

SPECIAL SESSION OF JANUARY 31, 2019

The City of Kings Mountain, North Carolina met in a Special Session at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 31, 2019 in the Conference Room at Public Works with Mayor Scott Neisler presiding.

ATTENDANCE

The following Councilmembers were present: Keith Miller, Mike Butler, Annie Thombs, Tommy Hawkins, Jay Rhodes, David Allen and Rodney Gordon.

Also present: Marilyn H. Sellers, City Manager, Nick Hendricks, Energy Services Director/Assistant City Manager, Karen Tucker, City Clerk, Crystal Morphis, Creative Economic Development Consulting, Brenda Daniels, Electricities, Shane Poteat, Electricities, Katie Diefes, Electricities, Michelle Vaught, Electricities, Stuart Gilbert, Planning and Economic Development Director, and Shirley Brutko, member of the Strategic Planning team.

INVOCATION

The invocation was given by Mayor Scott Neisler.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mayor Scott Neisler.

SPECIAL SESSION

City Manager Marilyn Sellers welcomed everyone to the meeting stating that “as we have talked and agreed – the City of Kings Mountain is in need of a comprehensive strategic plan that is a workable document that lays a foundation for our goals and makes sure that our core values align with your vision and also meets the needs of our citizens and what they expect.” She stated that this was really important because it will serve as a guide for Council and staff for many years to come for our City from a marketing standpoint, as well as, business recruitment and housing. This would also assist in our budget process. She stated, “we have always had a strategic process that addressed a plan of action on a staff level and communicated to Council at a 50,000-foot level, but it was more on a year to year basis. Really, financially that was all we were able to do, but now we are able to start loosening the belt a little and situations have changed. You have also expressed an interest, as a Council, in being more involved.”

Mrs. Sellers stated that the City contracted with Electricities for the economic development portion of this plan in order to have a third party that would be neutral and have expertise and experience in this field. She introduced Brenda Daniels of Electricities and Crystal Morphis of Creative Economic Development Consulting. She thanked the steering committee for their valuable input and stated that “this is not a “how to do” plan, but it is identifying major action items that should be achieved to enhance our economic development efforts and finding our niche for marketing.”

Crystal Morphis presented the proposed Economic Development Strategic Plan. She stated that the Strategic Plan Scope of Work included steering committees, previous study reviews, economic and demographic profile, SWOT analysis (interviews and community survey), and strategic planning. The Economic & Demographic Profile for the City of Kings Mountain was created using the feedback that was collected and includes the following:

- Population grew by 6.85% (2010-17)
- Median age is 42.7
- 83% of the population over age 25 has a high school degree or higher (lower than the County average)
- Per capita income is \$18,510 (lower than the County average)
- Median household income is \$37,023
- Homes are more affordable than the region
- Labor force 47,121, which is flat
- Unemployment below 5%
- Average weekly wage is \$784.77
- Employment sectors include Manufacturing, Trade, Transportation and Utilities, Education and Health Service
- 83% of all Cleveland County businesses have less than 10 employees
- Crime rate decreasing

According to surveys that were administered the following findings were included in the presentation by Crystal Morphis:

- The following economic development strategies were listed in order of importance:
 - New business recruiting
 - Existing business support
 - Education and workforce development
 - Small business & entrepreneur development
 - Retail and commercial development
 - Infrastructure improvements
 - Recreation development
 - Tourism development
 - Residential development
 - Transportation improvements
 - Arts and Cultural programs

- The top three goals of the City's Economic Development Strategic Plan are as follows:
 - Downtown revitalization
 - Local jobs creation
 - Increased new business start-ups

- The most important investment the City could make to ensure long-term, sustainable economic growth listed in order of importance, are as follows:
 - Downtown development
 - Business Recruitment
 - Recreational amenities
 - Infrastructure
 - Economic diversification
 - Entrepreneur support
 - Beautification
 - Cultural arts amenities
 - Existing business support
 - Transportation

The SWOT Analysis revealed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding economic development in the City of Kings Mountain. The top Strengths included our National, State and local parks, outdoor activities, close access to I-85 and Hwy 74, proximity to Charlotte, and Cleveland Community College. Weakness include the Downtown buildings in disrepair, retail options, low-income housing, and lack of middle-income housing. Opportunities include lake development, tourism, branding and marketing, downtown revitalization, housing development and workforce development. Threats include the perception of poor schools, perception of crime, lack of skilled workers, few new business startups, lack of strategic plan and consensus, and further disrepair of buildings.

After presenting the information that was obtained through community surveys and analysis, Crystal presented several goals and strategies to implement these goals. She also included an Implementation Guide which details measures that can be used to obtain our goals. Our goals include the following:

- Market Kings Mountain as a Destination & a Home
- Invest in Business Growth & Development
- Create Destination Recreational Amenities
- Promote Housing Development
- Invest in Appearance and Downtown Revitalization
- Support Innovation in Education and Workforce Development

Crystal stated that the next steps of the strategic plan would be Council approval. Once Council has approved the plan, it would need to be integrated into budget planning and other City planning projects then the program could be launched. She emphasized that we should present our plan to Cleveland County Economic Development and others in the surrounding areas.

Shirley Brutko, Steering Committee Member asked Crystal “How do we choose what to start with?” Crystal stated that we should look to economic development. Choose 3-6 things to work on in the coming year, then come back to the plan each year to see what we have accomplished. Councilmember Keith Miller asked Crystal if she could give some tips to stay engaged. She stated that the City of Fayetteville has placed their strategic plan on their website. She also stated that the City needs to look at its strategy position often, possibly having Marilyn and Stuart bring it out quarterly.

Councilmember Rodney Gordon stated that he would like to hear from the Councilmembers that served on the steering committee. Councilmember Jay Rhodes stated that this was a positive even if we just picked 2-3 items to work on. Councilmember Keith Miller added that the survey showed priorities, and dealing with buildings gives “a lot of political capital”. He stated that this will cost money, but it is helpful and will pave the way and move us forward.

Nick Hendricks, Assistant City Manager asked if there is a consensus to place this item on the agenda for the February 26, 2019 Regular Meeting. There was a unanimous consensus to place this item on the February 26, 2019 agenda for approval.

Brenda Daniels, Michelle Vaught, and Katie Diefes all of Electricities spoke regarding the need for a Public Information Officer and corporate communications. They presented steps that they can take to develop a brand strategy that includes anything from a logo to designing a website. They emphasized the need for a PIO to hand their product off to once it’s completed.

Councilmember David Allen stated that the first thing that young people look at when thinking about relocation is social media and a website.

Nick Hendricks, Assistant City Manager/Energy Services Director stated “that the return on our investment depends on what we put into it. We are headed in the right direction. We just need assistance to get us out in the media.” He stated that Stuart has been a breath of fresh air, and commended Marilyn on bringing in good people.

Stuart Gilbert, Planning and Economic Development Director, spoke regarding the City’s Redevelopment Commission stating that this would still be a resource; however, it is not a non-profit. He stated that commission was re-established in 2016 as a requirement of the Community Development Block Grants that were received on two parcels in the downtown area, and at this time half the board is inactive.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Councilmember Jay Rhodes, seconded by Councilmember David Allen it was unanimously voted to adjourn the Special Session of the City Council at 7:41 p.m.

ATTEST:

G. Scott Neisler, Mayor

Karen A. Tucker, CMC
City Clerk