

**MINUTES OF A TOWN COUNCIL WORK SESSION**  
**TOWN OF LURAY, VIRGINIA**  
**Tuesday, January 27, 2015**

The Luray Town Council met in a work session on Tuesday, January 27, 2015 at 5:30 p.m. in the Luray Town Council Chambers located at 45 East Main Street, Luray, Virginia at which time there were present the following:

Presiding:               Leroy Lancaster

Council Present:       Ronald Vickers  
                              Pam Flasch  
                              Jerry Schiro  
                              Joey Sours  
                              John Meaney

Also Present:

Charlie Hoke, Town Manager  
Danielle Babb, Deputy Clerk Treasurer  
Jason Spitler, Town Attorney  
Nancy Shifflett, Interim President- Luray Downtown Initiative  
David Slye, Luray Downtown Initiative  
Starr Johnson, Luray Downtown Initiative  
Liz Lewis, Director- Luray Downtown Initiative  
Eleanor Ames, Luray Downtown Initiative  
Leslie Currle, Luray Downtown Initiative  
Bill Huffman, Luray Downtown Initiative  
Joyce Krech, Director- Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center  
Sara Levinson, Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center  
Allison Dougan, Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center  
Alex Berry, Community Development Program Administrator- Virginia Main Street Program  
Linda Drum, Former LDI Board Member

A quorum being present, Councilman Lancaster led members in the United States Pledge of Allegiance. The roll was called with one member absent.

**Introduction of Attendees**

Councilman Lancaster introduced members of the Town Council and stated that Mayor Presgraves was absent this evening due to illness. Nancy Shifflett, Luray Downtown Initiative, introduced fellow members in attendance this evening; Starr Johnson, Leslie Currle, Bill Huffman, David Slye, Liz Lewis, Eleanor Ames. Other members of the board not able to attend the meeting include; Bill Isenberg and Jim Sims. Ms. Shifflett introduced guests for the evening Alex Berry- Community Development Program Administrator for Virginia Main Street, Joyce Krech- Shenandoah Valley SBDC, Sara Levinson and Allison Dougan- Shenandoah Valley SBDC.

## **Update on LDI Board Revitalization**

Ms. Nancy Shifflett updated attendees on the recent meetings and activities of LDI and their coordinated efforts with Virginia Main Street. LDI has developed a Three-Month Plan of action, which includes developing a mission and vision. The plan also includes work on the establishment of the Board's structure and processes. This will include a Board Manual that illustrates bylaw changes and policy/procedure changes. Other process changes will include time sheets, reporting responsibilities and report formats, working responsibilities, and personnel policies. Another change will include Financial Reporting and plans for a Fundraising Plan. The LDI Fundraising Plan will be developed by the Fundraising Committee and the campaign will take place between April 1<sup>st</sup> and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015. Ms. Shifflett stated that the Revitalization Plan will consist of a one-year plan starting on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 and will be a collaborative effort with the Town Council. She said that both organizations will designate individuals/teams that will participate in the planning process on their behalf.

Ms. Shifflett introduced Ms. Joyce Krech, Director of the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center.

## **Discussion**

Ms. Joyce Krech, Director of the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center, said that she will be facilitating the discussion and will assist Alex Berry. Mr. Alex Berry stated that he is one of three stateside Administrators of the Community Development Program. He stated that the intent of the discussion is to focus on the core of the program which is "revitalization". Ms. Krech said that the goal is to hold an open conversation and facilitate lots of brainstorming about "what revitalization of Luray means". She said that this information would be passed along to the revitalization plan teams. Mr. Alex Berry suggested that attendees ask themselves, "If we are successful, what does that mean?" His suggestion is to look forward and ask one's self what the downtown area would look like, the types of businesses, etc. Councilman Meaney stated that he had written down one question for the evening in his notes, "What does success look like?"

Councilwoman Flasch noted that she recently visited Thomasville, Georgia and felt as if she were on the set of a movie. She added that the feel of the town was that of a quintessential small-town USA.

Mr. Berry asked the group to define the context of "Revitalization".

*Comments received were as follows:*

- A place where people can come together, public gathering spaces
- A full downtown from end to end , open stores
- Revitalization is not only infrastructure but it is attitude, merchant and customer roles
- More people less cars
- Public Art
- Variety of Shops
- Stakeholder input and support
- Preservation of character

Members discussed who the "Stakeholders" are in this process.

