

CITY OF ABERDEEN ♦ COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW: LEN PARRISH

Stakeholder: Len Parrish, Director of Community & Economic Development
Harford County—Department of Community & Economic Development
Date: Wednesday, March 23, 2022 | 10:00am-10:45am | Teams Virtual Meeting
WM Team: Lauren Good, Project Manager
Nicky Davis, Planner

STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION

Len has been the Director of Community & Economic Development for Harford County since December 2014. In this role, he oversees the housing, community development, transit, and economic development programs offered by Harford County through a number of grant funded projects from federal, state, and local entities. The Department brings together housing, transportation, and job services to the citizens of the County.

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DISCUSSION TOPICS

FROM AN ECONOMIC OR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE, WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES FACING ABERDEEN TODAY? WHAT ABOUT OVER THE NEXT 10-20 YEARS?

- APG is the #1 employer. On/off-Post employment is about 30,000 employees within the County. Not seeing a lot of residential development elsewhere in the County.
- Going to see much more remote working. APG is operating at 50% on-Post right now.
- Anything with Amtrak/MARC transportation would have been a bigger issue but may not have been/will be as much now due to Covid.
- Need to ask, "what is defense community looking like regarding transportation."
- Construction of new hospital. Health care is #2 sector within the County. There will be some job creation within the County, but most involves employee transfers from Havre de Grace. Anticipating new technology uses in the future.
- Anticipate Aberdeen will see more residential growth than other areas in the County, especially on north end near Ripken Stadium.

- With rooftops brings retail – will continue to do well. Absorption has gone up and vacancy down from 8% to 6% during Covid.
- Industrial is #4 sector in County with many facilities just outside the City. Anticipates additional industrial facilities to be developed across from the stadium.
- City is served well by the bus system. Would like to see MARC system throughout the County – could see travel from North Carolina to Boston but there is a 12-mile gap in area. Would like to see connection to SEPTA in the future, which would open the City up to more growth. This has been on the State’s radar for a while and received a lot of traction under

the O’Malley Administration. The main station would have to be in located in Delaware, so he looked to Perryville as an appropriate place for a station, but the cost was much higher than the State was willing to absorb. Would have to work with Amtrak for 4th rail – have land but question remains whose responsibility this would be. Hope was that maybe with ARPA funding, rail would be considered, but with upcoming change in Maryland Governor, this conversation is going to be starting over. It will take 10-20 years for this project to build out (once started) and take a major commitment from multiple parties.

WHAT TRENDS ARE YOU SEEING IN THE COMMUNITY? AND PARTICULARLY FROM A BUSINESS/RETAIL/OTHER COMMERCIAL STANDPOINT?

- Data centers are another opportunity. These are large industrial/warehouse type facilities. They will not employ a lot of people but will use a lot of power. Big data is key for large online platforms. There will likely be defense contractors and private sector facilities that

want to locate near them.

- Automation and artificial intelligence are developed at APG and within the City, but also utilized locally.
- Advanced manufacturing (both building and research) will likely continue.

HOW CAN ABERDEEN CONTINUE TO DIFFERENTIATE ITSELF FROM OTHER AREAS OF THE REGION/STATE?

- Train station – main station in Harford County.
- Festival Park has some opportunity – large park in center of town in front of the City Administration building. Doing nice job using

the facility in terms of farmers’ market and concerts, but the City could take advantage of it more, including additional promotion of the resource.

HOW CAN ABERDEEN ATTRACT BETTER DIVERSITY OF BUSINESSES OR SHOULD THE CITY FOCUS ON PARTICULAR NICHE AREAS?

- Always focus on diversification for economic development, but this is done well for the County generally.
- Concern more for the future – people are being hired at the hospital and have to be there in-person. For defense industry, this is not the case. Defense will potentially hire people from outside the area who will be able to do the majority of their work from other locations. There is likely to be less emphasis on on-Post locations for defense side of things (*confirm with Nathan Osborne*). There

will be more opportunities to bring in additional defense contractors. The issue is they are not employing the higher number of employees that were anticipated during BRAC, so larger buildings/offices have fewer people/need for space.

- Future trends will include smaller office spaces and/or flexible design and location near the train station as it provides an easy in/out for commuters.
- Sports tourism is going to continue to grow in the County. The majority of County tourism

money comes from Ripken baseball. They are getting ready to open 2 new fields and possibly 2 more. There are opportunities for week-long tournaments. Attendees will be looking for restaurants, hotels, and gas stations. They will be moving their headquarters from Baltimore to Aberdeen.

