

ASTORIA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

City Council Chambers
September 6, 2016

ADC JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

A regular meeting of the Astoria Development Commission was held at the above place at the hour of 7:44 pm.

Commissioners Present: Price, Herzig, Warr, Nemlowill, Mayor LaMear

Commissioners Excused: None

Staff Present: City Manager Estes, Community Development Director Cronin, Parks and Recreation Director Cosby, Finance Director Brooks, Fire Chief Ames, Police Chief Johnston, and Public Works Director Cook. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

REPORTS OF COMMISSIONERS: No reports.

CHANGES TO AGENDA: No changes.

CONSENT CALENDAR:

The following items were presented on the Consent Calendar:

- 5(a) ADC Minutes of 8/1/16
- 5(b) ADC Minutes of 8/15/16

Commission Action: Motion by Commissioner Warr, seconded by Commissioner Nemlowill, to approve the Consent Calendar. Motion carried unanimously. Ayes: Commissioners Warr, Nemlowill, Herzig and Price, and Mayor LaMear. Nays: None.

REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS:

Item 6(a): Astor West Urban Renewal District – Storefront Improvement Program Startup and Launch (Community Development)

The Astoria Development Commission (ADC) has been considering a Storefront Improvement Program for the Astor West Urban Renewal Area (URA) since 2013. Façade improvements are a popular and widely used tool by urban renewal agencies and Main Street programs to assist property/business owners with exterior improvements to buildings. The purpose of the program is to revitalize designated commercial districts and corridors such as West Marine Drive in Uniontown, which has many inventoried historic commercial buildings.

Staff presented draft program guidelines on May 2, 2016 to the ADC. Based on these comments, staff produced a polished set of program guidelines that serve as parameters for the administration of the program. In order to launch the program, the ADC needs to review and authorize the program. The program would be administered as a grant/loan depending on the amount that is requested. For the first \$10,000, it would be a 50/50 matching grant administered by City staff. If the amount is \$10,000-\$50,000, it would require ADC review and approval and the leverage ratio would increase to a 75/25 match grant. If the amount exceeds \$50,000, than it would require ADC approval and be underwritten as a loan through Craft3.

Once the program is ready to launch and ADC approves the program, staff is prepared to conduct outreach to Uniontown businesses. The requested planned expenditure is \$250,000 per fiscal year. The total budget for capital improvements in the Astor West URA is \$2 million for Fiscal Year 2016-17. The planned expenditures can be reviewed and adjusted each budget cycle based on the actual demand for the program. Assuming a grant amount averages \$10,000-\$25,000, there could be 10-25 projects in different stages. It is recommended that the Commission approve the program guidelines, design guidelines, and program documents to implement the new Storefront Improvement Program for the Astor West Urban Renewal Area.

Director Cronin gave a presentation on the proposed program, which he believed would be well received and result in immediate improvements in Uniontown. He reviewed Staff's recommended program guidelines, design guidelines, program documents, and policy considerations.

Commissioner Nemlowill said Redmond's community development director believed the success of their Storefront Improvement Program was due to funds only being available for a short time. She asked if Director Cronin had considered this approach. She also wanted to know if the City could ensure the program was utilized. Director Cronin said a certain amount of budgeted funds are available for this program and only so many funds will be available each year. People are encouraged to go after the funds that are available. The ADC and City Council set the budgets for each year. City Manager Estes added that Staff has proposed \$250,000 for this fiscal year to encourage large projects in the first year of the program. The City can market the program for this first year, but Council will have to decide how much is budgeted for future years. People might not have their share of the funds to do a project now, but if they are aware of the program, projects can be approved in March or April.

Commissioner Nemlowill believed education and outreach would be important for the program to be successful. She asked if the Community Development Department had the ability to promote the program. Director Cronin said if the ADC authorizes the program at this meeting, Staff will begin an outreach program sending direct mail to the property and business owners. He and Planner Ferber will go door-to-door to inform people about the program and build relationships with business owners. Staff will also contact the Uniontown Association, Chamber of Commerce, and other partner organizations. He believed the City would receive quite a few applications once the program begins.

Mayor LaMear asked why this program included apartments but not single-family homes. Director Cronin explained that there were only a few single-family homes within current boundaries of the Urban Renewal District. If the district is expanded to include Bond Street, some more single-family homes would be included. City Council can add single-family homes to the program, but most Storefront Improvement Programs do not include single-family homes. The City will be working with other organizations to help improve housing along Bond Street. He believed most of the homes along West Marine Drive were multi-family units.

Commissioner Herzig believed Community Action Team in Saint Helens had funds for homeowners to do rehabilitation work. He also believed there were some single-family homes on the south side of West Marine Drive facing Young's Bay. Some of the houses are in very poor condition and the owners do not have the money to repair them. He was concerned about offering funds on a first come first served basis. He preferred that Staff prioritize early submissions instead of tying its hands with a strict chronological order. Someone may present a beautiful proposal late in the submission period, but funds would not be available because the City had to serve people as they came through the door. He wanted Staff to give itself more leeway to choose the best projects. He added no matter how well the program is advertised, someone will say they did not know anything about it.

