

**MINUTES OF KENNESAW ENRICHMENT AND ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM
MEETING
CITY OF KENNESAW
Ben Robertson Community Center
May 23, 2023
6:00 PM**

1. Call to Order / Roll Call

Mr. Phillips called the meeting of the Kennesaw Enrichment and Enhancement Program to order at 6:05pm.

Members present: Mitch Phillips, Dennis Bradish, Mark Allen, Sharon Blandford, Carlene Fregeolle, Travice Obas, and Dwain Phelps

Staff/Councilmembers present: Luke Howe, James Friedrich and Tracey Viars

Staff/Councilmembers absent: Trey Sinclair

2. Approval of the Meeting Minutes

A. April 25, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Motion by Mr. Bradish to approve the April 25, 2023 meeting minutes, seconded by Ms. Obas. Vote taken, motion approved 4-0-3 (Mr. Phelps and Ms. Blandford were not present at this time and Mr. Allen abstained).

3. Old Business

4. New Business

5. Discussion

A. Luke Howe, Economic Development Director: Discuss Economic Development Initiatives, Business Incentives, and Vacant Properties

Economic Development Director Luke Howe provided the committee members with an informal conversation regarding the purpose of the City's Economic Development team, how they utilize incentives to bring in business, and the committee's focus on vacant properties. Mr. Howe listed three tools local Economic Development departments use which include abating occupational tax license fees, abating or reducing permit fees, and abating property taxes. Through the Georgia State Constitution, the City is allowed to increase some people's taxes through what is known as a blight tax, but there is a very high threshold for what qualifies as blight. It is important to note that incentives can be used to collateralize a project but cannot be used to capitalize on a project. Some of the vacant properties in the downtown area are being used for complex projects that are difficult to finance. Community banks are typically the main funding sources for these projects, but when the cost is in excess of 10 million dollars, that can be a heavy

ask. On the other hand, a 10 million dollar project is usually on the lower end for larger investment banks.

Mrs. Fregeolle commented that a lot of the vacant properties in the downtown area have been vacant for some time. Mr. Howe acknowledged this and said these projects take time and the lack of funding sources has only hindered the redevelopment process. Some properties, both vacant and in use, can also be moved if the property owners are amenable. Another issue that hinders the development of properties in downtown Kennesaw is the lack of existing brick and mortar infrastructure. Other neighboring cities already have existing infrastructure to be used for redevelopment which makes it easier for businesses to move in to a space when another business moves out. Mrs. Fregeolle asked about bringing a small movie studio to the City as a way to increase the City's economic development and branding. However, Mr. Howe mentioned they would need a large space to put their studio and that studio companies generally close themselves off from the rest of the community.

At last month's meeting, the KEEP committee was really interested in the viability of creating a vacant property register that incentivizes property owners to redevelop their vacant properties relatively quickly. However, it was Mr. Howe's professional opinion that registries like that are token programs that do not produce significant change. Ultimately, there is little that the KEEP committee can do that is not already being done when it comes to increasing economic development, business incentives or tackling the issue of vacant properties. Mr. Howe said there may not be a silver bullet solution, but he would provide the committee with a one-page summary of everything he can do under the law.

6. Staff Comment

Mr. Friedrich spoke with Mr. Phillips earlier in the day because Mr. Phillips wanted to propose moving next month's meeting date to June 20 since he will be out on vacation. This new special called meeting date was amenable to the other members. Motion by Mrs. Fregeolle to hold a special called meeting on June 20, 2023 seconded by Mr. Phelps. Vote taken, motion approved unanimously.

Mr. Friedrich suggested the committee look at transportation related issues in the City's Code of Ordinances and come up with topics of discussion for the June meeting. In July, Mr. Friedrich would see if he could get the Public Works Director to join and answer any questions the committee may have.

7. Adjourn

Motion by Mr. Allen to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Blandford. Vote taken, motion approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:18pm.