

ATLANTIC CITY EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Tuesday, February 15, 2022

Zoom Conference Call

1) REMARKS FROM DCA CHIEF OF STAFF AND ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KIM HOLMES ON BEHALF OF LT. GOVERNOR SHEILA OLIVER

- a) Noted it has been several months since the Executive Council last met in October 2021.
- b) Brought the Executive Council up to speed on topics of interest to Atlantic City.
- c) Utility Shutoff Moratorium
 - i. Utility shutoff grace period extended from December 31, 2021, to March 15, 2022, for all water, electric, and sewer customers.
 - ii. Extension will allow households to work out a payment plan with their utility provider and seek utility assistance.
 - iii. People can use screening tool DCAid by visiting nj.gov/dca/dcaid to find out if they're eligible for energy assistance.
 - iv. It is worth checking out and sharing with your network because energy assistance programs significantly expanded income eligibility this year to include even moderate-income households.
 - v. For example, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps households at or below 60 percent of the state median income (\$6,439 a month for a family of four) and the Universal Service Fund (USF) program provides a monthly credit on electric and gas bills for households at or below 400 percent of the federal poverty level (\$8,833 a month for a family of four).
- d) Eviction Protection
 - i. Help us spread the word that eviction protections are in place in New Jersey for nonpayment of rent during the pandemic, but tenants must submit an income self-certification form to DCA to benefit from these protections.
 - ii. Once tenants are verified as income-eligible for the eviction protections, they can show this self-certification form to their landlords and to the courts to let them know that they should not be evicted for nonpayment of rent.
 - iii. People can visit <https://covid19.nj.gov/renter> to find out more about the eviction protections available and how to self-certify for these protections.
- e) Eviction Prevention
 - i. Mentioned DCA's Access to Counsel pilot program a couple times last year to the Executive Council.
 - ii. Since the pilot program launched in August, DCA has expanded access to free and quality legal representation to more than 100 renter households in the three communities we are operating in.
 - iii. One of the three communities is Atlantic City. In Atlantic City about 40 households have been directly assisted through the pilot program. These 40 households

included the elderly, disabled, and very low-income single parents who were diverted from eviction, including having their cases dismissed.

- iv. Many more households in the city also received information about their rights and current protections under the law.
 - v. DCA will soon be starting a new Eviction Diversion Initiative across the state.
 - vi. The initiative will provide \$2.5 million to fund 28 resource navigators, who will cover every vicinage in the state.
 - vii. These resource navigators will work with tenants in danger of eviction to assist them with the income self-certification process and to help connect them with any potential resources.
 - viii. The resource navigators will also have access to a \$2 million flexible fund at DCA that can provide quick, one-time assistance to tenants to get them necessary resources to sustain housing that cannot be funded elsewhere.
 - ix. This initiative is aimed at further defending against evictions and diverting low-income tenants from housing insecurity.
- f) Local Recreation Improvement Grants
- i. Last month, DCA awarded \$10 million in Local Recreation Improvement Grants to counties, municipalities, and school districts across New Jersey to ensure public access to quality outdoor recreation and community resources.
 - ii. The grants were awarded to 162 local governments after a competitive application process.
 - iii. The City of Atlantic City was one of the local governments to receive a recreation improvement grant.
 - iv. The City will use the \$100,000 grant for improvements to Weekes Memorial Park.
 - v. DCA – specifically Division of Local Government Services – developed the recreation grants, in part, to provide quality outdoor recreational space for the residents of underserved communities.
 - vi. This need has been especially heightened over the last two years as people have searched for outdoor spaces to help alleviate stress and anxiety brought on by the pandemic.
- g) Atlantic City Aquarium
- i. Significant renovations are happening at the Atlantic City Aquarium, which is getting a new roof; electrical and HVAC improvements; window and flooring replacements; exhibit upgrades; and gift shop renovations.
 - ii. It has been about 20 years since any major repairs have occurred at the aquarium.
 - iii. The aquarium – and, by extension, Gardner’s Basin – are incredible assets for Atlantic City on a variety of levels.
 - iv. They provide family-friendly tourism options beyond the casinos, hotels, and the beaches; they offer an authentic sense of place; and they can be a catalyst to attract new residents, many of whom want access to parks, nature, and recreation.
 - v. This is why the State – specifically DCA, DEP and CRDA – is investing in making the aquarium a first-class facility.
- h) Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit Program

- i. There is a lot going on in Atlantic City with regard to the Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit Program, which is designed to spur neighborhood renewal through strategies developed by residents and the community-based nonprofit organizations that assist them.
- ii. Last year, the city's Chelsea neighborhood received a more than \$680,000 funding award through NRTC and activities are underway to spur economic growth.
- iii. In addition, a NRTC planning grant was approved for the City's Inlet neighborhood last year and Atlantic Cape Community College is taking the lead in preparing a NRTC neighborhood plan.
- iv. And a NRTC Neighborhood Plan was approved for the City's Midtown neighborhood last fall, with AtlantiCare Foundation as its lead entity.
- v. Also, DCA has received applications for NRTC funding from the Atlantic City Development Corporation for the Chelsea neighborhood; the Atlantic County Economic Alliance for the Ducktown neighborhood; and AtlantiCare Foundation for the Midtown neighborhood.
- vi. All the applications are under review with final decisions anticipated by the end of March.