*Comments received were as follows:*

- Property Owners
- Real Estate Agents
- Schools
- Business Owners

- Customers
- Employees
- Visitors
- Attractions
- Local Government
- Residents

LDI Board Member, Starr Johnson, stated that the website needs to be a priority for LDI along with the listing of available properties on the site. Councilwoman Flasch said that it would be important to understand why property owners are hanging on to real estate downtown if they do not intend to make improvements. Councilman Schiro stated that it is important to address the property owners and convince them that it is important to invest in their property. He explained that if the property is improved it will then become desirable for lease.

Ms. Linda Drum, former LDI board member, raised question about ordinances that require the maintenance of these types of neglected properties. Councilman Schiro recalled that this had been explored by Council in the past, but that property maintenance codes can be adopted but are much greater in scope. A locality would be required to adopt the entire Virginia Building Officials Code and employ certified inspectors, etc. Councilman Schiro cautioned that this is a very extensive undertaking and mentioned that some localities are in fact too restrictive in their design code. Alex Berry mentioned that he has an upcoming presentation with Frazier Associates on Architectural Review Boards and he would invite members to attend this seminar. Joyce Krech observed that these issues show that local government is indeed a key “stakeholder”. Alex Berry mentioned that residents are also a stakeholder whereas they are also a beneficiary of these efforts. Mr. Berry said that one of the key Virginia Main Street principles is to improve the “quality of life” which can be defined in various ways but with the residents also in mind. He said that it is important that residents also be involved in community meetings and planning.

Board member, Dave Slye, said that he feels this is a bit of a challenge because it requires a culture change for the entire community. He feels that this community is a destination area and everyone should be aware of this. Starr Johnson, board member, said that the former “Cash Party” hosted by LDI was a crucial part of community involvement and outreach. Councilman Meaney feels that one of the critical problems is that lack of outreach to all levels of stakeholders. Councilman Schiro recalled an open forum meeting that was held at the fire hall back when LDI was initially formed. He felt this was one of the most productive forums that has been held. Alex Berry, said this would be a good format for LDI to communicate its new brand to the community. Councilwoman Flasch noted that some of the best ideas come from these type meetings and ground level ideas. Alex Berry said that last week a meeting was held where a draft vision statement was formulated and his advice would be to take all of these sessions and use this information to reformulate the draft. Mr. Berry said that once a new brand is formed then this can be brought to a community forum, which also serves as a way to recruit volunteers.

Members also discussed that “new residents” provide critical information on what attracted them to the town. They can provide information about retail areas that may be lacking. Linda Drum, business owner, noted that many visitors are disappointed in the amount of merchants that are often closed downtown. Members discussed the importance of downtown merchant input. Ms. Drum said several problems were pointed out at a recent merchant meeting; neither the town, LDI, nor the Chamber were included in this meeting. Ms. Drum mentioned several complaints that she heard from the meeting; including a lack of cross promotion, empty buildings on Main Street, and a lack of leadership in government. Eleanor Ames, board member, expressed concern that small business owners are not working together and feels that all businesses have something to offer. Ms. Krech summarized that often once all of the problems are expressed, it is much easier to move on to solutions and for committees to work together for solutions. Ms. Krech said that many communities have strong Merchants Associations, strong Chambers of Commerce, and strong Main Street programs; but what is important is that they

overlap and all strengthen one another. She said that this is not a duplication of efforts but a collaboration and resource for cross-promotion. Councilman Schiro said it is important for these issue to become forefront so that they can be resolved.

Councilman Lancaster continued that the condition of buildings downtown is an issue. He noted that as residents we know which businesses are open, whereas visitors only see vacancies. Councilman Lancaster recalled prior attempts to enforce the BOCA Code which only led to a few safety/electrical repairs of a particular building. He cautioned that any repairs beyond that would have been at the cost of the town. Councilman Lancaster said that he would rather see the buildings demolished than continue in their current condition. Councilman Meaney said that it is important to keep the lines of communication open and to continue positive dialogue between all parties.

Alex Berry, summarized that certainly the “stakeholders” have been identified and he would like to continue the discussion and look at “anticipated outcomes”.

Members discussed the “Outcomes” and how success can be measured in terms of revitalization.

