



Howard County Council

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Minutes (draft-Approved) Legislative Work Session February 24, 2014

Council Chairperson Calvin Ball called the work session to order in the Banneker Room at 4:33 p.m. on February 24, 2014.

Members Present: Calvin Ball, Greg Fox, Mary Kay Sigaty, Jen Terrasa, Courtney Watson

The Chairman invited questions concerning CR 22-2014, finding that the Long Reach Village Center is a blighted area, that redevelopment as an urban renewal project is in the public's interest, and providing for the County's possible acquisition of certain properties within the Village Center.

Mr. Fox asked Chief of Police William McMahon to present crime statistics for Long Reach Village Center and other village centers in Columbia. The Chief distributed a summary of complaints of criminal activity and noted that some residents perceive Long Reach Village Center to be unsafe and that management problems inhibit certain improvements in lighting, maintenance, and grounds-keeping that might improve the public's perception of the area.

Mr. Fox asked Jim Vannoy, Attorney in the Office of Law, to comment on the process used for condemnation and the Council's role in the process. Mr. Vannoy and County Solicitor Margaret Ann Nolan said that the Office of Law would advise that the process for condemnation to be used for Long Reach Village Center would be the same as that used for other properties condemned by the County, and that process typically involves the Council's approval.

Mark Thompson, Department of Planning and Zoning, was invited to illustrate the properties in the Long Reach Village Center and to advise on the current uses of each. Three buildings owned by America's Realty are the probable redevelopment site. Currently 69% of the retail space in those buildings is vacant, although the Safeway Company continues to hold an unexpired lease on 53,000 square feet of the unoccupied space.

Mr. Thompson further described the steps that the Administration would take in executing the authority granted by CR 22-2014, as follows: 1) Obtain a real estate manager to stabilize the properties; 2) Make short term improvements such as improved signage and lighting; 3) Establish a design and community engagement group to secure input from the resident businesses and community on a plan for redevelopment; and 4) Develop a redevelopment plan for presentation to the Council for approval. Marsha McLaughlin, Director of the Department of Planning and Zoning, added that she would hope to work with developers who may be interested in bidding on the project to provide input to the plan.

In response to Mr. Fox's questions about the impetus for the legislation providing for urban renewal, Mr. Thompson said that the owner of the blighted properties approached the County about buying the property. He explained that an urban renewal project would require that a second resolution be brought to the County Council which would provide the plan for the property's redevelopment. Mr. Thompson said that the Administration plans to acquire the property with funds previously appropriated.

The work session was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.