

MINUTES
CULTURAL ARTS COMMISSION
February 15, 2023

The Cultural Arts Commission meeting was called to order at 4:01 p.m. at the Bel Air Armory, 37 N. Main Street, Bel Air, MD 21014.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jeanne Close, Chair
Pat Fielder, Vice Chair
Carole Milan
Peg Lucas
Kristien Foss
Sandy Schlehr
Brigitte Grubb

IN ATTENDANCE: Angela Robertson, Economic Development Coordinator
Donna Kahoe, Town Commissioner
Edward Hopkins, Town Administrator
Ed Steere, Valbridge Property Advisors
Trish Heidenreich, Director of Economic Development
Catherine Butrim, Recording Secretary

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

Approval of Minutes – January 18, 2023

Ms. Foss moved and Ms. Lucas seconded the motion to approve the minutes of the January 18, 2023 meeting.

The motion carried.

FY23 Budget Review

Ms. Robertson distributed a handout for **Projected Budget Expenses for FY23**. She reported that the **Marketing** account, which had a starting balance in July of **\$4,350.00**, currently has a balance of **-71.00** when taking into account the projected approved expenditures. She advised that there is still \$4000.00 in the Public Art account. Ms. Robertson advised that any further expenditures for Marketing can be covered with funds from the Public Art account if needed.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Office Street Sculpture Signage

Ms. Robertson reported that Kevin Small has requested that the signage for the *Twister Star* sculpture in the Office Street Pocket Park be the same type of signage recognizing donors,

which is currently in the park. Those existing signs are bronze and gold as opposed to the silver sign that was previously approved by CAC. Ms. Robertson advised that the quote from AllSigns for the bronze and gold sign is in the amount of \$79.00.

Ms. Foss moved and Ms. Milan seconded the motion to approve the new quote for the Twister Star signage in the amount of \$79.00.

The motion carried.

Ms. Robertson reported that she has requested a mock up for the font to be engraved on the signage, and she will email that to the CAC members for approval when she receives it.

NEW BUSINESS:

Town Administrator Introduction

Mr. Hopkins visited the meeting briefly and introduced himself to the CAC members. He advised that he grew up in the Town and has been here his entire life. Mr. Hopkins advised that he joined the TOBA as the Town Administrator when Jesse Bane retired after serving as DES Director for Harford County. He advised that CAC can turn to him if anything is needed and can contact him for assistance. Ms. Kahoe advised that Mr. Hopkins was formerly a Town Commissioner and served as the Mayor of Bel Air. Mr. Hopkins advised that he believes he is the first Town Administrator who was born and raised in the Town, and it is helpful to have the wealth of information about the Town that comes with that.

Market Study Forum

Ms. Heidenreich reported that the Economic Development Department is working on a Market Study and has engaged the services of Valbridge Property Advisors to complete the study. She advised that Ed Steere of Valbridge Property Advisors will be joining today's meeting. Ms. Heidenreich advised that a Market Study will give the Town an analysis and recommendations to create a Market Plan. She advised that the Market Study will analyze how things have changed in the Town of Bel Air (TOBA) since the last Market Study in 2016, and it will take into account the 2020 census and what the real estate parcels in the Town are currently available.

Ms. Heidenreich advised that, in working with Mr. Steere, four (4) important components have been identified for the Market Study:

1. Retail

2. Government
3. UM Upper Chesapeake
4. Cultural arts

Ms. Heidenreich advised that CAC will be a focus group today for the Market Study. She advised that the Market Study will examine what is driving the market now, and it will guide the Economic Development department on how to market the TOBA moving forward.

Mr. Steere advised that cultural arts is an important component of the Market Study and important for the TOBA. He advised that his staff is looking at other towns to see what the ingredients are for a successful downtown with cultural arts.

Mr. Steere advised that Bel Air has everything that supports hospitality, including gas, good restaurants, shopping and the hospital as well; but the Town does not have hotels. He advised that the TOBA wants to capitalize on the elements that are in the TOBA and be able to go to the hoteliers and developers and investors to show that there is a demand.

Mr. Steere advised that the CAC members should advise him about their thoughts regarding cultural arts and the Market Study.

Ms. Kahoe advised that many successful towns appear to have at least one national chain located within their downtown.

Ms. Schlehr inquired about the Mary Risteau courthouse property and if that could be a structure for a hotel if the courthouse is vacated. Mr. Steere advised that the courthouse is on State land and the parking lot is owned by the County. He advised that the County does own a number of properties in the Town that are underutilized, and he and Mr. Hopkins will meet with the County to determine if any of those properties can be consolidated or surplus. Mr. Steere advised that the Mary Risteau building itself would be not suitable, and there is the question of what offices would be moved if the courthouse does move. Mr. Steere advised that the hospital could be the ultimate demand driver for a hotel, and in that case, the hotel would need to be located in that area.