*Comments received were as follows:*

- LDI addressing dilapidated buildings
- Improving the vacancy rate downtown
- Becoming a destination and seeing return visitors
- Family friendly atmosphere
- More local citizens downtown, Increase in retail gross receipts
- Green space
- Maintain Assets
- Retail Mix
- More Restaurants
- Business Promotion/Education

Councilwoman Flasch suggested business plan training for start-up merchants. Mr. Berry suggested that Entrepreneurship Training can certainly aid in making a business as successful as possible. Councilwoman Flasch inquired about options for start-up business programs. Mr. Berry said that VA Main Street is well versed many of these programs and feels they are very effective at helping fill storefronts.

Mr. Berry asked members if they had any final thoughts to conclude this portion of the discussion or any additional outcomes to add. Council members discussed visiting other localities such as Culpepper or Staunton that have successful downtowns. Joyce Krech, SBDC, noted that in looking at other localities it is important to recognize the processes that have taken place and to inquire about the stages of this change is beneficial. Eleanor Ames, board member, said that it is also important to recognize that some towns may want to know how Luray got to where it is today. Ms. Ames stated that she never anticipated to see the outcome of the Luray Depot, the success of the Greenway Trail, and the overall progress that has taken place. Councilman Meaney suggested small groups visiting these nearby towns. Liz Lewis, Executive Director, suggested a visit to Harrisonburg’ thriving downtown. Alex Berry added that he could speak with other Main Street directors and set-up some meetings, which would then facilitate the Downtown Revitalization Plan. Ms. Shifflett said that the LDI has appointed her, with Mayor Presgraves appointing Councilman Schiro to work in collaboration. Councilwoman Flasch countered that it may also be beneficial to have those same managers visit Luray to offer suggestions. Mr. Slye said that he does not want to miss out on the merchants and would like to capture the attention of these businesses and turn this into a positive resource. Board Member Starr Johnson stated that LDI is planning to establish a media contact for their organization.

## **Highlights of Virginia Main Street Program**

Alex Berry, VMS, provided a brief video presentation on the highlights of Virginia Main Street. The presentation included highlights of the operational relationships between VMS, DHCD, CDBG, and Enterprise Zone. Also, Mr. Berry presented key operational elements of VMS and discussed the principles for successful main street programs.

Alex Berry asked members if they had any closing comments to add. Board member, Starr Johnson, stated that she feels it is important to be appreciated and feel that one of the reasons LDI has succeeded in the past, was to continue to think ahead toward future fundraising and to express appreciation.

Councilman Lancaster cautioned that these changes won't happen overnight. He said that other localities have spent a great deal of years getting to where they are. Mr. Berry said it is important that everyone work together to determine what "Luray" will be known for and to find what works. He stressed that this is the key to successful downtown communities.

Mr. Berry noted the upcoming February 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> workshop at the Mimslyn with a guest speaker from National Main Street Center. He also mentioned other training opportunities, studies, and grants that are available to LDI through the Main Street Program. Alex Berry also advised that he would provide a copy of the power point presentation to members.

## **Next Steps**

Board President, Nancy Shifflett, thanked Alex Berry for his presentation and SBDC representatives for their assistance. Ms. Shifflett expressed gratitude to Ms. Sara Levinson and said that she has been the right-hand to LDI during this process. Ms. Shifflett said that she feels LDI is on the right track and hopes everyone can work together and put the Economic Development Plan into place. She said that she is pleased with the progress that has taken place over the past six weeks and looks forward to seeing new committees formed. Ms. Shifflett thanked everyone for their hard work and looks forward to seeing LDI meet all of its goals.

Councilman Meaney continued that he would like to participate in the visits to other localities and confirmed that LDI will schedule these. Councilman Schiro thanked Ms. Shifflett for all of her hard work and endeavors on this. Town Attorney, Jason Spitler, noted that the issue of dilapidated building seems to arise every few years. He advised that the town stick to the health, safety, and welfare issues foremost but also recognized that these buildings are a key problem. Mr. Spitler suggested identifying and maintaining a list of these buildings and bringing them to a public forum. Councilman Lancaster said that the Chamber is actively working on just that and plans to list these properties on the website to assist in the rent/lease process.

## **Adjourn**

There being no further business, Councilman Lancaster adjourned the work session of the Town Council at approximately 7:30 pm.

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Leroy Lancaster  
Luray Town Council

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Danielle P. Babb  
Deputy Clerk-Treasurer