

**TOWN OF MOUNT PLEASANT, SOUTH CAROLINA
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
Monday, April 30, 2018
(May Committee Meetings)
Municipal Complex, Committee Meeting Room, 3rd Floor
100 Ann Edwards Lane, Mount Pleasant, SC 29464**

MINUTES

- Members Present:** Bob Brimmer, Chairman, Joe Bustos, Kathy Landing and Rick Crosby (MPW)
- Staff Present:** Eric DeMoura, Town Administrator; Lauren Sims, Community & Government Affairs Chief
- Also Present:** Sam Skardon, One Region Project Director

Mr. Brimmer called the meeting to order at 11:16 a.m.

1. Approval of Minutes from the April 2, 2018 meeting

Mr. Bustos moved for approval; seconded by Mr. Crosby. All present voted in favor.

2. Public Comments

[None]

3. Update on the One Region Strategy - Sam Skardon, Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce

Mr. Skardon stated that he grew up in Mount Pleasant in Snee Farm, attended College in Atlanta, moved to Washington, DC and worked for a member of Congress and received his MBA from Georgetown University prior to moving back to South Carolina six months ago to take the position as the Project Director of the One Region strategy. He provided Committee with a background on the One Region strategy. He stated that there are some similarities and links between the One Region strategy and the Town of Mount Pleasant's strategic plan. He stated that there are Four Regional Values that the strategy is rooted in, based on an inclusive

planning process where they engage with almost 1,000 stakeholders and leaders across the region. He said through all the feedback, they discovered four themes or values that are consistent in every Town, City and County across the region. (1) A strong, resilient economy; (2) attainable opportunities for all residents to live, learn and earn; (3) balancing growth with nurturing our unique character; and (4) being a connected community. He said within each value area, there are a set of recommendations to advance that value across our region. There are 152,000 people in our region crossing a county border when they go to work, so they work and live in separate counties. He said the 152,000 does not even capture those who move between municipalities in the same county. This speaks to how connected and regional we must be when discussing people's lives in our area. He said housing prices are the #1 reason why young professionals leave our region. People between 25 and 45 years old said that housing is the #1 reason they leave our market, and they are precisely the individuals this region needs to be retaining in order to have that competitive economy and be the globally competitive place that we talk about. Volvo stated that only 4% of their applicants were qualified and this is not what any city or county can solve on their own. He said this is why their strategy and their organization exists - to help us collectively address these issues. He said to provide an update, the strategy itself was written and published in 2016. His position was created in late 2017 and he was hired approximately six months ago. He said they have an independent executive committee; therefore, he reports directly to an organization that is independent of both the Chamber of Commerce, the Regional Development Alliance and other stakeholder organizations. He said the specific mission they have as an executive committee and staff member, is to oversee, coordinate, and facilitate the implementation of the One Region Strategy across the region. He said an example of a project they have worked on in the first six months, are grant opportunities that would support the proposed Lowcountry Rapid Transit Corridor. He said the most realistic achievable plan to alleviate I-26 congestion is a rapid bus transit line that would be 23 miles and cross four municipalities in the region starting in downtown

Charleston and going up to downtown Summerville. This is a perfect example of crossing multiple City, County and Town borders. This is also very vital to every city and town in the region. He said they are working on a series of grant opportunities to bring stakeholders together from each of those municipalities, from key sectors such as non-profits, housing organizations, major employers, etc. He said bringing them together to create a consensus to ensure this happens, that the project is completed ahead of schedule and is effective is key, and that the right type of planning is accomplished to maximize the effectiveness of a first truly regional rapid transit system. He stated that this is an example of one of the projects he has been working on but is a micro-look of his day-to-day versus the macro look where it is seen as a vital piece of the implementation of the overall One Region strategy.

Mr. Brimmer asked Mr. Skardon of another example of something he has worked on that would more directly impact the Town of Mount Pleasant.

Mr. Skardon stated that there is a broader relevance other than just I-26 commuters. He said the Bus Rapid Transit proposed is highly scalable so once the initial infrastructure is in place, it allows the flexibility to serve other major corridors and arteries in the region, which will be a conversation that happens fairly soon. He said the Town of Mount Pleasant plays a vital role in the region, as it is among the largest municipalities. Part of their charge is spreading regionalism and to understand the interconnectivity that we have between each region. He said this is where they work a great deal with organizations in Mount Pleasant. People who work, live or play in Mount Pleasant understand the interconnectivity and the importance of what happens here. He said he would ask that we attempt to spread around the region, to think and act regionally and think about how projects in Berkeley and Dorchester County also have an impact in the Town of Mount Pleasant and how the rivers that divide up our region, force us to think across the borders. He said they have a new website and newsletter and would encourage Council to visit it at oneregionstrategy.com where there is also an opportunity to sign up for their monthly newsletter where large regional

issues are discussed, as well as projects he is working on with stakeholders.

