

SOUTH*Side* Community Benefit District

August 26, 2013

Councilman Eric R. Evans
Bethlehem City Council President
10 East Church Street
Bethlehem PA 18018

**Re: *Proposed Southside Bethlehem Community Benefit District
Request to Schedule a Public Hearing***

Dear Council President Evans:

Thank you very much for taking the time earlier this year to meet with me to discuss the process for Council to consider the possible formation of a Community Benefit District (CBD) in South Bethlehem. The resulting letter from Solicitor Spadoni to me of April 3, 2013 and the attached outline were very helpful and provided a template for the Steering Committee's subsequent actions.

As requested in Solicitor Spadoni's April 3, 2013 letter, the purpose of this correspondence is three-fold in nature:

- To inform City Council of the specific actions that the Steering Committee has implemented prior to and since receiving the letter of April 3,
- To inform City Council of the results of those actions, and
- To formally request that City Council schedule a public hearing to consider the resulting plan for the Southside Bethlehem CBD per the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Neighborhood Improvement District Act of 2000 ("Act").

As you know, structured discussions about creating a CBD in South Bethlehem began in June 2012. Information regarding the first two bulleted items above is presented as an attachment.

On August 12, 2013, following 14 months of work on this important endeavor, the Steering Committee met to discuss community feedback provided to date from all sources and to explore how the Draft Plan could be revised so that there will be general consensus in the community to support a revised Plan. These changes are reflected in the attached copy of the CBD Plan. The Steering Committee strongly believes that these changes address all major comments received by property owners throughout several months of extensive community outreach and public involvement efforts.

southsidebethlehem.org



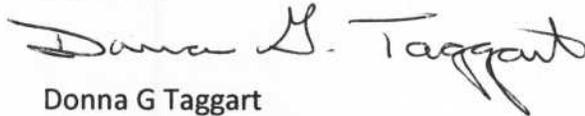
South Bethlehem CBD Steering Committee

Dennis Benner
John Brzyski
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Rob De Beer
Larry Eighmy
Dale Kochard
Louis Intile
Ellen Larmer
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Chris McCluskey
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Lisa Pektor
Paul Pierpoint
Santiago Rivera
John Saraceno
Tony Silvoy
Cleo Smith
Brian Tallarico
Ron Unger
Dave Urban
Jeff Vaclavik

With these changes, we are confident that the revised CBD Plan will be supported by the resulting affected property owners and as such, we respectfully request that City Council schedule and advertise a formal public hearing on the CBD Plan as mandated by the Act. Because the Act requires that all owners and lessees of affected properties in the proposed CBD be provided with access to the Plan and notice of the date, time, and location of the public hearing at least 30 days in advance of the hearing, we request that such a hearing be scheduled for some time in late October.

On behalf of the Southside Bethlehem CBD Steering Committee, thank you very much for your attention to this important matter and your consideration of this request. If you or other members of Council or the City Administration have any questions about the proposed CBD or the request to schedule the public hearing, please feel free to contact me at your convenience. We look forward to the successful establishment of the CBD as South Bethlehem continues its transformation.

Sincerely,



Donna G Taggart
Southside Bethlehem CBD Steering Committee consultant

CC: Councilwoman Jean Belinski
Councilman David T. DiGiacinto
Councilwoman Karen D. Dolan
Councilman Robert J. Donchez
Councilman Michael D. Recchiuti
Councilman J. William Reynolds
Honorable Mayor John Callahan
Joseph Kelly, Director of Community and Economic Development
Tony Hanna, Executive Director, Redevelopment Authority of the City of Bethlehem
Cynthia Biedenkopf, City Clerk
Christopher Spandoni, Esq., City Council Solicitor
Southside Bethlehem CBD Steering Committee

**PROPOSED SOUTHSIDE BETHLEHEM COMMUNITY BENEFIT DISTRICT
DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND CHRONOLOGY**

FORMATION OF A STEERING COMMITTEE

In *June of 2012*, a group of South Bethlehem property and business owners began meeting to discuss the possible formation of a CBD to support improvements to the Southside business district. The initial group understood the importance of building consensus and having support from a broad base of stakeholders, so a Steering Committee was formed that was comprised of not-for-profit and private property owners. Property owners as well as business owners who lease space in the downtown were included and represented properties spread geographically throughout the Southside.

The Steering Committee met over the course of the *summer and fall of 2012* to research CBD models and best practices and develop some conceptual ideas for how a CBD might benefit South Bethlehem. Based on this work, the Steering Committee created an informational brochure to be used in conducting outreach to potential CBD stakeholders.

PRELIMINARY COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Steering Committee spent *late 2012 through the spring of 2013* meeting one-on-one with more than 50 property owners, business owners, and downtown stakeholders about the CBD concept and what it would mean for South Bethlehem.

