

BEDFORD MIDDLE SCHOOL PUBLIC MEETING
December 14, 2017
Notes

LANDMARK

John Stiltner spoke on behalf of Benchmark.

Their focus is on smaller communities and families who spend 50% of their income on rent. Mr. Stiltner noted that 60% of renters in Bedford County fall into this category and he referenced 4,200 total rental units within the County. This number is under the statewide average. He questioned as to whether this is due to a lack of housing or a lack of choice in the local rental housing market

Mr. Stiltner then presented several examples of redevelopment work performed by Landmark. Of 85 total properties referenced in his presentation, 19 are schools.

Landmark would make extensive use of tax credits as part of the financing plan for their proposal. Mr. Stiltner stated that they have already approached Bedford County Public Schools about the possibility of working together and perhaps combining their proposals. They would intend to either lease the property from the Town under the terms of a lease that would be “advantageous” to Landmark or have the Town donate the property to them.

Their proposal is for the redevelopment of the brick main building and the yellow building into affordable housing. Rent would be controlled based on income and the exact figure would be targeted to the benchmark of 50% of family per capita income. Mr. Stiltner commented that the proposal is “not Section 8 – it’s ‘affordable.’” He further stated that, “If you make too much, you can’t live here.” Mr. Stiltner also stated that the maintenance and upkeep of the property under their proposal would be regulated by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

The total proposed budget for this proposal would be approximately \$9.6 million. It is anticipated that state funds (of one sort or another) would constitute \$6.3 million of that total. Historic tax credits would also figure prominently into the financing. Mr. Stiltner also stated that the Town’s donation of the property would have significant impact upon the proposed financing structure. After grants and other funding are considered, they are looking at a remaining \$1.3 million gap.

Mr. Stiltner identified a target date of Third Quarter 2020 for a ribbon cutting ceremony. In order to achieve that, they would need to start submitting requests for funding (under their proposed financing strategy) by January 26, 2018.

Mr. Stiltner identified typical rent ranges for units as follows: \$500-600 for one bedroom units, \$600-700 for two bedroom units, and \$700-900 for three bedroom units. However, he noted that a market analyst would be employed to determine specific rates that are “affordable” based on local per capita income.

Mr. Stiltner also said that 3 to 5 ongoing jobs would be created related to the duration of the project and its operation as an apartment development.

Mr. Stiltner was asked about the percentage of financing that would come from private investors compared to the percentage that would originate from tax dollars. He responded by referring to the budget numbers in his presentation.

WAUKESHAW

Dave McCormack spoke on behalf of Waukeshaw.

Their proposal includes apartments that would all be rented at market rate. No “low income” apartments are included as part of their proposal. Mr. McCormack presented several examples of other projects he had developed, and noted that his projects in Petersburg actually had the effect of increasing the rental rate within the local market there. He noted that, with regard to this proposal, he would “have to monetize every part of the property.” The site plan is designed to focus on existing connections within the local area.

Part of Waukeshaw’s proposal includes the possibility of redeveloping the yellow building as a boutique hotel. Mr. McCormack identified the Craddock Terry in Lynchburg as a local reference as well as McMennamin’s in the Pacific Northwest as examples for consideration. A primary consideration is branding, and a focus on what the Town wishes for its identity to be. His intent would be to lead redevelopment of the entire site with the yellow building, and he stated that he has no specific use in mind for the main brick building (although he noted the community’s stated preference that the auditorium be preserved and utilized in something akin to its present form).

Mr. McCormack stated that he would make use of several grants and funding mechanisms, including Industrial Revitalization Funds through DHCD.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Scott Walter spoke on behalf of the Bedford Community Orchestra, which currently performs in the auditorium within the main brick building. He said that the auditorium in its current state has a sound that cannot be duplicated. Much of this is the result of \$100,000 of acoustic improvement work that was performed previously through a grant that he obtained. The orchestra would like to keep the auditorium as a musical performance center, and he noted that Bedford is the smallest community in the United States that has a full orchestra. The orchestra would also like to obtain access to the band room in the gymnasium building for practices and rehearsal purposes. He also stated that we will not be able to duplicate what we currently have if we were to lose it.

Betty Gereau gave a presentation recounting her personal qualifications and background in historic preservation. She noted that there is great excitement within the community related to the redevelopment of this property. She made reference to the site's location on "the loop" (an informal recreational facility created by the intersections of four particular streets within Town). She also noted the architectural significance of the property and its value in attracting visitors who can gain an appreciation of our sense of place. Ms. Gereau suggested that Central Virginia Community College (CVCC) may be enticed to locate some or all of its local operations on the site, which would form the basis for an educational and cultural center. This would also promote potential partnerships with other colleges.

Reagan Flaherty stated that she likes the idea of CVCC on the site. She also suggested that incubator space for businesses would be appropriate in the cafeteria building (run by an organization with a Board of Directors). Apartments in the top floor of the main brick building would also be acceptable. It would be preferable for the gym building to continue to function in a manner similar to its present use and incorporated more broadly into the community. She also said that something for kids to do and venues for music continue to be pressing needs and desires within Bedford.