

The COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
held a Meeting on MONDAY, MARCH 8TH, 2021
beginning at 6:00 P.M.

CD PRESENT: Chair Callahan, Co-Chair Mitchell, Jessie, Cerra, Oswald

OTHERS PRESENT: Law Dir Deery, Assistant Law Dir Breunig, Safety Service Dir Brubaker, Mayor Whitfield, Building Official Farkas, Finance Dir Pileski, Asst Finance Dir Farrell, Assistant Service Svc Dir Calvert, Lorain County Commissioner Matt Lundy, Ken Prendergast of 'All Aboard Ohio', and Council Members Keys, Tollett, Simmons

1. The matter of a Resolution of support for a proposed Development Expansion Program for Amtrak Rail Services.

Referred by: K. Prendergast

Mr. Prendergast was not available at this time.

Commissioner Matt Lundy began by saying the Commissioner's office tried to make the LC Transportation Center an Amtrak stop in the past. He said after exhausting all avenues the project is currently dead. He doesn't see it coming back to life until Norfolk Southern and Amtrak are willing to be partners. Norfolk Southern were wanting the County to make investments in infrastructure with overpasses and rail which should have been Norfolk Southern's investments. The other issue was that design of the Transportation Center required that a ramp go over the tracks. There are tunnels which would go to the other side and we were hoping we would be able to use those but they weren't going to grant permission to do that. They wanted 100 percent indemnity from the county to cover potential liability. There is no way the County could provide that.

The County would have a discussion one day and the following day it was as though it never happened, it was very frustrating. As it relates to Amtrak, it was about a 12 million dollar project which would have been funded with transportation and federal dollars. We asked for a 20-year lease commitment from Amtrak, but the best they were willing to provide was a 5-year lease agreement.

Mr. Lundy wanted the committee to have this background information. Chair Callahan thanked Commissioner Lundy and asked in regards to possible grant money coming from Washington would that take up the loophole of the money that would've been spent by local governments as opposed to it being spent by the Federal Government? If the proposed grant goes thru it would be 100 percent with no local share.

Mr. Lundy said that he wasn't even aware that this was coming forward until he read about it in the newspaper. He would have to study that issue more, but he doesn't see the potential of bringing the project back to life. It was an expensive project and the important part is that indemnity issue. The ramps going over the tracks would not be a good site. He doesn't see that being possible.

Mr. Breunig said he did not see any time constraints that we need to be cognizant of. He said he's been in contact with Jerry Innes about the indemnity issue and that limitation. Whether or not this proposed legislation would circumvent or supplement that issue.

Chair Callahan said that he agrees on the matters brought up by Dir Breunig.

Mr. Prendergast joined the meeting and introduced himself. Ken Prendergast is the Public Affairs Director for 'All Aboard Ohio'. All Aboard Ohio is a non-profit educational organization and been around since 1973.

Amtrak announced that they are pursuing legislation which actually passed the House last year but never got a hearing in the Senate. It's part of the 5-year Federal Surface Transportation reauthorization and would allow Amtrak to aggressively develop passenger rail routes and they've identified 35 routes nation wide, 5 in Ohio and 4 of them converging in Cleveland and one passing thru the City of Elyria. They are proposing 3 trains a day in each direction. It all hinges on the Federal Legislation, 'The 5-Year Surface Transportation Reauthorization' grant. There is the amount of 25 billion dollars in this funding.

They are proposing to pay 100 percent of the start up costs, capital costs which includes both planning and engineering and construction for service star-up. They're not asking for a matching share. They would pay 100 percent of the operation costs for the first two years, 90 percent in the third year, 80 percent in the fourth year and 50 percent in the fifth year. After that, the states pick up the operating costs.

Mr. Tollett said there is a lot of discussion about a pending transportation bill on top of the current stimulus. Is this legislation part of that?

Mr. Prendergast said yes, that is correct.

Mr. Cerra asked what kind of cost would be for the operating from the City?

Mr. Prendergast said there won't be any cost to the city. It would be in terms of what the community wants to do in terms of the Amtrak Station. In terms of generating Economic Development it would be to have it at the Lorain County Transportation Center. That would require some significant investment that Amtrak is willing to provide.

Mr. Oswald asked how many passengers stop in Elyria?

Mr. Oswald also asked what Mr. Prendergast is asking for at this time?

Mr. Prendergast said that he would have to get the rider ship figures for him. In terms of what this legislation would do is merely asking Congress to pass legislation that would allow for this expansion. It does not obligate Elyria in any way.

Chair Callahan said this is just a resolution of support for the proposed development of the Amtrak expansion.

Mrs. Mitchell asked for clarification; so it passed last year and it hasn't gone through the Senate yet. What are the chances that it will pass at the Senate? She said that Mr. Lundy didn't seem optimistic about this and the Commissioners would need to be on board with this. Is Norfolk Southern on board with this?

Mr. Prendergast said it passed at the last session of Congress and it has to go back to the House and then thru the Senate. He said they think with the changes in Washington that there is a much better chance of it passing both houses. And the President has given his strong support of passenger rail development. As negotiations with Norfolk Southern, they would have to reach a partnership. That would happen through the Planning Process.

Mr. Lundy said in past experience he said that Norfolk Southern wasn't very receptive in increasing rail activity. He asked if there's been a change of heart?

Mr. Lundy asked what kind of role would the State take on this, would they embrace it?

Mr. Prendergast said Amtrak developed this program, of paying 100 percent of the costs, for States like Ohio. They want to get into some of these states that don't have passenger rail service. Ohio is the 7th most populous state in the country but ranks 27th in passenger service per boardings of 1,000 people. Columbus is the largest city without passenger rail service. Amtrak wants to develop those routes in those cities.

Mr. Baird said that he would be in favor of supporting this.

Chair Callahan read the committee report and asked for a vote.

Mrs. Mitchell moved and Mr. Cerra second the motion to authorize a resolution of support for the 'said' Amtrak expansion.

MOTION CARRIED

COMMITTEE REPORT WRITTEN

2. The matter of a request to amend COD 1131.02 to Overlay a Light Industrial District over a Business General District at property located at Midway Mall as set forth in Chapter 1176 of COD.

Referred by: Mayor Whitfield Administration

Mayor Whitfield said this is the final stretch for the Midway Mall zoning overlay. The Legislative work has been completed and now they are asking to apply that zoning overlay to the list of parcels.

Legal Counsel Taylor said that there was an additional parcel that was combined. He spoke with the Title Company and one of the parcels doesn't exist anymore. So that parcel needs to be excluded from the equation. That parcel is number 06-24-031-107-033 is a duplicate parcel that no longer exists based on consolidation at the Mall so that would need to be deleted from the requested parcels to be in the overlay district. Dir Breunig said that he already had that parcel removed, so it's all okay.

Mr. Breunig went on to say that they've taken care of the legislation creating this overlay district and now this is adding all of the parcels at the mall to this district as was previously discussed.

Mrs. Mitchell moved and Mr. Cerra second the motion to approve the 'said' rezoning request for the 'said' overlay district.

MOTION CARRIED

COMMITTEE REPORT WRITTEN

This evening's meetings continued with the Finance Committee at 6:40 P.M.

Mr. Cerra moved and Mrs. Mitchell seconded to adjourn the Community Development Committee's portion the this evening's meetings at 6:40 P.M.

MOTION CARRIED

Respectfully submitted by,

Colleen Rosado, Council Clerk Secretary

(Meeting was attended by Secretary Rosado and Meeting Minutes completed by Secretary Rosado)