

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, September 30, 2015, with the Roosevelt Center Owner.

Mayor Jordan started the meeting at 8:03 p.m. The meeting was held in Room 201 of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Judith F. Davis, Konrad E. Herling, Leta M. Mach, Silke I. Pope, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Emmett V. Jordan.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Celia Craze, Acting City Manager; and Cindy Murray, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: George Christacos, Lisa Christacos and Steven Christacos, Roosevelt Center Owners; Michael Hartman and Frank Gervasi, New Deal Café; Caitlyn McGrath, Greenbelt Theater; Leonard Wallace, Realty One; George Boyce, Greenbelt Maker Space/Green Stems; Kelly Ivy, Linda Ivy, Gwen Vaccaro, Susan Stewart, Lore Rosenthal and others.

Following introductions, Mr. Christacos thanked Council for inviting him to attend the work session. Mayor Jordan commented on the City's interest in the success of Roosevelt Center and said he hoped that Council could meet with Mr. Christacos on a regular schedule, perhaps every two years.

Mr. Christacos said he has owned Roosevelt Center for 40 years and summarized some of the upgrades he has made to the Center. He reported there is currently a 30 percent vacancy rate. Mr. Christacos said overall, he felt he has a good cooperative working relationship with the City.

Mayor Jordan reported on the City's efforts to be more active on attracting and retaining businesses in the City, including contracting with the Hyattsville Community Development Corporation to develop a series of next steps in economic development. He also noted the new home construction at Greenbelt Station and the possibility of the FBI relocation to Greenbelt.

There was discussion regarding marketing efforts for the vacant spaces in the Center. Mr. Christacos noted his experience in business and restaurants and his belief that another restaurant in the Center would cause competition for the existing restaurants. Council disagreed, noting that restaurant hubs have proven successful. Mr. Christacos said he would explore this possibility further. He added that he is very willing to work with prospective tenants.

In response to a question from Ms. Davis, Mr. Christacos said he regularly works with/helps out his existing tenants. Mrs. Christacos strongly agreed, noting they had a loss of \$75,000 from tenants in arrears who ended up closing the business. She added that they currently have two tenants \$40,000 in arrears. Mrs. Christacos said that she would send the rent rolls to show what merchants are paying and those behind on rent.

Ms. Davis asked who is responsible for interior paint and maintenance. Mr. Christacos said the tenant is responsible for the interior space and he is responsible for the roof and exterior space.

Mr. Roberts said the last ten years have been difficult on small businesses throughout the area. He asked how rents in Roosevelt Center compared to other areas in the County. Mr. Christacos said rent in Roosevelt Center was lower than other areas. Ms. Pope asked the average rent per square foot. Mr. Christacos said it depends on how much the tenant can afford.

Mr. Roberts thanked Mr. Christacos for working with the Greenbelt Step Club on their new space and not requiring them to pay rent until they were in operation. Mr. Christacos said he is also working with the new church relocating to the Center and giving them five months of rent free.

Ms. Craze provided an update on code enforcement issues at Roosevelt Center. She said there are currently a couple violations in the process of being closed out and the only active violation right now is at Greenbelt Consumer Cooperative.

Mr. Putens, Mr. Herling and Ms. Pope noted the need for the City, Mr. Christacos and the Roosevelt Center merchants to work together for the future success of the Center. Mr. Christacos said he is very willing to work with the City and the merchants.

Ms. Davis suggested that Mr. Christacos consider putting a management person for Roosevelt Center in place to regularly talk to every merchant. She said that more active management would go a long way to making the merchants feel better. Mr. Christacos commented on the cost associated with hiring another employee to regularly check on the merchants. He added that he is in the Center on a regular basis (about once a month) and visits the merchants.

Ms. Davis and Ms. Pope mentioned the need for the vacant spaces to be spruced up in order to attract commercial tenants, similar to what is done for residential property. Mr. Christacos explained the commercial build-out process once a tenant is secured. He added that for a 90 year old structure, he thought the Center looked pretty good. (Staff Correction – The structure is actually 77 years old.) Ms. Davis noted the need for regular maintenance on the awnings. Mr. Christacos said he will be sure any maintenance issues are addressed.

Mr. Roberts said the Roosevelt Center is a very beautiful place. He added that he believes most of the tenants are happy because they stay in place.

Ms. McGrath, Greenbelt Theater and Chair of the Roosevelt Center Merchants Association (RCMA), asked where the current vacant space was located. Mr. Christacos said the second floor offices and the old Curves space.

There was discussion regarding the recently installed roof at the Center. Mr. Roberts said he did not think roof mounted heating and air conditioning units should be installed because they will destroy the roof.

Susan Stewart suggested that the vacant commercial space in the Center be advertised on-line. Mr. Christacos said he thought that was a good idea.

Linda Ivy said she sees Mr. Christacos in the Center on a regular basis. She added that any upgrades (sprucing up) he would do to the vacant space would have to be redone during the commercial build-out for a new tenant. She said commercial build-out is standard operating

practice for commercial leasing operations. Kelly Ivy reported that Mr. Christacos had spent \$9,000 in repairs to the second floor offices that the previous tenants had damaged.

George Boyce, Greenbelt Maker Space, spoke in support of Mr. Christacos as a landlord. He said Mr. Christacos had been very agreeable to work with since he began leasing space.

Mayor Jordan asked Mr. Wallace of Realty One about the commercial property market. Mr. Wallace said he had been working on drawing tenants to the Center for the past 29 years. He noted that only certain types of business can make it there. Mr. Wallace stressed the need to have directional signage to the Center. Ms. Craze said generally zoning ordinances don't allow for off premise signage. Noting that Roosevelt Center was considered a park, Mr. Wallace suggested park type signage be considered.

Michael Hartman, New Deal Café, reported he had been dealing with both Mr. and Mrs. Christacos over the past two years and found them to be responsive to his needs. He added that he agreed with Mr. Wallace that directional signage was needed.

Caitlyn McGrath, Roosevelt Center Merchants Association, invited Mr. Christacos to attend the next RCMA meeting scheduled for October 27, 2015, at 8:00 a.m.

Council thanked everyone for attending. Mayor Jordan mentioned the City's Business Breakfast on October 14th and invited Mr. Christacos and the merchants to attend.

The meeting ended at 9:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Cindy Murray
City Clerk*