City Manager Estes noted that any project above \$10,000 will be presented to the ADC for review.

Commissioner Price asked if engaging in this project would move other projects to a lower priority. Director Cronin said at that point, he did not believe so. City Council is still trying to get a few questions answered about Heritage Square and the Library. However, the Heritage Square/Library discussion is currently on hold, which frees up Staff time to work on the Storefront Improvement Program. There would be capacity issues if his department began working on all of the projects in his portfolio at the same time. But he believed the City should take advantage of this opportunity now.

Commissioner Price asked if Staff could share how the Community Development Department has prioritized projects. City Manager Estes requested the Commission provide direction on how to prioritize projects so that he can ensure those projects are assigned. If there are workflow concerns, he would let the Commission know. The Library project will transition over to the new library director. A lot of work is currently being done on the potential expansion of the Astor West Urban Renewal District and the Storefront Improvement Program. The City always has urban renewal projects coming and Staff is aware that time must be budgeted for the day-to-day work. Community Development Department has the capacity now to get the word out about the Storefront Improvement Program. Director Cronin added that he would rather be on offense than defense. He can do the outreach needed for the Storefront Improvement Program and regulate the number of applications that Staff receives.

Commissioner Price said she wanted to discuss this further another time. She wanted to make a list of the projects she believed Staff was working on and decide whether those projects aligned with her and her constituents' priorities. Programs like this one always have early adopters and she wanted to know if Staff planned to wait until everyone had been advised before accepting applications. Director Cronin explained that he planned to create a level playing field for property and business owners. A letter will be sent out to everyone at the same time. Those who receive the letter will be encouraged to contact him if they have questions about the

program. The letters may not result in Staff receiving applications right away, so it is difficult to estimate how many applications the letters will generate. He will also go door-to-door with the goal of visiting each property or business owner within one week.

Commissioner Nemlowill did not believe formalizing access to urban renewal funds would change the ability of any entity to request the funds. If the City received requests beyond the budgeted amount, the Development Commission could consider the request. This is the first time Astoria has had a formal program with guidelines, which could spur some good investments in that part of town. The intent of the urban renewal district is to cure urban blight while other taxing districts suffer as the investment area is improved. When the urban renewal district sunsets, all of the taxing districts will prosper because the area will have benefited. It would be wonderful if the guidelines and the outreach spur new investment. City Manager Estes added that historically, Astoria's urban renewal districts have focused on some piecemeal projects and larger catalyst projects meant to spur more reinvestment in the area, like the Liberty Theatre, Astor Hotel, and Fort George. This program does not preclude those catalytic projects and the Development Commission will continue to consider game-changing projects. The Storefront Improvement Program simply makes it easier for citizens to understand how they could receive financial benefits as an incentive to improve their visual impact to the area. Director Cronin said in his experience, this program is a conversation starter about what redevelopment, urban renewal, and investment can do for the business and property owners. An owner might initially work on their storefront, and then realize there is more they can do. The City wants people to get excited about the revitalization in Uniontown.

Commissioner Nemlowill confirmed that the design guidelines in the area were developed to implement the Riverfront Vision Plan. City Manager Estes reminded that this program was a City Council goal several years ago. The program was put on hold until the Riverfront Vision Plan was complete in that area to ensure that the design guidelines would complement what was adopted by City Council.

Commissioner Herzig said he emailed City Manager Estes and City Attorney Henningsgaard earlier about the Development Commission's lack of a non-discrimination policy. He proposed that the Commission adopt the City's non-discrimination policy. City Manager Estes explained that the draft documents include a covenant that would be recorded if someone received a grant. Commissioner Herzig's email was asking about the language in the covenant. The Commission could add to the covenant, which would be noted and considered as part of the grant application process. However, the Development Commission has not officially ratified the same language, which could be done through a separate motion.

Commission Action: Motion by Commissioner Price, seconded by Commissioner Nemlowill, that the Astoria Development Commission approve the program guidelines, design guidelines, and program documents to implement the new Storefront Improvement Program for the Astor West Urban Renewal Area, with the addition of the non-discrimination clause in the covenant. Motion carried unanimously. Ayes: Commissioners Warr, Nemlowill, Herzig and Price, and Mayor LaMear. Nays: None.

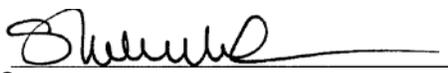
Commission Action: Motion by Commissioner Herzig, seconded by Commissioner Price, that the Astoria Development Commission adopt the City of Astoria's non-discrimination policy and include the policy to grants, awards, contracts, and covenants. Motion carried 4 to 0 to 1. Ayes: Commissioners Warr, Herzig and Price, and Mayor LaMear. Nays: None. Abstentions: Commissioner Nemlowill

Commissioner Nemlowill said she abstained because she did not know enough about how the City doing business with a private entity would be impacted by the non-discrimination policy.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:12 pm.

ATTEST:


Secretary

APPROVED


City Manager