



**Prosperity & Livability Committee**  
***Members: Ewing, Hill, Wagner and Williams***  
***Chaired by Council Member Ewing***  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Lobby Conference Room**  
**August 2, 2017 – 10:00 A.M.**

**MINUTES**

**Present:**

Committee Chair Jason Ewing, and Committee Members Alyce Hill, Jay Wagner and Chris Williams

**Staff Present:**

Randy McCaslin, Deputy City Manager; Randy Hemann, Assistant City Manager; Heidi Galanti, Planning Administrator; Jeron Hollis, Communications & Public Engagement Director; Planning and Development; Loren Hill, President- High Point Economic Development Corporation; Robby Stone, Assistant Public Services Director; Greg Venable, Transportation Planner, Mike McNair, Director of Community Development and Housing; Andrew Edmonds, Transportation Technician; Maria Smith, Deputy City Clerk, and Lisa Vierling, City Clerk

**Others Present:**

Judy Stalder, TREBIC and Carl Vierling, Greater High Point Food Alliance

**Consultants:** Adam Martin and Beth Poovey, LandDesign

**News Media:**

Stephanie Butzer, *High Point Enterprise*

*Note: The following hand-outs were distributed during the meeting and will be attached as a permanent part of these proceedings:*

- Presentation – Downtown Multi-Modal Vision Plan
- Discussion – Community Gardens
- Email from Paul Sicheloff to (Urban Agriculture Committee – Community Gardens)

***Note: These handouts will be attached as a permanent part of these proceedings.***

Chairman Ewing called the meeting to order 10:07 a.m.

**1. Presentation – Downtown Multi-Modal Vision Plan**

Greg Venable, Transportation Planner, advised that the High Point MPO was awarded a federal grant in 2015 to do a Multi-Modal Visioning Plan for the area around the Train Depot and the Hi-Tran facility. The plan includes the multi-use stadium area which looks at connectivity to the area with pedestrian, bikes, greenway connections and opportunities for public art and redevelopment.

Mr. Venable reported that LandDesign consultants were hired to do the study and staff is looking for a recommendation to take to the City Council. He then introduced Adam Martin and Beth Poovey with LandDesign who would be presenting the plan.

Mr. Martin noted that approximate 136 acres in the downtown area was assessed in the study and they saw a need to grow outside the original boundary by reaching out to High Point University (HPU) and the hospital area in order to create connections. The real focus was on the heart of the core city and also parts of the market district taking into account previous plans and recommendations.

Mr. Martin pointed out it was significant that the downtown right-of-way was 36% of the site area and suggested that this extra capacity/space could be given back to pedestrian cycle facilities. Public outreach sessions were held, as well as outreach meetings with steering committees as well as stakeholders to help with feedback to help with guidance.

They started out with three scenarios that were presented to the public:

1. *"Main Street Moment" (creating gateway experiences for a sense of arrival into downtown)*
2. *Uptowne "Rail to River" (connecting market areas around downtown)*
3. *"Institutional Connections" (connecting neighborhoods to downtown)*

Out of the 24 projects that were proposed, the following six projects were illustrated in the vision:

- 1) Pedestrianize Main Street (create an urban/retail shopping experience along Main Street, opportunities to give back to pedestrians along with cyclists)
  - More landscaping with additional angled parking and an intermittent median with a turn lane in the middle.
- 2) Main Street Gateway Features
  - Opportunity to bring the creative culture that is in the buildings out into the streets and give back to the public. He suggested a mural or art on the buildings.
- 3) Elm Street Upgrade
  - Illustration of the possibility of future redevelopment of Elm Street. He noted that there is a lot of extra laneage on Elm Street. This would allow for more opportunity for on-street parking, dedicated bike lanes, and sidewalks etc...
- 4) String and Splinter Trail, Southwest Greenway
  - Opportunities to extend connection downtown the Southwest Greenway and identify a connection to Armstrong Park which could be carried to HPU. The idea is to create a crosstown greenway for a north and south connection.
- 5) Railroad Esplanade
  - This would be unique for High Point using this as a cultural destination. He pointed out High Avenue along with Broad Avenue created with extra right-of-way that could be given back to pedestrians to create an east-west connection. Another key component he suggested was to increase visibility along High and Broad Avenue.
- 6) Redevelopment Opportunities
  - The PIT could be developed with retail, makerspace, multi-family, etc...
  - Possible enhancement to the existing ally to Main Street to a future plaza with connections to High Avenue at the Depot.

- Redevelopment of areas east of stadium which was near Church and Main Street with retail offices. He noted north of the station, there could be redevelopment opportunities such as convention center, retail, children's museum, multi-family and hotel. All with relationship to the depot.

Chairman Ewing asked staff what kind of action is expected from the Committee. Staff replied that ultimately, they are looking for acceptance of the plan by the City Council. Mr. Venable advised that some of the recommendations outlined in the multi-modal vision plan compliments those identified in the mixed-used area plan.

