

WORKSESSION MINUTES
College Park City Council
Wednesday, August 4, 2021
7:30 p.m. – 10:07 p.m.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, this was a Virtual Meeting.

PRESENT: Councilmembers Kabir, Kennedy, Dennis (Mayor Pro Tem), Esters, Day, Rigg, Mitchell, and Mackie.

ABSENT: Mayor Wojahn.

ALSO PRESENT: Bill Gardiner, Interim City Manager; Janeen S. Miller, City Clerk; Suellen Ferguson, City Attorney; Terry Schum, Director of Planning; Miriam Bader, Senior Planner.

Mayor Pro Tem Dennis opened the virtual Worksession at 7:30 p.m.

City Manager's Report: Mr. Gardiner reviewed last night's National Night Out activities and announced the upcoming Movie Night at Duvall Field. He responded to questions about new COVID guidelines: visitors to City buildings will be required to wear a mask.

Amendments to and Approval of the Agenda: The agenda was approved without amendment (Rigg/Mitchell) 8-0.

1. Request by Mark Vogel/Republic Properties to support a multi-family project instead of a hotel: Mark Vogel and Stacy Hornstein:

Ms. Schum said Mr. Vogel and Republic Properties seek the City's support for a change to the proposed Marriot Residence Inn project which was previously supported by the Council. The developer has now determined it is not feasible to move forward with the original project, but they still want to develop the site. The site belongs to Prince George's County, and the development right was given to Republic Properties based on the plan to build a hotel.

Mr. Vogel said they were looking forward to building a hotel but hotels are not viable now. Mr. Hornstein (Republic Properties) said they were at the finish line when COVID hit and need to explore other possibilities. One option is multi-family with ground floor retail and similar site coverage. The property is also zoned for multi-family. They are requesting City support for the new proposal and hope for a letter they can take to the County. Mr. Vogel said they have already done the engineering for the site. They believe a residential product would work better than a hotel at this time, and will explore smaller units (one bedroom, one bedroom with den, efficiency) marketed toward young professionals. There were questions about change in the density. A new DSP would be needed.

Councilmember Mitchell is interested in housing for 55+.

Councilmember Esters is hoping for consideration of affordable housing being in the mix. Mr. Vogel said there has been a lack of energy to develop affordable housing. This site will not be “affordable housing” but that is the reason to keep the units smaller. He added that affordable housing is being built by churches, and near the Purple Line.

Councilmember Rigg disclosed that he and Mr. Vogel discussed the prior hotel project. He asked if this site is in a tax credit district? Yes, but there isn’t a specific proposed project so the analysis hasn’t been done. Councilmember Rigg asked if they have considered the Revitalization Tax Credit. Mr. Vogel said it is too early. Councilmember Rigg said the prior project had scant parking and asked them to think carefully about the parking. Mr. Hornstein said they will be required to have structured parking. Councilmember Rigg stressed the need for public space, green space, and recreational amenities.

Councilmember Day disclosed he has spoken to Mark Vogel about various projects in the City. He asked about a sidewalk from Edmonston Road to the park.

Letter to Prince George’s County Executive on the Consent agenda next week.

2. Decennial redistricting:

Mr. Gardiner said this is a preliminary discussion about redistricting as required by the City Charter after the decennial census. This would apply to the 2023 City election. He reviewed the options in the staff report. The Council may create a redistricting commission and/or may hire a consultant. The population from development projects in the pipeline will be considered when you propose new district lines. The redistricting project could start early next year with the newly seated Council.

Councilmember Mitchell asked if staff is monitoring the state and county redistricting process. No, we are not.

Councilmember Rigg expressed concerns about the accuracy of the student population count due to COVID. Councilmember Dennis added that other populations can be undercounted as well.

Ms. Schum said the City’s Complete Count Committee went to great lengths to address off-campus student housing which is where the challenge is. She said we will look at the data when it comes in. She added that our response rate was not as high as we would have liked and varied from district to district. If we believe we have been undercounted we can present evidence to the Census Bureau. Mr. Gardiner said we have a GIS analyst on staff that can look at the data.

Councilmember Rigg likes the idea of a consultant. He mentioned that if we want to make a change to the number of districts and number of councilmembers per district this is the time to think about it.

Councilmember Kennedy said this should be an impartial and independent process. She also likes the idea of a consultant with an objective perspective. We should look to best practices and what other cities are doing. She thinks a commission is necessary.

Councilmember Day discussed how redistricting was done in 2000 (when he was Vice-Chair) and 2010 (when he was Chair). Chris Dullnig wrote the computer program to map the census data to each house. Residents put their hearts into the process to make sure it was done right. They didn't use a consultant. We divided the students by bed count per district. They walked the City to make sure the numbers were right. It is good for our residents to be part of the discussion. There are rules set in place about how to approach this.

Return in early 2022.

3. Hybrid meetings:

Ms. Miller reviewed the staff report and said once we get direction from the Council on what they would like to do, we can write the Rules and Procedures and/or Charter to reflect that direction. When we first started remote meetings due to COVID we had authority under the Governor's orders. As the Governor's orders are changing, it is appropriate for Mayor and Council to review and perhaps rewrite their own self-imposed rules about how to proceed. This is all dependent on us finding the right technology, which hasn't been identified yet. Ms. Miller reviewed the considerations for this discussion listed in the staff report. She said the chat box on Zoom should not be used to advance the public discussion and it does not become part of the public record.

