

Smithfield 2020 Notes from Team meeting of April 6, 2016

Present

Mike Adams	John Edwards	Amy Ring
Priscilla Barbour	Sheila Gwaltney	Peter Stephenson
Rick Bodson	Trey Gwaltney	Judy Winslow
Andy Cripps	Mark Hall	Scott Horn, guest
Lee Duncan	Randy Pack	

Admin

Current funds balance is \$14,951.85; \$386 remains in the project budget for repairs to Magnolia. There are no other outstanding fund commitments.

Food truck initiative

The food truck team presented key points of the initiative:

- Mark, team lead – Consistent with 2020’s commitment to cultural and economic vitality...objective: adopt a workable policy...hot topic in the Hampton Roads region but a moving target...a first cut proposal for Smithfield based on other municipalities shared with the Team for review. Food trucks provide more options, different experience...expand dining economy, not compete with current base...potential to “liven up” some areas like 300 block. Need to tailor an ordinance specific to food trucks vs. generic peddler license.
- Guest Scott Horn, owner of Granny’s Kitchen – A dream realized but the business model under constant tweak...key differentiator: his support of local farmers...food source is a care-about for his target customers. Food trucks add “quirkiness”...overall food sales up for surrounding area. Key issues: control of vendors and licensing...level playing field...reconciling County Commissary fee (relates to on-site prep) with fees and restriction of Town. Daily revenue to food trucks not material to other venues. More dining options... make Smithfield a destination...tie-in with events, e.g., food truck rodeo... can there be a critical mass of food trucks based on available volume of business... daily vs. events only?
- Mike hosts Granny’s Kitchen several evenings per month at Bon Vivant – Private property but permit still required... overall positive but have to be selective to be complementary to hosting business...add “quirkiness” and modest uptick in sales but also new customers. Customer feedback positive... parking situation good for him but could be issue for others. Offers opportunity to be creative between business and food truck, e.g., wine and meal pairing... need awareness of some legal limitations, e.g., alcohol consumption on site. Essentially a take-out model... on balance, a positive business decision to host.
- Peter explained the process by which an enabling ordinance is developed – Town Council directs Town Attorney to draft regulations...the more specific, the better...currently nothing in Town code. Recommended path: 2020 to Town Council committee to full TC. Amendment to Town code may require a public hearing... three-month timeline.

Team members shared their perspectives:

- Lee and Randy, Historic District restaurateurs – A good initiative...adds variety... should support. More dining capacity needed on busy days... on balance, brings benefits to the Town. Key questions: big enough demand in District for food trucks to be successful ... can specific spots be designated... can specific types of vendors be controlled (likely not if in a public space vs. private property)... can collection of tax revenue be assured
- Informal conversations between Rick and other Historic District restaurateurs – Generally, negative to the concept in the Historic District... takes business away, especially tourists... could make slow days even worse. Unfair to investors in brick and mortar...not paying fair share of taxes... food trucks are not Historic District “citizens” and frequent donors to local fundraisers... not hiring locals as servers and generating local payroll. Concept ok in larger areas (Norfolk)... momentum / trend is acknowledged, but not for here and not now.
- Business owners’ perspectives, Jim (via notes to Rick) and Sheila – Clear advantage in “pull” to areas such as 300 block... daytime, though, not evening... opportunity to tie-in with event, e.g., art exhibit... some spots have ability to counter take-away with tables and chairs. Food trucks lack atmosphere and personal service. Some but not huge upside for retailers.
- Informal conversations between Rick and other Historic District business owners – A hot trend ... food trucks typically have a following...draw new people who will come back for local restaurants, but still some concern about local restaurant owners. Not expecting huge dollar upside from food trucks but indirectly by adding buzz to Historic District.
- Andy / Chamber of Commerce and Amy / County ED – A “good” food truck initiative does have economic development impact... might draw investors for brick and mortar if a dining market apparent ... location pulls customers to target area, e.g., Norfolk strategy... develop ordinance that encourages what we want, discourages what we don’t want.
- Judy and Tourism’s view – Support for reasons cited above... need to clearly differentiate strategy and role of food trucks for special events vs. daily availability... location needs to be specified carefully: on-street parking needs to consider safety, e.g., sight distances from intersections.
- Other Team members – Need to quantify impact of taxes and fees, ability to enforce collection of meals tax, economic impact “across the board”... rationalize concerns with food trucks against special event vendors who compete with brick-and-mortar retailers.

A motion to continue the project and research the identified key issues to be worked into a proposed food truck ordinance was adopted. The next step (target: May meeting) is to have enough to take to Town Council committee a comprehensive food truck strategy and a detailed outline of a recommended enabling Town ordinance.

Next meeting: Wednesday, May 4, 8:45 am, Arts Center @ 319 classroom.