- Flexibility in zoning is key near the stadium. A vacant building is currently transitioning to self-storage in the area – it will do well but

not necessarily the best use for area to leverage stadium and visitors.

- Rail continues to do well.
- There has been a shift to people buying products online, but many still like to shop in neighborhood areas – local restaurants and retail (mom and pop vs national).
- Grocery is always a concern for Rt. 40 – not necessarily in Aberdeen but generally. Would like to see grocer move into the area.

WHAT NEEDS ARE THERE FOR BUSINESSES IN THE CITY/REGION? FOR SMALL OR START-UP BUSINESSES? (E.G., INCUBATOR SPACES, SKILLS TRAINING, OTHER RESOURCES)

- Harford County Public Schools and the Community College are doing a good job coming together to provide training for trades.
- Lab space & related training continue to be

- needs.
- There is an ongoing need for assistance in obtaining military clearance.
- The college could potentially make significant investment in the City.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS OBSTACLES TO REINVESTMENT IN THE CITY? WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THE CITY COULD DO TO REMOVE THOSE OBSTACLES?

- Aberdeen seems pretty flexible in terms of development/developer needs. This is part of the reason the hospital chose this location. The City is willing to work with those coming.
- Vacant spaces are present throughout the

- City and County – nothing can really be done to incentivize.
- There is a high land cost, which is a problem throughout the County, not just in Aberdeen.

ARE THERE SERVICES OR PROGRAMS THAT THE CITY SHOULD CONSIDER PARTICIPATING?

- Continue supporting the Main Street program, which DHCD continues to fund. This has been a strong program generally.
- Enterprise Zone designation is key – there are real property and income tax benefits when

- businesses locate within the area. Big chunk of Aberdeen falls within the Enterprise Zone.
- Not a ton of economic incentives within the County other than matching State money that goes into the community.

THE COUNTY'S RECENT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN NOTED A DESIRE FOR COORDINATION REGARDING IMPROVEMENTS WITHIN THE US 40 CORRIDOR—CAN YOU PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON WHAT IS DESIRED?

- Façade improvements – have grants/loans that can be used on a commercial building; generally only for properties that front Rt. 40.

- Redevelopment/beautification along corridor always welcome; new construction has been pretty decent.

COULD YOU TALK A LITTLE ABOUT ANY HOUSING NEEDS/OPPORTUNITIES?

- Worry about affordable housing within Harford County. Any lower/entry level jobs will have difficulty finding housing. Hope that new housing developing in north end will provide opportunities. This is a need countywide – there are plenty of jobs

- available, but the question is where employees are going to live and how are they going to get to jobs.
- There are no extreme issues related to housing within the City.
- There are problems with homelessness

throughout the County and, at one time, Aberdeen was a hub for this population but not the case so much anymore. The County is looking to expand the current individual homeless shelter; they do not have a family shelter.

- Family House in Aberdeen is a great provider that tries to help families in transitional vs emergency housing. Giving/working them on a year-long program – hand up vs hand out to get people back to self-sufficiency. The County is going to continue to invest with them and are in the process of merging with the individual homeless shelter.
- Senior living – giving people the opportunity to age-in-place is key. Aberdeen has at least 1-2 senior housing communities. The focus should be on finding areas where services can be provided onsite.

- Accessory dwelling units are available. These provide an opportunity to have aging parents living with you. Flexibility in zoning is key to allow. Or even kids getting out of college but not going out on their own. ADUs provide help for affordable housing needs and providing housing stock in general.
- All programs have a wait list (Housing Choice Vouchers, etc.).
- There is a big push for moving toward Areas of Opportunity (Opportunity Zones). Aberdeen had not been in an Opportunity Zone previously, but one present toward south end from rail line to APG – more State money is going toward these areas and is pushing this growth more toward those areas. There is a need if a developer was interested and could get approved.

DURING PREVIOUS WORKSHOPS AND THE COMMUNITY SURVEY, CRIME WITHIN THE CITY WAS BROUGHT UP A FEW TIMES. DO YOU FIND THAT THERE IS HESITATION TO LOCATE IN THE CITY DUE TO THIS PERCEPTION?

- Part of this is a perception issue. Don't think there is really a crime issue in Aberdeen. There is a strong policing unit and community policing unit. They do a good job trying to interact with communities that are most in need.
- Problems with crime occur in specific, known

communities within the City. This is not impacting business attraction. Problem areas are typically south of the railroad and closer to APG. This is a more low-income area where drug use and crime occur typically. While there is a problem, businesses aren't trying to locate here – their focus is more on locations closer to I-95.

Meeting Notes:

Lauren Good, Project Manager

Nicky Davis, Planner

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