

Council Agenda Report

Date: July 11, 2016
Prepared by: Pat Escher, A.I.C.P., City Planner
Submitted by: Odie Wheeler, Director, Public Works *awf*

SUBJECT: FY 2017 Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development Division of Neighborhood Revitalization, State Revitalization Program Grant from Maryland - DHCD in the amount of \$150,000.00 for Façade Improvements in conjunction with the American Legion

Recommendation that Council:

- A. Receive a staff report on an application for the FY 2017 Façade Improvement Grant;
- B. Hold a public hearing, take public comment, and close the public hearing;
- C. Authorize submission of the grant application.

Discussion: The request is for a \$150,000 grant with the American Legion providing a one for one-dollar match. The funding from the State would be \$150,000 with the Legion matching that amount for a total of \$300,000 for upgrades to the Legion façade.

The American Legion site is located at a very prominent location within the City, as a true entry point into the City after crossing the Choptank River bridge. However, as demonstrated by the photos below, the building has banal, nondescript architecture, which virtually blends into the landscape beyond.





On May 3rd of this year, the American Legion had fire initiated by a lightning strike. The fire caused substantial damage to the building, necessitating a redesign the building. City staff and Planning Commissioners, Bill Craig, Marshal Rickert and Mary Losty met with the American Legion representatives on June 22nd to offer support to the Legion as they go through the public site plan process required by the Unified Development Code. As this is the first structure within the Mixed – Use Waterfront Overlay Zone, it is setting the stage for future development along the waterfront and should be of a high quality architectural design with solid building materials of masonry, glass and metal.

During the June meeting, staff indicated that the City was in the beginning stages of creating some conceptual designs for the property across Rte. 50, known as the “Gateway”. Pending the demolition of the garage and the old Burger King building, the City will be creating a temporary green space until a design is finalized through the public process. The discussion turned whether the Legion would be willing to upgrade their building design with more noteworthy architecture, embracing the prominence of their location and future design across the highway. The Legion members indicated that they would consider improvements, but were limited due to the insurance would only cover “in kind” replacement of their structure. The discussion ended with staff stating that they would research potential opportunities to find funding sources to potentially to upgrade the building facades.

Staff believes that the Neighborhood Revitalization Program Grant would be such an opportunity and the timing of the grant is opportune. If awarded the grant it would be a one to one match of funds from the Legion. The American Legion building could indeed create a significant architectural project that could be a symbiotic with the design feature across Rte. 50 and truly create an elegant “Gateway” into the City.



We also discussed the benefit of the American Legion’s event venue replacement. They indicated that the American Legion intends to incorporate a second story water view to the building which will enhance the attractiveness of the public venue. Staff believes that this space will offer a viable alternative for a significant number of events now offered at Governors Hall. The new American Legion public event venue can at least partially, if not totally, fulfill the State’s requirement that the public event venue that is Governors Hall be replaced at a nearby location if Governors Hall is demolished as part of the Sailwinds development.

Fiscal Impact: While the actual fiscal impact of such a project would be difficult to determine, the overall benefit to the City would be substantive given the sites’ prominent location and the contribution to potential reimaging of the City with the adjacent “Gateway” feature.

Approved by: Sandra Tripp-Jones, City Manager *STJ*