It was during that period that the Steering Committee reached out to City of Bethlehem officials to discuss their perspectives on the CBD concept, culminating in Solicitor Spadoni's April 3, 2013 letter outlining the City's required next steps. The City Administration has been kept regularly informed of the progress of the Steering Committee.

1st COMMUNITY INFORMATIONAL MEETING

On *April 25, 2013*, the Steering Committee mailed a letter to all property and business owners within the boundaries of the proposed CBD to notify them of the ongoing discussions surrounding the possible formation of a CBD and to invite them to attend a community meeting scheduled for May 6 in order to learn more about the CBD concept and provide input.



The **May 6** meeting was held at the Comfort Suites in Bethlehem and included a presentation on the basics of what a CBD is and how it would function, preliminary thoughts on possible boundaries, and more. Approximately 40 people attended the meeting, and there were very productive discussions. Much of the discussion related to the City's role in providing improvements within the downtown and whether single family residential properties should be assessed a CBD fee (such as a flat \$100/year fee).

DEVELOPMENT OF A DRAFT CBD PLAN

Based on the overall favorable response received from participants at the meeting and during previous one-on-one meetings with property owners, the Steering Committee moved forward with the development of a Draft CBD Plan which included all of the information as set forth in the Act. On **May 31, 2013** a letter was mailed to each property owner and lessee within the boundaries of the proposed CBD informing them of the availability of the Draft Plan (it was available for download at www.southsidebethlehem.org and hardcopies were made available at City Hall and seven different locations in the CBD) and inviting them to attend a meeting on July 10, 2013 to learn more and/or provide input on the Draft Plan.

OUTREACH TO 4 BLOCKS INTERNATIONAL

In addition, the Steering Committee worked in partnership with Community Action Development Corporation Bethlehem (CADCB) to translate that letter and project information into Spanish and to reach out directly to the Spanish-speaking community to make sure they understood the process and their ability to provide input. The Steering Committee also coordinated a special meeting for the benefit of property owners in the "4 Blocks International" neighborhood (Fourth Street between Hayes and Fillmore), with CADCB helping to get the word out to property owners in this part of the City. This meeting was held at the Hispanic Center Lehigh Valley on **July 2, 2013**, but attendance was extremely low, with only one commercial property owner from this area attending.

2ND COMMUNITY INFORMATIONAL MEETING

The second community meeting was held on **July 10, 2013** at the Comfort Suites in Bethlehem and included a presentation on the Draft CBD Plan. Approximately 50 people attended the meeting and, once again, discussions were very productive. As was previously the case, the portion of the Draft Plan that received the most objections from property owners was the inclusion of a flat \$100/year assessment on single family residential properties.

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Subsequent to the July 10 meeting, the Steering Committee had further discussions with Tony Hanna, Executive Director of the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Bethlehem (RDA), about how funds from the Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) District in South Bethlehem might be used to support downtown improvements in conjunction with the efforts to be funded by the CBD. The RDA seems to be amenable to providing improvements within the boundaries of the TIF similar to those proposed within the CBD. The Steering Committee is very excited and encouraged about these collaborative efforts and is planning continued discussions with Mr. Hanna to formalize this partnership.

Because feedback from property owners in the 4 Blocks International neighborhood to date had been limited, and because that which was received was generally not supportive of the CBD, the Steering Committee wanted to be very certain it had a firm understanding of the position of these property owners before moving forward. As such the Steering Committee again worked with CADCB, this time conducting a door-to-door in person survey with property and business owners in this part of town during the weeks of **August 5 and 12, 2013**. The results of the survey indicated that the vast majority (24 of 31 property owners surveyed) did not support the CBD.

REVISIONS TO THE CBD PLAN

The Steering Committee met on **August 15, 2013** to discuss all community feedback provided to date from all sources, and how the Draft Plan could be revised so that there will be general consensus in the community to support a revised Plan.

At that meeting the Steering Committee endorsed the following changes:

1. ***The annual CBD assessment on single family residential properties within the proposed CBD will be \$0 and, therefore, these owners will not have a vote in the formation of the CBD.*** The Steering Committee feels strongly that owners of single family residential properties in the CBD will benefit from the activities of the CBD, but instead of requiring these owners to pay a CBD fee, these owners instead will be encouraged to make voluntary financial or community service contributions.
2. ***The boundaries of the proposed CBD will not include the 4 Blocks International neighborhood,*** but rather will stop at Fillmore Street along 4th Street, instead of extending all the way to Hayes Street.
3. ***The boundaries of the proposed CBD will abut (but not include) properties already included within the boundaries of the South Bethlehem TIF District.*** This revision will be coupled with a proposed Cooperative Agreement between the RDA and the