Mr. Bustos stated that as the Town attempts to recruit businesses and headquarters to Mount Pleasant, Ms. Livingston and Town staff could consider Mr. Skardon an asset.

Mr. Skardon stated that he hopes they do. He said the strategy is multi-faceted and deep, and one of the long-term visions is being a place where we are a top target for a corporate headquarters, which is specifically spelled out in the strategy.

Mr. Bustos stated that this is one the Town is working on and trying to figure out the formula, and how to accomplish this repeatedly.

Mr. Skardon stated that he is working with several region-wide organizations such as the Metro Chamber, Regional Development Alliance, Coastal Community Foundations and organizations that have regional footprints. He said when discussing the corporate headquarters and major projects, people are interested in the region and people want regional statistics about education, housing, workforce, infrastructure and having a competitive region is also vital to having a competitive Town. He said rather than people seeing themselves moving to Mount Pleasant, Summerville or North Charleston, they see themselves as moving to the Charleston area and understand that although the corporate headquarters is located in Mount Pleasant, they will have employees coming over the bridge or coming from McClellanville or Awendaw. He said they are really interested in what's going on regionally and this is a great way they can be an asset to the Town of Mount Pleasant which is speaking to both the assets of the region and of the Town individually.

Mr. Brimmer asked about recruiting meetings.

Mr. Skardon stated that this is not specifically his job; however, he works closely with partners who do direct business recruitment and retention, but he would say his position as Project Director for One Region Strategy

is more to work on the things that make the entire metro area an attractive environment for people who do the development.

Mr. Brimmer stated that when Mr. Skardon is discussing the strengths of the region, what specific strengths does he associate with the Town of Mount Pleasant and what areas of the Town are not as strong, to support the region.

Mr. Skardon stated that the quality of life in the Mount Pleasant is outstanding and is a large portion of the One Region Strategy, which is preserving, promoting and deepening that quality of life throughout the region by supporting cultural organizations, good land use policies and smart land planning and conservation.

Mr. Brimmer asked Mr. Skardon what quality of life means to him.

Mr. Skardon said that everything from natural environment to cultural organizations to parks and recreation, and even commute time. He said the difficulties would be housing affordability and attainability. He said he grew up in Mount Pleasant and would personally have difficulty purchasing a home in Mount Pleasant. He said it is something they see regularly when discussing economic development for the region. Companies understand they are going to have a workforce here that must purchase homes and will need to recruit and retain people in the area. He said making sure there is a stock of attainable housing that working-class people can afford is very important for the entire region and Mount Pleasant is included in this.

Mr. Brimmer said from Mr. Skardon's perspective, is there anything the Town of Mount Pleasant is able to do to strengthen themselves in the region.

Mr. Skardon stated that thinking and acting regionally sounds broad, but doing things such as transportation planning, housing planning, in coordination with neighboring cities and municipalities and doing them in coordination with regional organizations is important. He said when saying to think and act regionally, rather than this sounding very broad, he would hope this means doing comprehensive plans, setting those

plans in motion and coordinating with organizations that are doing similar work across the municipal border and the region.

Ms. Landing stated that the Convention and Visitors Bureau recently put a great deal of effort to work with CARTA to start the Park N Ride program where they have the parking lot on North Morrison Drive. This is especially geared towards people in the hospitality industry that must work into the late hours and often time cannot afford to park or cannot find parking near their respective businesses. She stated that this just started, but brings it up as an idea, because if this goes well, she would like to see the Town coordinate this for people coming into Mount Pleasant to work in the food and beverage and hotel industries.

Mr. Skardon stated that this is really important. He said he began with the anecdote that 152,000 cross a county border that does not even include municipal borders. He said when transportation planning is accomplished, it is important for multiple municipalities to be involved.

Mr. Brimmer stated that being a CARTA board member along with Councilman Jim Owens, those conversations are taking place to expand it beyond the peninsula.

Mr. Brimmer thanked Mr. Skardon for taking timeout to speak with the Economic Development Committee members.

4. Discussion of the strategy for Business Recruitment

Ms. Sims stated that the Town has an Economic Development Strategy that went from 2013 to 2017 and it has been completed, although several initiatives in the strategy are continuing on. She said one of which is the Business Development Expansion and the ongoing Economic Development activities. She said at the time the strategy was created, there was a committee that was put together as well as Council direction and the Comprehensive Plan direction that pulled together all the different elements and realized that the Town wanted a strategy that is comprehensive for both true economic development initiatives and business development initiatives. She said support for the local market, recognizing the value that those businesses and industries bring to the

community as well. She said the Town's strategy has been a unique blend of those true economic development and business development initiatives as well as partnering with other larger organizations (CRDA, Chamber of Commerce, One Region Strategy), to expand our efforts to look on a broader scale, regionally and globally, and also here in Mount Pleasant. She said they have done several things recently such as the Local Vendor Partnership, Certified Business Programs and New Business Recruitment Guide. She said the Town is doing a lot of these great things and are looking forward to some direction from the Comprehensive Plan Forum that is currently meeting for next steps on the Town's strategy. She said until that time, they are continuing great efforts based on Committee's direction.