2) REMARKS FROM ATLANTIC CITY INITIATIVES PROJECT OFFICE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICHAEL C. EPPS, ESQ.,

- a) We have strong energy coming out of the State of the City address. City of Atlantic City Mayor Marty Small did a great job with the address and he is building up the City's recreation program.
- b) Many of the new people working in recreation are working in the office where the Atlantic City Initiatives Project Office (ACIPO) is located. Have brought energy into the space.
- c) For the young people of the city, we need to find things for them to do to keep them engaged. The recreation program promises to do that.
- d) ACIPO is looking to do an outdoor theater camp in Atlantic City for young people.
 - i. Will need a stage and rehearsal space.
 - ii. ACIPO looking to get that program moving and funding donated.
- e) The public health and wellness subcommittee is still active under the Atlantic City Restart and Recovery Working Group. Dr. Kifle Mihrete, Ph.D., MPH, the City's full-time health officer, is running the subcommittee, which is looking to get a community initiative organized.
- f) As we get to spring, ACIPO wants to reach out to neighborhoods for engagement.

3) REMARKS FROM CASINO REINVESTMENT DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MONICA DE LOS RIOS

- a) Introduced herself to the Executive Council. Explained that she has worked with the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) as general counsel for the last several years.
- b) Said that CRDA Deputy Director Rosa Farias will leave the Authority on March 1 to return to the State Senate staff.

- c) ACIPO Executive Director Michael Epps told Ms. Farias that he was sorry to see her leave Atlantic City and the work here.
- d) Ms. Farias said leaving CRDA and working in Atlantic City was bittersweet. She promised to take her advocacy of Atlantic City to the State Legislature. She said everyone can agree that three years ago, Jim Johnson, who led the effort to draft the Atlantic City Transition Report, dared to create something new in Atlantic City. She said she is committed to that vision for the city and implored everyone on the Executive Council to continue that vision and effort.

4) PRESENTATION: CHELSEA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, PRESENTED BY CHELSEA EDC PRESIDENT ELIZABETH TERENIK

- a) DCA's Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit (NRTC) grants have been a great opportunity to move some projects forward in the city's Chelsea neighborhood.
- b) Recognized Carol Ruffu, Brian Jackson from Stockton University, and Stephanie Koch from the Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City who are on Chelsea EDC board and were on the Executive Council call.
- c) Encouraged people to go to Chelsea EDC website for a schedule of what's going on. Website features resources for residents and resources for businesses. The organization put a lot of effort into the website and wants people to use it.
- d) Chelsea EDC hosted many public meetings about the NRTC grants. Takes this grant funding and transparency about how it is used seriously and with incredible responsibility.
- e) Learned from the public meetings that public safety is top of mind for every resident and business owner.
- f) Chelsea EDC looking into having its own public safety ambassadors, i.e. two ambassadors on bikes part-time in the next 30 days; hope to have them go full-time soon.
- g) Want to buy security cameras and connect the cameras into the City's public safety building.
- h) Offering a program to promote homeownership in the Chelsea neighborhood.
- i) First round of grants going to renters in the neighborhood who want to become homeowners. Putting door hangers on every doorknob in the neighborhood about the grant program.
- j) Supporting social worker outreach to supplement efforts of police.
- k) Looking to do technology education and technology career pathways for students in neighborhood.
- l) Focusing on neighborhood beautification efforts.
- m) Working with immigrants to get the higher education degrees and credits they achieved in their home countries recognized in the U.S. so they can get higher income jobs.
- n) Initiative with Stockton University's Atlantic City campus to introduce students to local restaurants near the campus. Entice them with free food to participate and get them exposed to the wonderful eating establishments and local residents.
- o) Reaching out to LGBTQ community to encourage them to buy homes in Chelsea.
- p) Looking to increase the quality of the housing stock in Chelsea and construct housing on vacant and underused lots.

5) GOOD OF THE ORDER

- a) Brian Jackson, chief operating officer of the Atlantic City campus of Stockton University, said that as part of Stockton's 50th anniversary celebration, it is doing a cleanup day on Saturday, April 23rd in Atlantic City.
- b) There will be nine (9) cleanup site projects around the city. Stockton is looking for 1,000 volunteers on this citywide effort.
- c) Volunteers will come back to O'Donnell Memorial Park for food, entertainment, and games.
- d) City Business Administrator Anthony Swan thanked Mr. Jackson and noted that Stockton University has been a fantastic partner with the City.
- e) BA Swan said the City this year wants to push community involvement and keeping neighborhoods clean. At the State of City address, Mayor Small announced the Golden Broom award, which will be awarded during the State of the City address next year to the city's cleanest neighborhood. The City is doing this for community engagement and to help public works keep up with cleaning.
- f) BA Swan said the City has in its budget the purchase of another street cleaning machine so the City will have two.
- g) Carol Ruffu, representing the City's Historical Preservation Commission, said the commission had its reorganization meeting on Wednesday and she was named chairperson again this year. Heather Perez will be vice chairperson and she is keeping track of the city's historic properties.
- h) The commission received a grant to do surveys of two neighborhoods in the city – Lower Chelsea and Ducktown. In doing the surveys, they found in Lower Chelsea that not enough homes can be designated as historical because so many changes have been made to the homes' exteriors so they are no longer historical. However, there is a section of properties in Lower Chelsea that can be helped.
- i) Ruffu explained that a historical designation will not prevent property owners from making interior changes. They can even make changes to the exterior within reason. She said a homeowner can also decide to not have their home designated as historic.
- j) In Ducktown, the commission didn't find any homes that hadn't been changed since the 1990s. It did find a lot of businesses in Ducktown that are historic. So, maybe the commission can do a historical business district. A benefit is that many of these businesses are family-owned and have been for years and years.
- k) She said if Ducktown is named a historical business district, the commission can get business plaques that look the same and explain a bit about the business so that people know they are in a historic district.
- l) Working on this for marketing purposes; so people know there is more to do in Atlantic City than visit the casinos and beach. They can come learn about city neighborhoods' history.