, where would they be traveling from, what condition was it in and what improvements needed to be made to make the community more welcoming. They looked at the commercial area, with Caesars as an anchor, what commercial development or public amenities could be included surrounding that property not only to be more attractive to visitors, but to make sure it served as an amenity to local residents. Finally, the neighborhood itself, with about 800 residential parcels, how can they develop the neighborhood plan that makes it more kid friendly, pedestrian friendly, and what resources can they make available to those residents.

Keiko Cramer from WRT discussed the process of community engagement and the vision of the plan, noting they had numerous meetings with three primary events: Schoolfield Kick-Off, which introduced the planning process, Schoolfield Week which was a walk in design session with the community, and Schoolfield Fest, which showed the outcomes of the work that was being done. The Vision of the plan was the New Schoolfield District, which envisioned an authentic, resilient, historic and thriving village fabric stitched by community and shared history. Ms. Cramer reviewed the four key systems, which were the framework for the Vision, including community, Character and Identity, which would preserve and celebrate the history and legacy of Schoolfield and create welcoming gateways into the community; Housing and Economic Development to combat displacement and identify equitable and inclusive revitalization and development opportunities that meet the needs of residents; Ecology and Open Space to enhance existing open and natural spaces and find opportunities to create new spaces for recreation, habitat and respite, and Mobility, Connectivity and Infrastructure to emphasize Main Street as the City's spine and create seamless, multi-modal connections to the River District.

Jared McKnight from WRT explained the corridor was defined by six character zones which run the entire way to the threshold with the River District. Each character zone was identified by the existing conditions of the corridor, and the width and the opportunities they were able to devise in the Mobility Plan. Currently, they have some discontinuous sidewalks, and no bike lanes throughout the entire corridor. How can they work with the existing sections of the West Main Street corridor and identify opportunities to enhance walkability, look at new opportunities for planting and bioretention areas, new bikeway systems to connect the bicycle network and look at mobility and transit improvements.

Zone 1 and 2 were about entering Danville and that transition from the highway from the Virginia North Carolina border. This was where they have some of their wider street sections across Danville. They were looking at opportunities to maintain that two way vehicular infrastructure on both sides, maintain the median that was planted, offer a welcoming threshold into the City, but also look at opportunities to create a more continuous pedestrian framework with a continuous sidewalk condition along the one side and a two way bikeway on the other side, all fitting within that existing section.

Zones 3 and 4 were the heart of the study area, the Village center, next to Caesar's Virginia resort; they looked at the opportunity to take advantage of that narrower width of West Main Street. It was one way in each direction, but they looked at opportunities to bring in pedestrian mobility on both sides of West Main Street through sidewalks, a more continuous bikeway system and at the important intersections and thresholds, have a central turning lane to be able to continue that

mobility through that section. Getting more into the residential area, it was characterized by street parking, and a discontinuous bike lane in the area. How can they make that safer, create a more protected bikeway but also enhance the sidewalk conditions, keep the on street parking, while also creating more planted buffers to create more pedestrian safety throughout that residential fabric. Those were the overall strategies from a very high level prospective. They started to expand the master plan and look at opportunities for different catalyst sites along the study area and the corridor. The idea of a village framework, the ability to walk to some of these resources was something that continued to come up in the community engagement sessions.

Mr. McKnight noted five key priority sites were identified by the community, the first was the threshold at the North Carolina Virginia line and they were calling it the Interchange.

The Interchange – they looked at the idea of this as a gateway into Danville from North Carolina, and also creating a vibrant, attractive and welcoming gateway into Danville. They looked at strategies that could provide more hotel options for visitors and tourists, and options for dining and amenities for residents, workforce and visitors. Also, creating more welcoming public and pedestrian spaces and better connecting for different modes of travel; could they provide a transit hub to provide more connectivity along the corridor.

Main Street Green – this was the next site across from Caesars Virginia resort. It was something they were considering as a central gathering node, an opportunity that looks at mixed use development opportunities, flexible plaza and park spaces, but also an opportunity to honor a little bit of Schoolfield's history and past. One of the existing rail spurs from the rail line that used to come into the mill site was there; how could they take advantage of things like that to tell the history of Schoolfield in different ways. They also looked at opportunities that extended into the neighborhood, to look at different types of housing that could be applied there. In the former Hylton Hall site, they looked at what a senior village might look like, and opportunities for different types of residents. They looked at where they could take advantage of the development happening at Caesars but also create spaces for community and revenue generating uses on existing parcels along the Main Street corridor. Providing different types of mixed use development, retail, commercial spaces, hotels, and residential, and creating flexible plaza and park spaces; a lot of community members were interested in park spaces around this area, but also looking at diversity of housing that doesn't currently exist in the neighborhood. It could include new bikeways, sidewalks, opportunities to look back at the history with images of Schoolfield and using the rail spur to tell that history.