Ms. Landing stated that she brought this topic forward because it was one of the big issues she campaigned on. She has built a business in the area and spent 33 years working with many businesses and entrepreneurs as clients. She said one of her first steps after being elected was to contact Ms. Livingston, Business & Tourism Manager, in order to request meetings in areas of interest and specifically meeting with people who either lived in Mount Pleasant and had their place of business here or at least had their primary place of business located in the Town. She said what she quickly discovered was that all of the businesses were pleasantly surprised that she was meeting with them. She said several of them specifically communicated that they have never had a Council member meet with them simply for the purposes of seeing how their businesses were doing. She also discovered that business people, more specifically entrepreneurs, are going to do everything possible to determine whether this is the right place or market for their business, as well as the quality of life. She said the big picture items are great, necessary, organized and help define things. She had a great meeting with the CRDA regarding Mount Pleasant as a product to talk to businesses about. What she is referring to is the "nitty-gritty", meeting with an entrepreneur who is interested in possibly expanding or bringing a business here to the Town, which is much of what Ms. Livingston and her staff do but add the weight of Council and the desire of Council to say

that they really want those businesses here. She stated that she plans to work with Ms. Livingston and her staff on a very specific plan that will include parcels of land that are currently up for sale in Mount Pleasant or have been vacated, identify whether the owner simply desires to sell or if they envision a specific target market for that area. She said she would also like to have discussions with commercial real estate professionals that bring businesses in. She said recently a laundromat was built on the frontage of US 17 in northern Mount Pleasant which did not appear to be the best use of frontage property; however, it turned out to be an attractive building and is attracting other small businesses that will be very useful and would have needed frontage. She said the idea would be that she and the Business and Tourism Office would have a very ongoing defined way of reaching out to businesses. She spoke with an entrepreneur recently who approached the Town on his own but ran into a major roadblock and determined that he was going to take his business elsewhere and sell his home in Dunes West. She did some research and determined that he was going to be able to move forward and stay in the Town. She said it may sound like a small thing, but it isn't, because it indicates that if Council becomes more involved in the day to day, they will be able to bring the businesses in. She discussed creating a name for this initiative, such as "Mount Pleasant Business Partners". She also suggested soliciting input from the residents as to what types of businesses they would like to see in Mount Pleasant. She has brought this up previously regarding the number of storage units fronting US 17. She is not against storage units, as it a low maintenance business to run, but we do not want all the valuable frontage remaining going to storage units. She said this plan will be to solicit input from businesses and identify very specifically the parcels of land and ways to put together what is needed with what is available in the remaining resources.

Mr. Brimmer stated that he is in favor of processes that are more proactive than waiting. He would add one item to this which is that much of the property that Ms. Landing is referring to is in the County of Charleston and any effort made in the Town should include participation

from the County, whether we annex that property or collaborate with the County on zoning or other pieces that involve economic development.

Mr. Bustos said this is similar to an earlier conversation regarding true economic development. He said for too long, Mount Pleasant hailed a Burger King or McDonald's as economic development, because it created jobs. He said we need to understand what true economic development is. He said bringing new money into the Town of Mount Pleasant is economic development. He said some of the smaller businesses circulate money within the community but do not bring money into the community. He said our goal should be much broader. He said we should keep good relations with small businesses; however, recruiting headquarters so people are able to work and live here. He stated that he has nothing against small businesses, because he himself is a small businessman. He said when you bring businesses here to the Town and pay wages that are not sufficient for those employees to live in the Town, all we accomplish is heavier traffic congestion. He said we need to be cautious about what we are calling economic development. He said our effort today is an indication that we are attempting to move that way and need to keep focused on the real economic development prize. He said having good business relations is great; however, it is not economic development, and we need to stay on the trail of good economic development.

Ms. Landing stated that it has been identified by both the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce, as well as CRDA of major areas that we should be focusing on. She said David Ginn shared that the Town is not going to have a large industrial plant. She stated that she met with an entrepreneur of one of the fastest growing cyber security companies and was featured at the Mount Pleasant Chamber of Commerce last month. She said that they are doing a tremendous amount of business and asked if there is anything synergistic with what they do that the Town could help facilitate, or is there another business that can help them, what would that business look like. She said the idea was to brainstorm with someone who is already successful, paying their employees a significant

salary. She said another was an individual who runs a television production company out of Mount Pleasant. What would allow the Town to expand and bring people in, because film and television is a hot area for millennials in terms of work. She said there is a presence in Mount Pleasant, but nothing permanent. She said this is where headquarters could come in. She agrees that we need to think in terms of the big picture. She said someone also mentioned healthcare which is an area we have a lot of, but there are other things that the Town could bring here to enhance that, which would result in higher paying jobs.