**Chairman Ewing made a motion to forward the Multi-Modal Vision Plan to the City Council for consideration/adoption. Committee Member Williams made a second to the motion, which carried unanimously. [4-0 vote]**

## **2. Discussion – Community Gardens**

Mr. McCaslin referenced an email that was sent to the manager from Paul Siceloff (Urban Agriculture Committee – Community Gardens) asking for the City's consideration of the following:

1. Subsidize or offset the water installation
2. Provide a discount of cost for top soil from Ingleside
3. Allocate funds for Community Gardens to apply for grants similar to the process used for non-profits.

Carl Vierling, Executive Director, Greater High Point Food Alliance, shared some information relative to the to the discussion (i.e. Community Garden expenses, Community Garden locations, total food production for each, as well as pictures of the Burns Hill Community Garden and the High Tunnel Community Garden on Pershing).

According to the information submitted, the total food production was estimated at \$115,353. Then he reported on their recent Youth Food Summit with 140 kids in attendance from seven different agencies. The kids were asked questions relating to food insecurity, hunger etc, and were asked what they would do to help solve the problem. The #1 answer was: "we need more gardens". Mr. Vierling shared that he is seeing more and more kids actually involved in the gardens, which helps health benefits, community activism, etc...

According to the information received from the Agriculture Extension Office, the startup cost for a garden could be up to \$5,200. Mr. Vierling noted the biggest resource and struggle is water (actual installation and connections). Additionally, there are ongoing costs, such as soil, mulch, etc... He used the study from Rutgers University and the University of Massachusetts to come up with the rough estimate \$115,000 worth of produce that the local community gardens have produced. He pointed out there is actual economic value coming into the city through these community gardens/high tunnels.

He shared that Burns Hill continues to add beds to their garden each season and noted they are seeing more involvement with the neighbors and children getting more involved and some even building their own raised beds in their backyards. He added that these community gardens are about building community and it is significant that the neighbors are taking ownership.

He raised the following questions:

- What can the city do to help?
- What are the possibilities for investing in these community gardens?

He advised that food insecurity costs our local community about 75 million a year in healthcare costs.

Chairman Ewing asked if ten tons of compost to start ten raised beds would be sufficient; he wanted to know how often the gardens/beds would have to be re-soiled. Mr. Vierling responded at least once a year at the same capacity, and noted that some have as many as three harvests/crops each year.

Committee Member Wagner asked if the water installation would be needed one time or if another connection would be necessary if the garden was to be expanded. Committee Member Williams added his support to this as he has noticed the community engagement has grown and the availability to the High Point Library Farmers Market after the construction is completed, they will not have issues to find more vendors.

Chairman Ewing wanted to know if High Point CAV provides the sheds or if they build them and who provides the materials. Mr. Vierling confirmed that High Point CAV does build them and some of the materials have been coming from the Hayden-Harman Foundation, other grants, donations, etc... Committee Member Williams shared that Hayden-Harman Foundation built a shed for them and it included the cost of the wood as they are using the program to teach the men the construction trade. Chairman Ewing suggested how they could leverage other partnerships such as Habitat for Humanity to possibly assist with building the sheds for the gardens, or at least providing the supplies to build it.

Mr. McCaslin noted that the city's Community Development & Housing Department provided a grant to buy the materials for the tool shed at the West End garden and High Point CAV provided the labor. He stated that some of these gardens are located on city-owned property and are being leased out to these groups. He added as far as the water connections go, not every lot is the same. The ones that had houses on them fairly recently probably already had the water tap and maybe the water meter was still there, so that cost would be minimal compared to having to install water taps, etc.... where there is no water connections.

Committee Member Wagner asked if these figures for the water installation and the meter were the city's actual costs, or what we charge. Mr. McCaslin replied these costs are what the city charges, but the city does not recoup the full cost. Robby Stone, Assistant Public Services Director, referred to the most current information/pricing and gave an example of a lot that had no previous service. He noted that effective January 1, 2018, it would be \$1,815. He noted the average monthly cost listed would be between \$13-\$17.00 a month and could vary depending on the weather and the size of the garden. Mr. McCaslin pointed out that it is expensive, especially for volunteer, non-profit groups. He added that the Hayden-Harman Foundation has stepped up in some of the cases and provided financial assistance. Chairman Ewing asked how the water taps were being policed and Mr. Vierling replied that all the ones that he has seen do have locks on them. Committee Member Williams suggested some kind of assistance could possibly be addressed in the non-profit allocation process.

Mr. McCaslin responded that staff is looking for City Council's direction as to if Council would like to tie this into the nonprofit grants. He noted that timing may be an issue because they would need to get the gardens ready for the growing season in the spring. He strongly recommended that if this is something that council wants to do then they should set aside "X" amount of dollars that could be used to cover the cost of soil, mulch, water taps, and etc. and he was not too keen on staff having to make these decisions.