Baltimore Avenue Cluster – this site was adjacent to the Main Street Green at the Baltimore and Main Street intersection, and the heart of the Schoolfield village. This was requested by the community to show different residential typologies, retail and community spaces and also build on the history and how it moves forward into the future. Strategies included adaptive reuse of historic mill buildings and different reuse of existing infrastructures; how to open access and mobility from the neighborhoods into these areas, honoring the history of Schoolfield, creating public spaces for people of all ages and building different types of housing opportunities.

Ballou Center Redevelopment – this was the largest piece of land with all of the privately owned properties. They worked with the owners, who knew the study was going on and were interested in seeing what the future of the properties might look like; what would a reimagined Ballou Center look like. In this version of the plan, they looked at different types of affordable housing options from townhomes, mixed use, to multifamily residential uses, attractive neighborhoods serving retail and commercial uses, better connecting the site both to Ballou Park as well as the other

infrastructure along West Main Street and integrating that new development within the existing fabric.

Schoolfield Woods - this was the last site they looked at which was between Caesars Virginia and the Dan River, an opportunity to tap into the trail systems that exist along the river, through Ballou Park and create different types of experiences and access to nature. It looked at stream restoration to provide opportunities for people to interact with nature in a new way they currently don't have access to. They looked at the adaptive reuse of the filtration plant; it could support different types of mixed use, community oriented, or revenue generating developments, and looking at opportunities for education centers, for kids to be in nature, leaning and experiencing, but also looking at more ecological opportunities to restore stream corridors into natural and recreational assets. A lot of these strategies could be simple strategies that looked at solutions to bring people closer to the amenities and opportunities that already exist in the fabric of Danville in the study area.

Amie Patel from WRT reviewed the Neighborhood Plan, noting people were central to the plan, and they should think about how can they support the residents of Schoolfield to make sure they have access to all these amenities, but also so that they can continue to age in place and live there affordably. The neighborhood strategies include: Housing, Livability & Sustainability, Arts & Culture, and Parks & Open Space.

Housing. Some of the biggest things they heard was a need for more housing; this was a nationwide trend, and how can they address that. One strategy was targeting strategic sites, and looking at how they can rezone those for mixed uses. The catalyst sites were a great example of mixed use development and could address a lot of those issues of how to bring amenities to residents but also build more housing. In addition, they need to make sure they were supporting their existing residents and housing stock. It was an historic district, the homes should be supported, find ways to make sure residents have access to resources, and develop other materials that could help them make energy retrofits.

Livability & Sustainability. How can the neighborhood be a livable and improved place for people to live. There were three ways to do this: Social, make sure there were enough community bonds, build up that sense of community; there was a need and want for that. Environmental: finds ways for these historic homes to make energy retrofits, make sure they were weatherized, as well as expanding the green infrastructure throughout the village, and a plan for stormwater management. Lastly, Economic Development: Caesars Virginia was bringing a lot of interest to Danville. There will be a lot of new economic development happening, how can they support residents who have ideas, and support local small business.

Arts & Culture. To create welcoming gateways that were unique to Danville, finding ways to incorporate wayfinding signage to create a sense of place, and use art and historic interpretation to make sure the voice of Schoolfield was heard.

Parks & Open Space. Connectivity was huge and Danville had a great parks network; they can build that into Schoolfield by identifying places like Schoolfield Woods, Ballou Park, and the Riverwalk Trail. The Schoolfield district has a neighborhood park called Hylton Park; revitalizing that and making sure that could be a beacon for the residents that were there.

Ms. Patel noted these were a lot of great ideas, but how were they implemented. One of the first things was a brand, and their partners developed a brand for Schoolfield that acknowledged the past but thinks about how citizens can enjoy, explore and grow Schoolfield. As part of the district

plan, there were design guidelines to show what sort of signage, or art pieces could be used to highlight this unique place. Ms. Patel reviewed the high level cost estimate for each zone, and the implementation matrix, noting some of the projects could start as soon as the City was ready.

Council Member Vogler noted a lot of the properties shown were privately owned and asked has the City already spoken to some of these people to see their level of interest and Ms. Bobe stated they had conversations with the private sector property owners on the catalyst sites; they would be suggesting changes and getting their permission for their site to participate in the study; they were all on board. They did have a number of them participate in the community events, they were very excited to see some of the recommendations and that sparked a conversation of what they could do with their own properties. The next step with the implementation and release of this was to talk with them about how they can work together to make these changes. Mr. Vogler asked if the IDA would be involved in strategic sites to spur this and Ms. Bobe noted absolutely. In the budget this year was a line item for implementation of the Schoolfield plan as part of the City's agreement with Caesars; as tax revenue was generated for the City, 5% would go back to the implementation of the plan. The IDA has already acquired some property and staff continues to identify what additional catalyst sites and key high priority properties they will need to purchase.

