

Camden Council explores downtown funding, addresses neighborhood needs and public safety

The Oct. 6 meeting included a presentation on TIF, proposed changes to parking and traffic rules, neighborhood concerns and proclamations recognizing planning and fire prevention.

Safer streets, well-maintained neighborhoods and planning for Camden's future connected the discussions at the Oct. 6 meeting of Camden City Council in South Carolina, where members explored a potential funding tool for public improvements and considered measures affecting local businesses, traffic and parking.

Tripp Muldrow of Arnett Muldrow & Associates presented an overview of tax increment financing, or TIF, explaining how it could help Camden fund public improvements.

Mayor Vincent Sheheen explained that creating a tax increment financing, or TIF, district would not itself raise property tax rates. Instead, additional property tax revenue generated by growth within the district would help pay for eligible public improvements in that area. That revenue could also support borrowing to complete improvements up front.

For Camden, those improvements could include water and sewer systems, streetscaping and parking, helping meet everyday needs while supporting local businesses and redevelopment.

The proposed district includes portions of downtown and an area near the I-20 Exit 98 interchange. Sheheen identified the former Shops at Midtowne and Deluxe Inn properties as important redevelopment opportunities.

Other possibilities include streetscaping on Broad and Rutledge streets, clock tower maintenance, an entrance feature near the interstate and additional downtown parking. These projects remain possibilities, with details still to be developed and considered.

Tuesday's meeting was about public education and transparency, and no action was taken to establish a TIF district. Sheheen said Council would continue discussing the proposal and potential projects before deciding whether to move forward.

Council recognized October as Community Planning Month and Fire Prevention Awareness Month through proclamations highlighting planning and fire safety in Camden.

Planning and Development Director Shawn Putnam reported on efforts to address overgrown lots, trash, unlicensed vehicles and other property maintenance concerns. Six uninhabitable structures have been demolished at their owners' expense this year, and debris was cleared from a railroad right of way near Chestnut Street. Putnam said posting notices on properties has helped resolve more than 90% of violations before court citations are needed.

Raymond Peterson and Judge Tommy Cooper requested consideration of annexation for Pine Creek, a neighborhood off Dicey Creek Road, citing challenges with maintaining its private roads. Peterson said petitions had been submitted and requested further discussion with City staff and Council.

Lisa Moore shared additional neighborhood support for temporarily restricting Halloween traffic on a portion of Fair and Lyttleton streets to protect trick-or-treaters. Sheheen asked Police Chief Jack Rushing to provide a recommendation by the end of the week.

In other business, Council approved second reading of the rezoning request for 1009 Rippondon Street, with two opposing votes. Councilman William Wilkes and Councilwoman Davis voted against the request; all other members voted in favor. Council unanimously approved second reading of a special property tax assessment for historic property at 1008 Broad Street.

Council also unanimously approved first reading of proposed local restrictions on utility terrain vehicles. Police Chief Jack Rushing explained that the measure addresses traffic safety concerns following a change in state law allowing vehicles on certain roads. The proposal requires another reading before becoming final.

A separate zoning amendment would adjust limits on awnings extending over downtown sidewalks. Putnam said the existing rule prevented a Rutledge Street business from expanding its awning because of the sidewalk's width. The proposed change would provide more flexibility while maintaining a maximum awning size.

As part of an effort to bring the City's ordinances up to date, Council unanimously approved first reading of a proposal to restore local parking rules and retain a portion of citation revenue locally. Members increased several proposed fines while leaving the overtime parking fine unchanged and requested a fire lane definition before second reading.

Keeping Camden clean and protecting family property also entered the conversation. Councilman Phil Elliott called for a litter awareness campaign, while Councilman William Wilkes highlighted his partnership with the Center for Heirs' Property to offer free seminars Oct. 17 at the Kirkwood Community Center and Oct. 24 at the Robert Mills Courthouse.

Drawing on a conversation with Greenville Mayor Knox White, Sheheen suggested possible signs downtown to raise awareness of Camden's noise ordinance and noted that police have already issued citations for violations.

Agendas, approved minutes, meeting dates and additional information are available at www.experiencecamdensc.com.