Councilmember Kabir asked what other public bodies are doing. Ms. Miller said everyone is talking about this right now and that the Council's rules are self-imposed and may vary from other cities, depending on what this Council feels is appropriate for us. He supports hybrid meetings based on resident feedback about the convenience. He wants the rules to be flexible about how many elected officials should be in the room.

Ms. Ferguson reviewed guidance from the Open Meetings Compliance Board with respect to remote meetings. They are just starting to see cases come through about remote meetings: it is legal to have remote or hybrid meetings as long as everybody has the same access. That used to mean the ability to hear the meeting. Technology has changed so you want to provide the ability to see any information that is shared during a meeting.

The Mayor and Council can decide whether the same rules that apply to Mayor and Council meetings would also apply to advisory boards, i.e., there can be a separate set of rules for advisory boards as long as everyone has equal access. Again, this would depend on finding the right technology.

Councilmember Rigg would give preference to Councilmembers attending meetings in-person whenever possible because it provides more opportunity to collaborate. He doesn't think greater participation always happens in a virtual platform but may allow for non-traditional voices to be heard. He is open to developing a list of narrow criteria – sick, out of region, family emergency

– as reasons for Councilmembers not to be in-person during voting sessions. We should also look at the context and definition of an emergency in our rules, and could have one set of meeting criteria that applies in a declared emergency, and a different set of criteria that apply under normal circumstances.

Councilmember Esters said wherever we can provide various modalities for access is helpful, but she has concerns about how many Councilmembers would be present at a time and would want to limit the number of Councilmembers that could be virtual.

Councilmember Day likes the option to be able to attend remotely when necessary, as long as it's not abused. We could limit the number of people that can be virtual at one time, and not go above. We have day jobs and might need to travel and still want to participate. A Worksession is a meeting like any other meeting of the Council, and we should make an effort to be in front of the people.

Councilmember Mitchell has concerns about the COVID variants and the safety of all. It makes sense to have one policy for right now, while we are in COVID, and another going forward when we are not.

Councilmember Kennedy wants to make the policy in the Charter as flexible as possible and set the guidelines in the Rules and Procedures since those are easier to change. She hopes there will be better technology in the future.

Councilmember Mackie expressed concerns about the chat box. She agrees that Councilmembers should have ability to participate in a meeting when on travel or for a medical reason, but in general wants them to be in the room. She wants to make it convenient for members of the public to participate virtually. Be very sure that the forum gives everyone equal access. She mentioned that when the screen is shared you can't see all the people.

Councilmember Dennis asked whether our virtual platform is providing the full capability of presenting the meeting over our cable tv channels; many older residents don't use the computer.

Rules that pertain specifically to advisory boards:

Mackie - give our boards the flexibility to do what they want to do. We don't want to tell them they have to meet in person.

Esters – making meetings more accessible and easier for residents to participate in will provide greater opportunity for people to get involved. The more flexible the better.

Kabir – agrees. Volunteers are hard to recruit. Promoting this as an opportunity to participate virtually might encourage more to join.

Dennis – keep in mind that there might be extra work to manage a virtual meeting.

Kennedy – get feedback from them about this. What about hearings – APC, Noise Board - how would that be handled in a hybrid meeting.

Rigg – we owe deference to the committee chair. They will have a good sense whether their committee functions best in virtual or hybrid. Should we let them adopt their own rules? Some of the most productive give and take is done in person.

4. Discussion of a Proclamation Policy

Ms. Miller reviewed the staff report. Staff recommendation to Consent agenda next week – adopt by Resolution.

5. Discussion of a new Phone system

Mr. Gardiner reviewed the staff report. The proposal is for a system that would cost about \$50K, is a more robust cloud-based system, employees can take the phone with them and plug it in and has the look/feel like you are in your office. Should last 10 years. After 3 years we would own the phones and cost would be less. Want support to go forward. Hope to have a proposal to vote on next week.

Councilmember Day is familiar with the CISCO phone system; is it UC (unified communication) or just the voice product? Would it allow for phone lines for councilmembers to access instead of them using their personal phone? Yes, we would just have to buy phone lines for you.

Councilmember Rigg asked if there is an argument to be made for everyone going to a mobile phone?

Mr. Gardiner said cellphones and maintenance are more expensive than a desk phone.

Councilmember Kabir had questions about the cost. The Help Desk is a \$10K add on; otherwise it would be IT staff. Find out how much it would be to add phone lines for M&C.

Councilmember Dennis hopes this will enhance our incoming call responsiveness, like in a call center. Mr. Gardiner said this system will be easier to configure.

To agenda next week with proposal.

Mayor and Councilmember Comments:

- The Education Advisory Committee is doing a book giveaway next Saturday at the College Park Food Bank.
- The Lakeland Civic Association meets next Thursday, August 12 at 7 p.m.

Adjourn: 10:07 p.m., motion to adjourn by Mackie/Rigg, passed 8-0.

Janeen S. Miller
City Clerk

Date
Approved