

February 25, 2020



The Bulletin

COURTESY OF:

FLORENCE EXCHANGE CLUB
THE LONGEST SERVING CIVIC CLUB IN THE SHOALS SINCE 1921

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James Barnett presented our speaker, James Bobo. James is the CEO of the Bobo Family Group where he is responsible for management and growth, and planning the family's real estate assets. He has 15 years experience in real estate investment and development in North Alabama. Before his current role, he was a licensed real estate broker and Alabama home builder. He's currently enrolled in the Alabama Advanced Management Development program in real estate through Harvard's Graduate School of Design and will graduate in July of 2020. He is a Florence native and enjoys spending time with his wife, Kristin, and their four children. He currently sits on the Board of Trustees at Riverhill School, the CB&S Advisory Board, the Shoals Economic Development Authority, the committee for a Greater Shoals and the Industrial Development Board.



"I want to share a little about me and a project that I'm working on here in the Shoals area" said James. "I grew up in a real estate office of my grandfathers, H.M. Bill Bobo. He moved here in the late 30's. He was an entrepreneur and businessman and created several companies in this area. Like him, I started in the real estate business when I was 19. I came into Bobo Family Group at my father's call about 3 years ago. He was ready to retire and inquired if I had an interest in taking over the family business. Our mission statement is to develop a real estate investment platform that will generate superior, risk-adjusted returns through investments anchored around positive social, environmental, and economic changes. We want to promote an open-minded, collaborative community that will allow our stakeholders an opportunity to learn, grow, and prosper. Supporting our community is very important. We're passionate about creating new opportunities for community growth.

I want to talk about a live/work/play/ mixed-use development that we're proposing on the old Sears lot in downtown Florence. This development that we're proposing came out of a problem that I discovered in various conversations with leaders in the area. Between 2013 and 2017, we've had no population growth and none really since 2010 in the Shoals area. Huntsville has had extraordinary growth at 1.4% and even the US has been growing not only from natural birth, but also from people moving into the country. We've also had a loss of educated talent in the Shoals. We've had a 20.78% reduction in high-tech employment between 2008-2018. Why are our kids who are getting great degrees at UNA, specifically tech degrees, not staying here in our area? There's a gap that needs to be filled. All of our technical degrees are going to Huntsville, Nashville, etc. If you look at our employment scene here in the Shoals area, the #1 employment is in manufacturing. It is about 15.7% of our employment. If you look at the wages; production wages are about \$35,700 and manufacturing is around \$55,000. If you look at that compared to tech-based wages; those are around \$66,000 on average. The second largest employment in our area is retail. The average pay for

UPCOMING PROGRAMS:

Bert Bretherick March3

Board Meeting March9

Business Meeting March10

Youth in Gov March17

Do you have an idea for a speaker?
Call Fran

- MORE INFORMATION INSIDE -

retail is about \$22,000. Therefore, the greatest concentration of employment in our area is about \$35,000-55,000 and the second greatest employment concentration in our area is getting about \$22,000. The third in our area is healthcare and is around 12% of the population with about \$38,000 in wages. It all boils down to the fact that we don't have employment opportunities for these kids who are getting high-tech educations from UNA to stay and apply them here. Since 2008-2018, there has been a job loss of 0.69%, which is a net loss of 412 jobs. Should we be investing in manufacturing jobs when we see a decline? Should we be investing in high-tech where we see an increase? It has a growing contribution in GDP.

Dense urban development can benefit and create community. It makes us smarter. It creates more opportunities for a community to share ideas, experiences, and knowledge. It makes us greener. Gas consumption per family declines by 106 gallons as the number of residents per sq mile doubles therefore leading to a reduction in carbon emissions. It makes us richer. Social interaction creates more learning opportunities that enhances innovation and productivity. Greater productivity leads to higher wages per capita. It makes us healthier. Average life expectancy is nine months longer in counties with 500 or more people per sq mile as opposed to those less than 500. We want to positively shape our community. We want to recruit and retain the next generation of talent. We want to create new opportunities to collaborate. We want to create more discretionary income. We need to develop new products. We need to build products that are attractive to a broad audience such as our Boomers, Gen x, y, and z. We need to recruit new employment. We want to develop attractive office space that is appealing to high-tech employers. We need to create a stronger community. Dense urban development creates more opportunities for community development. We need to become a smarter city. As the college educated population rises by 10%, there is a 7% increase in incomes of those with a high school diploma.

This is all included in our massive plan that we have underway on Tennessee street. There on the southwest side, we will put a 5-story office structure with a rooftop restaurant. On the east side is a 4-story multifamily component/ rental property. On the bottom floor of that we've carved out about 13,000 sq feet to recruit a small grocery store. On the bottom floor of the office space would be small local retail. In the back will be a parking deck.

We've proposed about 112 units of multifamily. They will vary in size, but the average size will be about 850 sq feet. In the office building, we've been talking to a group who is the 3rd largest financial group here in the state. They would be taking about half a floor. It will be more executive higher paying positions. That would be about 40 paying office positions with an average of about \$80,000 income a year per position. This a lot of capital that could be plugged into downtown. For us to be competitive in lease rates, we must have some sort of financial assistance to get this thing to work. We are carrying conversations with the city and they are very interested in developing the parking deck. It would allow the site about 350 spaces and the public about 150 spaces to use during the day as well. Another component is the cost of the land. I truly feel this project would be a great impact in economic development. I didn't want to assume that, so I got a 3rd party group to do an economic analysis of this project and they estimated about 374 people in total could work on this site with an average pay of about \$57,000 and that includes high-tech, retail, and restaurant. We could also have about 410 indirect jobs from this project. That report at the end of the day showed the ongoing annual impact this development would have about 111 million dollars a year. We are so looking forward to this project and I hope to be about to come back and update you on our advances this year."



MARCH BIRTHDAYS

happy birthday!

Fran Nunnelly 3/15
Parrish Riedel 3/16

The Chili cookoff at Singing River Brewery went off without a hitch! James most definitely had a WINNING recipe. The Florence Exchange Club won 2nd place in the judges' division. A lot of people asked about the Exchange Club and what we do. It was a great opportunity for exposure. Thank you to James for helping us with this event and for taking the lead!



John Dupuis has requested 'Red beans and Rice' to be the first Monday in April (6th). The Presbyterian church we normally use will not be available for us this year the week of Easter so we are looking at some back up plans. John's church has a nice kitchen we can use so we will update you as soon as we know.

Thank you to everyone who donated items to Common Ground Shoals! Thank you to Teresa for delivering those items to them.

