



WORK SESSION of the Greenbelt City Council held Monday, April 16, 2001, for the purpose of holding a stakeholder meeting with commercial real estate brokers.

PRESENT WERE: Council members Edward V.J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, Thomas X. White, and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: David E. Moran, Assistant to the City Manager; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Amjad Kahn, HLA (owner, Belle Point Office Park); Linda Carter, Site Management (Property Manager, Hanover Office Park); Peter Minshall, Asset Capital Corporation, Bethesda (owner, Commerce I, 7701 Greenbelt Rd); Dennis Skelly, Donohoe Company (Property Manager, Commerce I); Amy Boyes, the Gazette; and Maria Piazzola, Greenbelt News Review.

Mayor Davis started the meeting at 8:00 p.m. by explaining the purpose of the stakeholder meetings. She noted that Council hears from some people that Greenbelt is a "plum" area to be but, on the other hand, hears reports of vacancies. She said Council would like to hear from this group what their experience has been and what suggestions they might have.

Mr. Kahn said he had more empty space than he should but that he recognized part of this problem was the off-road location of Belle Point. He's received a few calls from the sign he recently put up. Mr. Roberts asked if he might be better off to lease. Mr. Kahn responded that he thought the same issue would prevail; moreover, he has been offering 100% financing, with the result that it is more attractive to buy. Mayor Davis remarked that people are surprised how quiet his units are—that they expect more Beltway noise. Mr. Kahn described some of the above-required grade of materials used at Belle Point. Mr. Putens added that it was originally envisioned that the commercial space would also help to provide a sound buffer for the residential area.

Ms. Carter said Hanover Office Park is about 82% occupied right now. She later explained they have recently had one very large tenant leave. She said their vacancy rate is usually lower than this and that, in general, medical office space has lower turnover than other types of commercial leases.

Mr. Minshall's company bought the Commerce I building in December 1997 from First Union Bank. There was a "friendly foreclosure." When he took the building over, there were quite a few vacancies and maintenance problems. The vacancy rate right now is only about 7-8%. He said Greenbelt is definitely "one of the better places to be" in Prince George's County but that the problem in the county is that there is no growth in the tenant base: the same tenants are just moving around. He said the primary suggestion he wanted to bring to Council at this meeting was to encourage Greenbelt to push the county toward growth. In this context, he later discussed

information he has received regarding Goddard's efforts to bring its contractors onto its campus. One of his current tenants has been notified by Goddard that he must move, and he was told by someone who recently won a contract from NASA that the RFP had prohibited any allocation of funds in bids for outside office space. He said that this will result in a net loss of tenants in the area during a time when "no one is looking to move to Prince George's County."

In answer to some comparisons made by Mr. Minshall about growth in commercial space in other parts of the metropolitan area, Mr. White expressed reservations about whether that had been an excessive response to the surge in the economy that would now result in vacancies.

Mr. Minshall had high praise for the Police Department, saying Greenbelt's police are the friendliest and the most active of any place his company has property. He later added that from the standpoint of commercial property owners, the Police Department is one of the biggest advantages of being located in Greenbelt. There was general agreement about the work of the Police Department, though Mr. Kahn did cite an instance involving dumping on his property when he found the police non-responsive.

Ms. Carter agreed about the Police Department but particularly emphasized the extremely good response rate they had received to fire calls. Council said the initial response in that location would be from the West Lanham Fire Department rather than Greenbelt's but that they were very pleased to hear about the effective response.

Mayor Davis asked about experiences with the Code Enforcement Department. In general, the comments were positive. Mr. Skelly said they would prefer to see a little more flexibility in the Department, giving as an example their replacement of signs that were in bad condition with new ones of much higher quality and more appropriate style that the City objected to because they were slightly bigger. Ms. Carter also said that while Hanover Office Park unequivocally wants to comply with any needed code corrections and keep standards high, she considers some of the violations she has been receiving recently (e.g., for mud on the side of a building and for a broken board on a trash enclosure) to be more on the order of routine maintenance. She said she would like to understand these standards better, and the Mayor suggested that she feel free to call Celia Craze, Director, Planning and Community Development, to talk about these matters.

The forthcoming State Highway Administration Neighborhood Conservation Project and the City's own Hanover Parkway corridor study were discussed briefly.

Mr. Minshall and Mr. Skelly described a problem with people from Windsor Green coming down the hill and through their parking lot to get to the Safeway, oftentimes with shopping carts and children in tow. They are concerned about the safety issue, since there is no path or sidewalk and no easy way for pedestrians to get from the hill to the shopping center. Mr. White suggested that such walking path should be made part of the Post Office development. Council suggested that Mr. Skelly talk to Sheldon Goldberg, as a resident of that area and head of the Greenbelt East Advisory Committee, and they asked that Ms. Craze also be alerted.

In response to a question from Mr. Minshall, Council described some of the interactions between the City and the county.

Mr. Kahn asked Council if it would be possible to get a path from the commercial part of Belle Point to Greenbelt Lake. Council members thought this might already be in the plan for when the commercial building is completed, but they asked staff to check.

Mr. Minshall recommended to Council that the City might wish to subscribe to a publication called CoStar, also available on line, which is the source the commercial realtors use for information on the D.C. metropolitan area regarding rates, vacancies, etc.

Council thanked the participants for coming.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Gallagher

City Clerk