Mr. Whittle asked the pricing range for the new homes and townhomes, and Ms. Bobe noted they don't have a sales price established, but believed the cost estimates in the implementation plan were more focused on the redevelopment of the site, not the sales price of individual homes. The plan includes an assortment of housing; the Hylton Hall site was recommended for senior housing, and they would look at the Danter Housing study to see what profile of either lease or purchase rates that would accommodate for that particular site. They will have to do the same with multifamily, any additional townhouse or single family housing developments; it will be based on what the developer charges for those units. The recommendations from their office for redevelopment would be based on what Ken Danter has recommended in his study. It would be recommendations on supporting the existing residents in the Schoolfield Mill Village, including multifamily, workforce housing, market rate townhouse development, or senior living; it touches every component of recommendation within the Danter Housing Study.

Mayor Jones thanked the WRT Team for their presentation.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Mr. Larking discussed the Big Sort with Council, explaining the Partnership for Regional Prosperity has been holding Big Sort events; the City had one in Danville at the Institute late last year. There was another one coming up on April 19th at 5:00 p.m. at Bonner Middle School. They want to make sure that as many people attend including as many Council members.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATES

Ms. Bobe noted in addition to the promotion of Kelvin Perry to Assistant Director of Economic Development, they do have a new Visitor Center Manager who started yesterday, and will be brought in May to be introduced to Council; they also have a few new travel counselors at the Visitor Center.

COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Whittle asked to put a motion on the floor for a four cent reduction in real estate taxes. Mayor Jones noted Mr. Whittle was asking did Council want to put on the agenda a four cent tax

reduction, and asked for a straw poll. Mr. Buckner questioned if staff could give Council an impact study on this and Mr. Whittle stated it was \$1M a year on the budget. Mr. Larking noted it was important for everyone to understand the budgeting process; the City Charter stated that the City Manager was to recommend a budget each year. Each time he has recommended a budget, it was based on revenue estimates they have formulated based on months of work, using trends. They examine the needs of the City and try to balance a budget. Mr. Larking stated he presented a balanced budget for the upcoming year; it did not have any tax rate adjustments and the normal process would be for the Council to look at the budget and during this time, talk about what they would like to change about it. If Council wanted to do a reduction, they will have to talk about what services need to be cut, and Mr. Larking stating he cannot find a way to trim \$1M out of the budget that did not impact services; he would like to know what Council would want to stop doing. Mayor Jones asked for a straw poll, all in favor of putting this on the agenda for a four cent tax reduction; Mr. Vogler stated he wanted his support of the tax reduction on the record. Mayor Jones noted Mr. Whittle did not have the votes to put this on an agenda.

CLOSED MEETING

At 9:40 p.m., Vice Mayor Miller **moved** that this meeting of the City Council of the City of Danville, Virginia be recessed and that Council immediately reconvene in a Closed Meeting for the following purposes: discussion or consideration of the acquisition and/or disposition of real property for a public purpose where discussion in an open meeting would adversely impact the bargaining position of the City as permitted by Subsection A(3) of Section 2.2-3711 of the Code of Virginia, 1950 as amended, and more specifically to consider a discussion regarding the sale and/or potential purchase of specific parcels of property for use by prospective industrial, commercial, and mixed use projects looking to locate in the City; and an Economic Development discussion and update concerning a prospective business or industry where no previous announcement has been made and/or the expansion of an existing business or industry where no previous announcement been made as permitted by Subsection (A)(5) of the Section 2.2-3711 of the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended and more specifically to consider: an update on multiple prospective commercial, mixed use, hospitality, and industrial projects considering locating within the City and/or locating within the region in cooperation with the City's regional partners.

The Motion was **seconded** by Council Member Whittle and carried by the following vote:

VOTE: 8-0-1
AYE: Buckner, , Hood, Jones, Mayo,
Miller, Saunders, Vogler and Whittle (8)
NAY: None
ABSENT: Campbell (1)

Upon unanimous vote at 10:11 p.m., Council reconvened in open session and Vice Mayor Miller **moved** for adoption of the following Resolution:

CERTIFICATE OF CLOSED MEETING

WHEREAS, the Council convened in Closed Meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act; and

WHEREAS, Section 2.1-344.1 of the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, requires a Certification by the Council that such Closed Meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia Law;

April 4, 2023

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council hereby certifies that, to the best of each Member's knowledge, (i) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements of Virginia Law under Section 2.2-3711 were heard, discussed or considered, and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the Motion by which the Closed Meeting was convened were heard, discussed or considered by the Committee.

The Motion was **seconded** by Council Member Vogler and carried by the following vote:

VOTE: 8-0-1
AYE: Buckner, , Hood, Jones, Mayo,
Miller, Saunders, Vogler and Whittle (8)
NAY: None
ABSENT: Campbell (1)

Mr. Vogler asked for a discussion on a consensus on what types of manufacturing the City wants at their sites.

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 10:32 P.M.

APPROVED:

s/Alonzo L. Jones
MAYOR

ATTEST:

s/Susan M. DeMasi, CMC
CITY CLERK