Mr. Brimmer said there is room under the umbrella of economic development for many different strategies. He agrees with Mr. Bustos that the focus must be on the larger issues and trying to create the climate for economic development. He said Ms. Landing's focus is slightly more micro, looking at individual properties and businesses. He believes this is all appropriate for economic development. He said there are a number of partners who have, over the years, been very interested in coming into the Town and helping us with those various aspects. He said it was nice to have Mr. Skardon here today, and previous input from the CRDA, both the Charleston and Mount Pleasant Chambers, and believes it is now time to leverage those relationships on all of these strategies and move forward. He said staff had a meeting last week to discuss an individual situation which may be fruitful.

Mr. Crosby said that it seems to him that the comments are a bit scattered. He said we should revisit what true economic development is in Mount Pleasant, specifically, and develop a strategy to go after it. He said MPW spent quite a bit of time on strategic planning and their plan may be of benefit to the Town. He said the Town is going in several different directions and he does not see a single focus that is going in one direction going after the ideal prospect that we want in the Town. He said we have an opportunity now, to truly pursue economic development and should go after it full speed, because Mount Pleasant is not for everyone and believes the Town knows the ideal prospect they would want. He said we need to define what that is and aggressively go after it.

Mr. Brimmer stated that we have an economic development plan and have had one for years.

Mr. Crosby asked how the plan was working for the Town.

Mr. Brimmer said that the Town has not necessarily worked the plan, so not having a plan really is not the issue, it is how we execute it. He said with the new comprehensive plan now under development, maybe the Town should review whether the plan is where the Town needs to be today and in the next ten years, or do we need to revisit it. He said it is not just properties that are available, but we are moving into a phase of redevelopment and there will be a number of properties over the next 20 years that will be right for redevelopment. He said there is a great deal involved and perhaps more focus is needed, but the conversation will need to take place here with the four Committee members to determine what that focus should be in terms of moving forward. He said this conversation has been taking place the past several months and the Town is identifying where we need to go and how to get there. He does not believe it is going after a prospect. He said we have One Region which has several target areas and the Town needs to be cooperative not only with our regional Chamber, but also with our local Chamber, who needs the Town's support.

Ms. Landing stated that she put this idea out, because she started a new communication forum using social media. She said one of the first comments she received was from Chris Staubes, President of the Mount Pleasant Chamber of Commerce providing his support and assistance. She said she believes the Town will receive a great deal of support and does believe the Town is focusing. Her experiment of going out and having discussions with businesses in the Town was because they were already very successful and in areas that had been identified as being important to the Town.

Mr. Brimmer directed his comments to Mr. DeMoura and said Mr. Crosby mentioned the process that Waterworks is currently going through with a retreat. He asked if there has been any discussion in the past about the potential of an economic development retreat where the Town invites

some of their partners to sit down at the table for a day and put together a more cohesive plan.

Mr. DeMoura stated that there was a very similar session last year in the May/June timeframe with entrepreneurs of different backgrounds and disciplines in Town and the Town hosted them which was very fruitful. He said his recollection is that most of the comments revolved around whether there was an environment conducive to fostering business in Mount Pleasant. He said there were comments regarding what they felt was keeping them from expanding or what they felt was in the way of others similar to their business from coming into Town.

Mr. Brimmer suggested circling back on this to see how the Town has improved over the past year. He asked if this could be put on staff's schedule to take place in the summer. He does not feel these meetings are fruitful unless they are reevaluated to see if the Town has done what they said they would.

Ms. Landing stated that measuring from what has come from that meeting, staff can do this. She asked Ms. Livingston to send her the new businesses, as there were 70 new permits granted last month. She said some are small and some are much larger. She said there are ways to measure the progress and there are properties in the northern portion of Mount Pleasant, as well as the GenPhar location. She said this is a large location. She stated that there are very specific things in mind and not at all scattered. She stated that if we get together for another retreat where the discussion is very general, this is an issue. However, if we are coming together to brainstorm, then she is onboard, because the Town has already received great definition from CRDA and now the One Region strategy.

Mr. Crosby said if the Town is going to have a retreat, he suggested sending out a retreat agenda to develop that agenda prior to the retreat and agreed upon by the Economic Development Committee and staff to know exactly what will be discussed.

Mr. Brimmer stated that it appears that this committee is ready to move forward with more specifics, whether it be parcels or projects. He said there should be more discussion on how this may take place but would be very favorable to a retreat meeting with all the partners to share where we are and where we need to go.

5. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Ashe
April 30, 2018