

**City of Columbus**  
**Special Economic Development Authority Special Meeting**  
**08.14.19**

The 08.14.19 meeting of the City of Columbus Economic Development Authority was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by President Jesse Preiner at the City Hall. Present were EDA Commissioners Mark Daly, Jon Rausch, Jeff Duraine, Denny Peterson, Shelly Logren, Janet Hegland, and Executive Director Elizabeth Mursko, Attorney Bill Griffith, and Assistant Secretary Jessica Hughes.

Also in Attendance were – Kris King, Paul Peskar, and Ron Hanegraaf.

**1. CALL TO ORDER – 6:01 p.m.**

**2. APPROVAL –Agenda**

**Motion by Daly to approve the agenda for the 08.14.19 EDA meeting. Seconded by Hegland. Motion carried unanimously.**

**3. OPEN BUSINESS**

Presentation: Marketing v. Branding

Commissioner Logren gave a presentation to EDA members on to topic of re-branding the City. She provided the EDA with a copy of materials she compiled on the topic of branding.

Logren began by saying that most attempts by Cities to brand successfully fail. They are likely to fail because Cities focus on marketing goals first rather than branding goals. Logren explained that branding is a concept that needs to be solidified before any marketing initiatives are launched. Branding is not logos, taglines, or billboards, it is a concept that reflects the current perception of the City. She added that it is important for the experiences the City would like to offer be functional before a new brand is rolled out.

In order to properly brand the City, it is important to understand what other people perceive the City to be, based on their experiences. The City's brand is the essence of who they are, what they're product is, and what experiences they can offer to visitors and residents. Logren added that Columbus' problems and opportunities are that no one knows who Columbus is, the City is changing, and a common goal is to bring people in to experience what Columbus has to offer.

The first step of the branding process is a discovery phase. In this phase the goal is to figure out what the essence of Columbus is. During this phase the City should consider networking, consulting professionals, and ordering feasibility studies. These tools will be narrowed to fit the City's budget. She added that other Cities have found that a 12-week period for branding discussions should be sufficient.

Logren continued by saying that branding is important to build Columbus as a destination for positive experiences. It is also important to distinguish the City from surrounding communities.

She sees Columbus as ripe for opportunity, because of the City's convenient access to I-35 and the completion of the TH 97 over I-35 bridge project within the next year.

In order to achieve these goals, Logren said she would like to chair a Branding Subcommittee of the EDA. She would like to recruit volunteers, and hopefully present ideas to the EDA by the end of the year.

Duraine asked Logren if she had any preliminary ideas for branding? Logren said that any branding initiative needs to take into account both the Freeway District and the more rural areas of the city. She said it is clear to her that Columbus residents enjoy their properties and enjoy having autonomy. Some of her constituents have stated that their homes are their vacation destinations. While it is desirable to have enough space for autonomy, the City needs to capitalize on funding sources to maintain this type of lifestyle for its residents. One possible way to bolster spending within City limits would be to promote mini vacations in Columbus.

Duraine asked how the City will roll out a new brand? Logren replied that it will be a long process, that will likely require professional help. It is important to proceed cautiously with marketing initiatives, but Logren noted that the billboards that are available for use by the City could be a good opportunity in the future.

City Attorney Bill Griffith reminded the EDA that the City passed a Lodging Tax amendment recently. He said that this should coincide nicely with branding efforts. The money generated from the lodging tax must be spent on a convention bureau, which would promote tourism in Columbus.

In order to achieve these goals, Logren said she would like to chair a Branding Subcommittee of the EDA. She would like to recruit volunteers, and hopefully present ideas to the EDA by the end of the year.

President Preiner said that he would support Logren as the chair. He followed up by asking her how many people she anticipates sitting on the subcommittee? Logren said she envisions 7-10 people, with a mix of residents, business leaders, and City Council or Planning Commission members. She added that the biggest qualifier for membership is a commitment to the branding process.

President Preiner asked Mursko if she felt a Branding Subcommittee will be helpful for her? She replied that it will help her guide developers when they approach the City asking to locate here. It will help tell a story about Columbus and where the City is headed.

**Motion by Duraine to create a Branding Subcommittee of the EDA. Seconded by Hegland. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Motion by Duraine to appoint Logren as chair of the Branding Subcommittee. Seconded by Hegland. Motion carried unanimously.**

Griffith noted that the convention bureau funded by the Lodging Tax should be assembled soon.

## Discussion: Biking and Walking Trails

Mursko presented information to the EDA about how cities have integrated biking and walking trails. Because she has received inquiries about this from residents, she is asking whether the EDA is in favor of considering how to integrate biking and walking trails in Columbus.