Ms. Fielder inquired about other small towns Valbridge has studied. Mr. Steere advised that they currently are studying Frederick, and he noted that trails do bring a lot of people and money into the towns that have them.

Ms. Heidenreich advised that the previous Market Study in 2016 concluded that the TOBA could not justify a hotel, and a specific hotel study in 2019 found justification for a

boutique hotel in the TOBA. She advised that one goal with this study is to get a hotel in the TOBA.

Ms. Heidenreich advised that she and Jenny Falcone of the Bel Air Downtown Alliance (BADA) toured West Chester, PA and Lititz, PA, and they are slated to visit Newark, DE.

The CAC members discussed some of the following cultural arts and other possible attractions:

- Dog parks and dog walking trails
- Retail stores with supplies and tools for artists, wood crafting and home renovations
- Art studios and specialty art shops that offer classes
- Art classes, such as those offered at retail stores like Board and Brush
- Vacant space in the Mall that could be used for gaming rooms and stores that sell items related to gaming
- Tribute band concerts and local bands that will attract a demographic that will visit establishments before and after concerts
- A volunteer woodshop like the one near the Equestrian Center
- The need for more fine dining in Bel Air
- A comfortable movie theatre
- An antique pinball gallery
- A dance academy
- A culinary arts establishment

Ms. Fielder inquired if the Market Study will examine the reasons that Bel Air is one of the more desirable places to live in Maryland. Mr. Steere advised that Bel Air is desirable because it is a cheaper suburb to live in, it is commutable, it has good schools and it has all the right elements at the right price.

Ms. Close inquired how much of the Market Study has been completed. Mr. Steere advised that they are approximately 50% through the study.

Ms. Lucas inquired about any plans for the property on Bond Street where the Church of Reconciliation is located. Mr. Steere advised that Wayne Goddard has plans for two (2) buildings: one commercial building located on Bond Street and one residential building behind the commercial building.

Mr. Steere advised that the Market Study will be examining greater Bel Air as well.

Ms. Milan advised that she recently visited Charleston, SC and visited Charleston Place, which encompasses a hotel with upscale shops on the ground floor and seating for people who want a place to relax with a pianist and harpist performing.

Mr. Steere advised that they have begun studying movie theatres, but they are having trouble getting good site selection criteria for movie theatres. He advised that food and concessions are critical components for theatres.

Mr. Steere advised that they are trying to get more information from the Center for the Arts and the data from the Amoss Center. He advised that there should be a central clearinghouse for arts events data in the County.

Mr. Steere advised that the Market Study will examine how vacancies impact the leasing of neighboring spaces and marketability.

Ms. Robertson advised the CAC members to send any additional suggestions to her, so she can forward them to Mr. Steere by February 22.

OTHER:

Bond Street Pocket Park Sculpture

Ms. Robertson reported that the Bond Street Pocket Park project and the proposed sculpture may be changing as a the individual who is developing the property on Bond Street is now involved as a sponsor for the park project. She advised that this individual will be attending the next BADA Design Committee meeting to discuss potential changes to the project.

FY23 Planning

The members present brainstormed the following potential ideas for public art / sponsorship projects:

- Z Vault and The Nest on Main for possible murals on their buildings.
- Investigate placement of a possible painting, sculpture, stained glass or other public art project in the new Town Hall/Police Department building.
- Sponsorship for the Bel Air parades.
- Sponsorships for music, ballet and art studios to hold classes at the Armory.
- Painting the stairwells at the parking garage.
- Commission a painting of the old Bel Air Library building for the current library building.
- Begin planning for the Bel Air 150 celebration in 2024.

Ms. Close requested that Ms. Kahoe report to CAC about news from the Town Commissioners when appropriate and that Ms. Robertson report out on upcoming events.

A&E District Update

Ms. Robertson advised there are four tickets available to attend (but not take home a piece of art) Take a Chance on Art on March 11 from 6:00-9:00 p.m. Ms. Lucas, Ms. Schlehr and Ms. Foss advised that they will attend. The members present agreed that money from the CAC budget may be used to pay for tickets if any other CAC members would like to attend.

Maryland Center for the Arts Progress Report

Ms. Robertson reported that the Maryland Center for the Arts is awaiting permits from Harford County.

ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Foss moved and Ms. Fielder seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:59 p.m.
The motion carried.