

SPECIAL MEETING
JULY 6, 2010

Mayor Jeff Bearden called the Special Meeting of the City Commission to order at 6:30 p.m. in the Forum Room of Wilbarger Memorial Auditorium, and a quorum was declared present.

Present: Mayor Jeff Bearden

Commissioners: Jimmy Dennis, Russell Brownlow, Travis Taylor and Phil McCuiston

Staff Present: City Manager Mitch Grant, Police Chief Tom Wilson, Community Development Director Monica Wilkinson, Finance Director Anne Garmon, and City Secretary Linda Byers.

Commissioner Dennis led the group in the invocation.

Mayor Bearden welcomed everyone attending this meeting and summarized the processes and steps that the City has gone through in its downtown revitalization efforts. He pointed out that this meeting was an opportunity to determine the best way to improve the appearance, marketability and viability of Vernon's downtown, and give the public an opportunity to ask questions.

Mayor Bearden introduced Debra Farst, State Coordinator of the Texas Historical Commission Texas Main Street Program

Ms. Farst noted that the Texas Main Street Program is a program to better the whole community, which starts with historic preservation. She discussed the history of the Main Street Program with a power point presentation and highlighted the benefits of becoming a part of the program.

There are four points upon which the program is based:

- Organization; which builds an effective coalition of public and private sector stakeholders, working in partnership with organizations who share an interest in the health of downtown and the community. Local activities in this area might include grant writing and/or enhancing public awareness of sound preservation practices.
- Promotions; Markets a unified, quality image of the business district as the center of activities, goods and services to retailers, shoppers, investors and tourists. Local activities in this area might include heritage festivals, retail promotions or image development.
- Design; creates an attractive, coordinated and quality image of the downtown by capitalizing on unique physical assets and heritage. Local activities in this area might include building rehabilitations, property inventories and/or preservation ordinances.
- Economic Restructuring; identifies new market opportunities for the commercial district, finds new uses for historic commercial buildings, and stimulates investment in property. Works to strengthen existing businesses, identify new business opportunities, find new, higher, more appropriate uses for vacant buildings and/or intensify the uses of buildings.

Local activities in this area might include business retention/recruitment or establishing local incentive programs.

Following Ms. Farsts' presentation City Manager Grant explained that if the City applied to the program and was accepted, a full-time program manager would have to be hired by the City for a period of three years at an approximate cost of \$45,000 per year. Total budget for the program would need to be around \$70,000. Partial funding for the budget would come from other entities such as Vintage Vernon, Hotel/Motel Funds, Chamber of Commerce, Business Development Corporation and others. He encouraged business owners to write letters of support to be included in the application packet for the Main Street Program.

Community Development Director Monica Wilkinson outlined the lengthy application process for the Main Street Program noting the deadline for letters of support is July 15, and the application must be submitted before July 31. The application is essentially telling strangers what a great city Vernon is.

The meeting was opened for questions and answers. Patsy Wilson asked where the funding would come from to make the improvements on the buildings. Ms. Farst responded that it would come in large part from the business owners, but the Texas Historical Commission would help the city and other organizations set up different funding mechanisms. There are different legal tools that can be used to fund preservation such as façade grants, low interest loans, pools, and other things.

Sue Ann Streit asked about the competition for the Main Street Program. There were seven letters of intent received by the Texas Historical Commission and up to five of those would be chosen for the Main Street Program.

Mike Moore asked about the focus on the building facades. Ms. Farst noted that the Main Street program includes the services of architects to provide technical assistance. Most grants are for facades, but some are available for sidewalks. Being in the Main Street programs helps acquire other grants.

Amy Lorance with the Texas Department of Agriculture stated that there were available grants from her organization through the Texas Capital Fund, and workshops on how to start a business.

There were questions:

- What about owners who won't fix their building when they have tenants? (Response-Main Street Program gets people involved and attitudes change)
- Where will funds come from after three year commitment? (Response-City plans to increase its commitment and from other entities)
- What about business owners that don't take care of their building? (Response-Hopefully assets will increase as program builds on itself, and peer pressure)
- What are we getting for the budget? (Response-The director will manage the program and get the ball rolling on bigger projects. This is a building program not for funding projects)

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- Are there metrics to measure progress? (Response- The city collects data for reporting each year to compare with prior years)
- What will we do to encourage new businesses? (Response- One-on-one cooperation with business owners. There are strategies in the program to help)
- Will the tax rate increase? (Response- There is funding for the first three years with using money from the sale of the old PD building and support from other entities)

Carolyn Grimes noted that the employment of a full time Director will coordinate efforts and will help make the program successful.

Mayor Bearden encouraged business owners to let the City Commission know their views and to write letters of support to be included in the application packet.

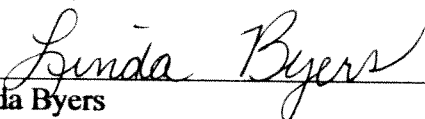
ADJOURN

The meeting was declared adjourned at 8:25 pm.



Jeff Bearden
Mayor

ATTEST:



Linda Byers
City Secretary