

SPECIAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Downtown Residents' Council, Inc.

Date: June 22, 2020 @ 6:00pm

Place: Virtual via Zoom

Members absent: Jan Hirlinger

Invited guests included Adam Geltner and Brandy Del Favero of 3CDC and Lindsey Florea, John Reiser, and Gio Rollo of the City's Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED).



President Alan Bunker called the meeting to order at 6:04 pm. He stated that the sole purpose of this special meeting was to consider a request by 3CDC for DRC support of a proposal to apply for city Tax Incentive Financing (TIF) funds for 3CDC's Court Street Plaza project.

Item for Discussion/Action: 3CDC Proposal

Alan turned to Cate Douglas to present information on the project; she in turn introduced Adam Geltner, who (assisted by Brandy Del Favero) walked board members through 3CDC's plans. Adam thanked the Board for convening this special session. He noted that 3CDC had been considering the Court Street corridor for some time, in part as a means of making a stronger connection between the central business district and Over the Rhine. The new Kroger store was the first completed component. As its building proceeded, Mayor Cranley and Council member Chris Seelbach convened a task force focused on pedestrian safety, including consideration of making streets in the Kroger vicinity two-way. (Former DRC President Sue Byrom served on the task force.)

A working group chaired by former mayor Roxanne Qualls and Derek Baumann of the Cincinnati NCAAP was formed to look at plans for the Court Street area. An initial idea to make Court Street a pedestrian mall met with resistance, so focus shifted to reducing car traffic and limiting parking to spaces linked to existing businesses. Parking is a critical issue in the area; Adam reminded the group that the new Kroger garage and a new parking lot at Walnut and Central Parkway are now available.

The working group and 3CDC have worked with the company Human Nature to design the proposed Court Street streetscape. Human Nature has been a 3CDC partner in other projects, notably Washington and Ziegler parks.

The Court Street proposal involves two car lanes (one in each direction) in addition to parking lanes; the change from the current configuration will allow significant sidewalk expansion. The overall aim is a European plaza-style effect, which will allow for outdoor dining and seating areas and which can lend itself to social/entertainment events on occasion by closing off the street. (City Flea and concerts were cited as examples.) 3CDC owns half the properties on the south side of the street, which are slated for renovation, as has already occurred on the north side. The request for TIF funds pertains to the streetscape.

John Stringer said that he would like to understand how this request fits into other possible uses of TIF funds, and how we might assess the value of this investment to the city. Adam characterized TIF monies as a shared community resource rather than a focus of competition. Total TIF funds amount to approximately \$25 million, which must be expended between now and 2033. Noting that 3CDC had spent a lot of its own money on Court Street already, and that no TIF money was requested for park development products, Adam explained that the Court Street project was one that needed TIF dollars to move forward. In asking 3CDC to take charge of this project, the city recognized that it was not one that could be expected to attract commercial bids. However, a construction management contract will be awarded through a bidding process.

Jackie Bryson asked about other projects in the TIF pipeline. Adam said that the city has a list of potential projects, for example, the former Macy's site and the Terrace Hilton. The city administration believes that there is enough TIF money to fund all projects contemplated, and it fully supports the Court Street project. In answer to another question, Adam acknowledged that the impact of COVID on a space designed for public gathering is still unknown.

Esther Wing asked about the city's COVID-related deficit and its impact on plans to spend the kind of money the Court Street project entails. Adam reminded the group that TIF money can only be spent on public infrastructure or housing; it cannot be used to serve needs in social services or public salaries.

Board members Christian Rahe, Mary Heimert, and Hank Davis spoke in favor of the Court Street project as a boon to the city and a needed revitalization of a somewhat rundown area.

Alan asked for a motion authorizing DRC support of the Court Street proposal and its use of TIF money. Jackie so moved, Mary Heimert seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously. Alan asked Cate Douglas what she would need from the Board to make this support official; she asked for a letter. John Reiser of DCED said that the city wanted to see such a letter, sent by DRC to 3CDC and submitted by the latter to the city.

Alan thanked both Board members and guests for taking part in this special meeting. His call for adjournment at 7:00 was approved by all.