

DRAFT MINUTES -- CRA MEETING 1-7-2016

A duly noticed meeting of the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) Advisory Board was held on January 7, 2016, in the Commission Chambers at City Hall, 204 Ash Street, Fernandina Beach, FL 32034.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 3:15 p.m.

1. ROLL CALL

Present were Chair Arlene Filkoff; Members Andrew Curtin, Lou Gold, Marla McDaniel, Anne Thomas, and Lynn Williams; Commission Liaison Robin Lenz; and Community Development Department Senior Planner Kelly Gibson. Absent was Member Daniel McCranie.

2. MINUTES

The minutes were deferred to a subsequent meeting.

3. BOARD BUSINESS

3.1 Potential Hotel Project

Mr. John Cotner, architect for a proposed hotel project in the CRA District, gave a presentation to the Board. He told the Board that the project is still in the due diligence phase. Several rounds of discussions have taken place with city staff regarding FAR and other zoning requirements, fire protection, retention tanks, utilities, and the like, and feedback has been very positive. Mr. Cotner said he would be meeting soon with the Historic District Commission to see if the HDC has any issues with the project. If that meeting is positive, a purchase and sale agreement will be negotiated and executed. One unusual aspect of the deal is that the seller is insisting on retaining aesthetic approval. The buyers will be developing the concept further, with color, to see if it meets with the seller's approval.

Mr. Cotner then showed plans and elevations on the screen in the Commission Chambers. The ground level of the building is devoted to parking (85 spaces) and utilitarian things like elevators and utilities. Retention tanks will be located below the ground level. The second level will have 27 hotel rooms consisting of 14' modules, an upscale kitchen, a lounge for continental breakfasts, an outdoor courtyard, and an area for condensers sitting on the garage roof. The third level will also have 27 hotel rooms, and the fourth level will have 26 hotel rooms. The total square footage of the building will be approximately 70,000 s.f.

The site is a 38,000 s.f., L-shaped parcel which wraps around the Crab Trap restaurant and is bordered by Front Street, 2nd Street, and Alachua Street. The main entrance will be on 2nd Street. The facades will be articulated, with a usable balcony for each hotel room. The property will be landscaped with palm trees, and the ground level parking will be screened with green living walls and louvered shutters. There will be a 10' wide promenade along the railroad tracks, with an attractive fence screening the tracks from pedestrians. A parapet will screen mechanical equipment on the roof. Facade materials will include brick and stucco, and there will be classical style decorative elements on the rooftop, including a gazebo.

Mr. Cotner said construction costs would be in the range of \$150-\$200/s.f., for a total cost of up to \$14 million. He said the project would be a difficult job, with no room to work and a need for auger or helical pilings and underground retention tanks. One of the Members estimated the tax increment financing revenue to be \$137,000/year with construction costs at \$160/s.f. and \$172,000/year if costs were to go as high as \$200/s.f.

Dr. Chip Ross asked whether Alachua Street would need to cross over to Front Street to make the project work, and the answer was no, although Mr. Cotner thought that would be a good idea. Commissioner Lenz asked whether the train noise would be a problem, and Mr. Cotner said that train noise is not a problem for the investors, who are willing to buy into the long term plan that the waterfront will not be an eyesore forever. He said they are not "build it and flip it" types of guys. Mr. Gold asked if there were money in the budget for the Alachua crossing and was told yes, there is \$150,000. There was some discussion about ensuring that all the fencing along the railroad tracks match or otherwise be aesthetically coordinated. Commissioner Roy Smith asked about stormwater overflow onto Alachua Street, and Mr. Cotner told him that the project is providing retention to cover what it creates.

Ms. Filkoff then asked if anyone were opposed to the project. Mr. Curtin moved that the Board support the project, Mr. Gold seconded, and the Board voted unanimously to support the proposed hotel project. Ms. Filkoff said she would attend the Historic District Commission meeting to express CRA support.

3.2 Parking

Ms. Filkoff asked whether the most current parking and traffic circulation study needs updating. Ms. Gibson said the study is updated every 7-10 years, and she thought it would need updating again in a few years. The last update was in 2009. Ms. Filkoff remarked that Fernandina seems to need parking for special events more than on a day-to-day basis, and perhaps the CRA Board should be addressing parking for special events. Ms. Gibson said that the city has been having bigger and more frequent events in recent times. Ms. Filkoff inquired as to the cost of a parking study, and Ms. Gibson said she would look into it. Commissioner Lenz spoke of requiring a parking plan for special events and mentioned that there some event organizers in the past have had an agreement with Fernandina High School to run a buses between the high school and downtown. Ms. Filkoff suggested that the most recent parking study be looked at to see what improvements could be made using existing data. Lastly, someone mentioned that the 2009 study takes into account the parking being taken away by the waterfront Advisory Group (WAG) Plan.

3.3 Coastal Flooding Study

Ms. Filkoff said the CRA Board had recommended that this study be done and asked whether any action had been taken. Commissioner Lenz said the study will be taken up at the Commission's upcoming goal setting meeting.

3.4 Parking Lot B Update

An engineering drawing (a copy of which was attached to the meeting agenda and is also attached to these minutes) was shown on the screen which included two rows of perpendicular parking spaces separated by circulation space. The driveways in and out of the lot both have curved radii. Mr. Gold asked whether truck could make such a turn. Mr. Eric Bartelt, the landscape architect, said that the radii will be gentler than shown on the plan. Some concern was expressed about backing out into Front Street, but Mr. Bartelt said the plan has been engineered and meets standards. Ms. Filkoff cautioned that the Parking Lot B reconfiguration has not had the public input that the WAG plan had. Mr. Curtin disagreed and said there had been a lot of public discussion and the reconfigured plan had been published in the newspapers. Mr. Bartelt said \$18,000 has been spent on engineering. Mr. Williams said the park is the same -- just the parking has been changed, and it was the railroad that required the parking to be pulled back from the tracks. Commissioner Smith said he wants it to come before the Commission again. Dr. Ross asked what would keep people from crossing the railroad tracks. Mr. Bartelt said fencing to the east is being coordinated with the Depot and the Hampton Inn, and to the west there will be a fence and plantings. He added that pulling the parking back from the railroad tracks has allowed for a walkway, in addition to trees and other landscaping. Ms. Thomas moved approval for the Parking Lot B plan, Mr. Curtin seconded, and it was unanimously approved.

3.5 Walking Tour of CRA

There was a consensus that the walking tour should take place in better weather -- perhaps March. It was agreed that the new Main Streets Executive Director should be invited.

4. SUMMATION

Ms. Filkoff said the Board had addressed all the issues that had been raised, and that going forward, it would be necessary to revisit the CRA Plan to see what needs to be changed. She asked whether members would want to have a special session to discuss what is known about the CRA. Mr. Williams mentioned that Rob Semmes is doing a feasibility study for the Ventura property and could speak to the Board about that and that it would be good to review Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) and DEP requirements. It was agreed to ask Mr. Semmes to speak to the Board. In addition, Ms. Gibson will put together something on Land Development Code (LDC) requirements for waterfront lots.

There followed some discussion about the ownership of Front Street. It was agreed to invite City Attorney Tammi Bach to the next meeting to discuss what can and should be done regarding the railroad and the opening of Alachua Street.

Ms. Filkoff said she would include the following in her report to the Commission: 1) an endorsement by the CRA Board of the proposed hotel project; and 2) approval by the CRA Board of the 60% plan for Parking Lot B. Ms. Gibson was asked to undertake the following assignments: 1) to look at the 2009 parking study to see how it can be updated; and 2) to communicate to the Board the LDC requirements for waterfront lots.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:24 p.m.