To provide some history, the EDA previously discussed adding trails on Howard Lake Drive and Notre Dame Street, but the response from residents when approached about selling or donating their land was negative. Mursko noted that the only way for the City to afford adding trails would be for residents to donate or sell their land.

Hegland said that she would be in favor of adding more biking and walking trails but said that the cost factor makes the initiative difficult. She followed up by asking if the City could require developers to integrate walking and biking trails in their developments? In this way the cost could be borne by developers rather than the City.

Griffith replied that if the City would like to create a system of interconnected walking and biking trails, it would need to be added to the Comprehensive Plan, and an ordinance amendment must follow. In the case where a developer would be expected to include trails, a development agreement would also be needed to solidify the commitment. Duraine commented that interconnection throughout the City would be expensive, and he is concerned that there may not be many large developments coming to the City in the future.

President Preiner noted that the NE I-35 Quadrant could be a good starting point for a system of trails. Daly asked if a sidewalk from the NE I-35 Quadrant to Running Aces Harness Park was already approved? Mursko said that there is a sidewalk on the westerly side of north Hornsby Street, the north side of TH 97 going across the bridge, and on the north side of the CSAH 23/Lake Drive (TH 97) roundabout. She is unsure if the path continues from there. Griffith summarized that there are elements of an interconnected trail, but the question remains if it connects to Running Aces Harness Park.

Mursko continued to address concerns about walkability in the NE I-35 Quadrant. She is unsure if there will be a dedicated walking path to service different parcels, or if pedestrians will have to cut through parking lots or green space. Duraine asked if it is too late to require sidewalks in the NE I-35 Quadrant? Griffith said that the topic can be raised with developers because plans are currently in a fluid position. Rausch encouraged the EDA to consider maintenance obligations with sidewalks, as he is aware of many cities that struggle with sidewalk maintenance in the winter. Griffith finished by noting that the City can use parkland dedication funds for park facilities, which may include trails.

Hegland noted that she thinks it would be a good idea to approach JAMP and encourage them to ensure the NE I-35 Quadrant is walkable. Griffith said that now would be a good time to have this conversation with JAMP, in order to tie discussions in with the development agreement. He also recommended taking a closer look at the City's Comprehensive Plan to determine what type of amendments may be needed to support interconnected trails.

## **4. COMMISSION OPEN DISCUSSION**

## Review 2019 goals list.

The first item on the 2019 Goals List was to support HF 2031 at the State Legislature. Mursko noted that this initiative is complete, and any changes in the formula for Local Government Aid did not result in Columbus receiving funds.

The second item on the Goals List was marketing the City. Mursko spoke with ClearChannel about providing time for City-owned vinyls on their billboards. She said they are happy to design and install vinyls for the City and suggested adding this item to Logren's subcommittee agenda to integrate branding with the design.

The third item was a name for the NE I-35 Quadrant entrance. During the last workshop there was discussion about the name, and "Columbus Crossing" had the most support. JAMP also indicated they would be open to other ideas. The Planning Commission felt like a different name may be appropriate.

The next item on the 2019 Goals List was updating City banners. Mursko explained that this goal will be considered in 2020 once branding work is nearing completion.

Another item on the 2019 Goals List was concept plans for the NW and SW I-35 Quadrants. Mursko said that there is a road placement concept for the NW Quad, but that may need to be revisited when the bridge project is completed. The SW I-35 Quadrant concept is still being developed. With the reconfiguration of CSAH 54 the City's lot was bisected, so the City will have to consider how they might want the land to be developed. Mursko added that discussions with Holiday should likely occur to see if they have plans to develop the remaining portion of their property.

Mursko continued to say that another goal, roundabout design installation, is being worked on. The idea is to plant native prairie plants in the center of the roundabout. Mursko and Public Works Superintendent Jim Windingstad still need to shop for plants.

The next goal is ColumBiz. Assistant Secretary Jessica Hughes is working on completing a ColumBiz newsletter for 2019. Mursko asked the EDA if they are interested in having a ColumBiz event in 2020? Hegland said that she would like to. Logren said that by the time of the next ColumBiz event, the branding conversation should be far enough along for her to have something to present at the event. Daly suggested that the event be held in March or April, as summer is a very busy season for contractors. Mursko said that she will look at budget and ensure that there is enough money for a spring 2020 ColumBiz event.

## **5. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

No report.

## **6. NEXT MEETING DATE**

The next EDA meeting is 10.09.19 at 6:00 p.m.

## **7. ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by Daly to adjourn. Seconded by Duraine. Motion carried unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 6:56 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Jessica Hughes, Public Communications Coordinator