Chairman Ewing inquired about the process/procedure that a neighborhood group would use if interested in starting a community garden. Mr. Vierling explained it would all depend on the location and if it were a vacant piece of property. It starts with an interest from the community to start a community garden and the neighborhood gathering together. Then as the process continues, they will work with Mr. McNair, Mr. Harman, and the Agriculture team to ask questions. They also have to test the soil, so that would be an added expense.

Chairman Ewing wanted to know if there was a commitment on the neighborhoods part as to the hours required to help maintain the gardens. Mr. Vierling explained that initially there is and shared that the HPU Vista students have been a tremendous help.

Committee Member Williams asked if this would possibly fall under the “blight” umbrella and if assistance could possibly be provided through the Community Development & Housing Department. Mr. McCaslin believed it would not according to the current definition they are working under.

At this time, Mr. McNair joined the meeting to offer additional insight on the CDBG monies that are distributed as grants to the various groups in the community. Committee Member Hill noted how all of these gardens are different in how they are funded, and pointed out that Bountiful Harvest had a lot of private money that went into it, along with Southside. He explained his department helps facilitate the need for mulch, then directs them to Public Services to get the mulch at the city’s rate, then the bill is forwarded to the Community Development & Housing Department. He noted that non-federal dollars were used. He also reported that they currently work with High Point CAV to build the sheds where they can store their tools. He stated it is part of their training to build the 8x10 sheds.

Mr. McCaslin reported that we were receiving quite a bit of requests from nonprofit groups for free mulch/topsoil from Ingleside which prompted the Public Services staff to start work on a policy for Council’s approval. In that policy, it stated that valid nonprofits were eligible for one scoop or one ton a year.

Chairman Ewing asked about the number of gardens and how many are being added on an annual basis. Mr. Vierling replied on average some of the neighborhoods have been adding two to three a year, and ones like Burns Hill continue to add more.

Committee Member Wagner asked Mr. McNair if his department could help facilitate this if a pool of money could be identified. Mr. McNair advised the main cost would be the water and the meters which would run about \$3,000 for the water meters alone. Mr. Stone added if they were to coordinate a location that had a dwelling or a public water connection previously, and verify the connection is still there or the box is still there, that would reduce the cost. Chairman Ewing asked if it might be possible to come up with an inventory list of those properties that do have water connections. Mr. Stone advised that historically, they send staff out to verify water connections, but if they were made aware of specific locations for gardens, staff could do the research to confirm whether a connection is available or not.

Mr. Vierling shared they have other potential projects (hydroponics, aquaponics, etc...) that they have been in discussions with the Agriculture Extension Office about and the possibility of renting or using warehouse space. Mr. Hemann reminded council that we the old water plant facility could be used and reported that staff has been discussing possibilities with the city’s Legal Department

as to how this could be done and what would be required for the fair market value and if it needs to be declared as an economic development project.

Mr. Vierling shared about his trip to Washington recently for the Local Food and Local Places Summit that was sponsored by the EPA and noted it might be possible to get a federal grant for hydroponics, aquaponics, and other innovative growing methods, etc.... Committee Member Wagner advised a good resource would be Zane Hedgecock, the Chief of Staff to the NC Secretary of Agriculture and offered to connect them.

Mr. Vierling stated if they were able to get the soil, they would find a way to get it transported once or twice a year to the gardens for maintenance purposes. In his closing remarks, Mr. Vierling commented that he has been told that what they are doing in High Point is very unique compared to other communities because they are using a more collaborative approach than what is seen anywhere else in the nation. One of the reasons is they are bringing people together and people outside the communities are beginning to recognize that. He thanked the city staff for their leadership and thanked Mary Sizemore, Director of the High Point Library, for coordinating the grant for Local Foods, Local Places.

People outside the community are starting to recognize that as well and using High Point as a model. He attributed the success of the community gardens to everyone working together with a unified vision of what the city can look like. He expressed appreciation and gratitude to the City of High Point as it sets the example for the rest of North Carolina.

Mr. McCaslin pointed out what drives this is the private sector and the interest in the community neighborhoods. Chairman Ewing stressed the importance of remaining a partner and continuing with the private interest so it could grow beyond the community gardens. Mr. McCaslin asked if the Committee could come up with a dollar amount that could possibly be added to Mr. McNair's departmental budget.

Chairman Ewing suggested \$16,000 and felt if Council does allocate dollars for this, it would require some type of policy. Committee Member Wagner suggested rounding the amount up to \$20,000. The Committee concurred with the \$20,000 and directed staff to come up with a policy for the process to prevent abuse and to help govern it. Chairman Ewing suggested that once staff drafts the policy, it could come to the Prosperity & Livability Committee at the September meeting, then the policy could be moved to the next Council meeting for adoption and approval of a budget amendment.

### **Painted Intersection**

Committee Member Wagner shared that they are working on getting the first painted intersection. A location has not yet been identified, but they have selected an artist and were trying to get Boy Scout Troop 4 interested in helping.

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 11:05 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

---

Maria A. Smith  
Deputy City Clerk

---

Jason P. Ewing, Chairman