

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION  
CITY OF WATERTOWN  
October 12, 2021  
7:00 p.m.**

**Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith Presiding**

**Present:** Council Member Ryan J. Henry-Wilkinson  
Council Member Sarah V.C. Pierce  
Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero  
Council Member Leonard G. Spaziani  
Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith

**Also Present:** Kenneth A. Mix, City Manager

**City staff present:** Michael A. Lumbis, Michael Delaney, Patrick Keenan, Geoffrey Urda

**DISCUSSION**

**Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) Streetscape Project Update**

Michael Lumbis, Planning and Community Development Director, began the presentation by recapping some of what has already been presented to Council in the past. He reminded Council that as part of the \$10 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) award from New York State, the City of Watertown received \$1,500,000 for a Downtown Streetscape Project and \$100,000 for enhancements to the Governor Roswell P. Flower Monument. He informed Council that over the last seven months, Barton & Loguidice has been working with Planning and Engineering staff on proposed designs for the projects. He added that in July, Barton & Loguidice, in conjunction with Planning staff held a series of focus groups to solicit input from key stakeholders, such as property owners and business owners. There was also an open house held in September for the general public to engage. He informed Council that for eight days following the open house, an online survey was available for citizens to provide feedback on the proposed designs.

Mr. Lumbis then introduced Keith Ewald, Managing Landscape Architect, Barton & Loguidice.

Mr. Ewald presented Council with a slideshow (on file at the City Clerk's Office). Mr. Ewald informed Council what the project areas are, noting the area includes Court and Coffeen streets, Lachenauer Plaza, Governor Flower Monument and Franklin Street. He stated that the overall goal is to increase mobility and safety. He said that one of the goals for Court Street is to open it up more, which will provide more parking and allow storefronts more access to the sidewalk. He pointed that one of the big challenges for work on Court Street is the underground utilities. He then told Council that they would like to make Lachenauer Plaza more modern and noted that it was one of the bigger focuses the public was interested in. He said they would like to open it up more and make it more pedestrian safe with more lighting and he told Council he is looking for input from Council on adding to or improving the water fountain. He noted that he has met with the Lachenauer family, and they are excited about fixing the area up and stated that the family wants to keep some sort of water feature in the park. He then drew Council's attention to the Governor Flower Monument. He said the key goal is to retain the safety of the monument by adding visual cues and making it more pedestrian safe. He stressed to Council that the ideas are still in the very early stages. He then drew Council's attention to Franklin Street expressing

that one of the main goals is to work with National Grid on obtaining new lighting. He pointed out that the streetlights are in poor condition and some just need some new paint, while others need to be replaced altogether, adding that new ornamental lights would be a nice touch. He mentioned there are a lot of broken curbs and sidewalks that need to be replaced, and he suggested adding more green space and opening up the sidewalks more for the storefronts to make it more pedestrian friendly. He summarized to Council the discussions that he has had with stakeholders and Public Information Management (PIM) and discussed at length the different requests, wishes, concerns and ideas that the individuals have for the four areas. He informed Council that the Post-PIM Survey concluded that all four project areas received a “somewhat to very much in favor of” ranking with the results ranging from 64% to 71% for Lacheneaur Plaza, Governor Flower and Franklin Street 63% and 65% respectively and the lowest ranked was 60% for Court/Coffeen Street.

Council Member Ruggerio said she likes the idea of extra lighting and keeping the fountain in Lachenauer Plaza.

Council Member Pierce asked what kind of feedback has been received regarding the fountain.

Mr. Ewald said he has received a “half and half” response, noting that most are in favor of having a fountain but would like to see something different. He also said that some people do not think a fountain is worth it because it does not run the whole year.

Mr. Ewald informed Council that the next steps are currently to get the preliminary designs done, and give them to Council to review in November, noting the final designs should be done by December or January at the latest. In March, the bids will go out with construction starting in April/May of 2022 with a goal of construction completion by October 2022.

### **Traffic Signal at Arcade and Arsenal Streets**

City Manager Kenneth Mix began the topic by informing Council that the subject of the traffic signal was originally brought up by Patricia Whalen who voiced her concerns about the safety at the intersection. He noted that the signals are expensive and said there are some other funding sources that could possibly be used for this project.

Michael Delaney, City Engineer, began the discussion by telling Council that, after much input from the public, he reached out to Fisher Associates for their expertise on the matter and he was given an estimate of \$86,000. He explained to Council, at length, what this cost included and also a traffic analysis. He told Council he feels the estimate was high, and therefore, he has reached out to other firms for estimates. He told Council that he is looking for direction on whether they are on board for putting a traffic light there before he does any more work on getting a scope put together.

Mayor Smith questioned whether Council wanted it to be signaled or left as is before any more work goes into this proposal. He added that if the answer is signaled, then staff should find cheaper pricing.

Mr. Delaney noted there are some challenges with the proximity to the next light. He told Mayor Smith that if it is going to be signaled, he can move forward very quickly with getting pricing.

Council Member Spaziani expressed concern about why a light is needed there, noting that there are all ready plenty of lights in the area and added the confusion it creates with the buses loading and unloading passengers.

Mayor Smith and Council Member Spazianni summarized their concerns regarding crosswalks and where pedestrians will have to cross, as well as whether the intersection should have a traffic light.

Council Member Spaziani wanted it noted he is very against the light.

Mr. Mix said there are two purposes for this light, one is pedestrian safety and the other is to allow the buses to move about better and possibly alter the routes.

Council Member Spaziani thinks the bus station should be moved.

Mr. Mix said that idea has been discussed before.

Mr. Delaney reiterated the main function of this project is pedestrian safety and traffic flow.

Mayor Smith asked Council for their input, noting he supports installing the light.

Council Member Pierce indicated she would like to see more pricing, but generally supports the idea.

Council summarized at length the pros and cons to the light, highlighting that traffic backup is a concern.

After much discussion, the vote was four Council Members in support of it and Council Member Spaziani not in support.

### **Citibus Project Updates**

Patrick Keenan, Superintendent of Public Works, and Doreen Dougherty, Transit Supervisor, started the discussion by explaining to Council that the Metro Planning Organization (MPO) was formed in 2014 and is responsible for fulfilling Federal and State transportation requirements for urbanized areas. They are also responsible for the day-to-day activities and Federal funded programs. He informed Council they have a website which has informative information. He explained the City works with the MPO regarding daily activities of the bus fleet and programs. He then presented Council with some updates and projects that have been taking place through Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). Next, he informed Council that the City has just received a 32-foot bus which will be delivered in the next few weeks. He said another order for a 32-foot bus has been placed as well and will be ready next year, which will have the City running three full size buses, with the smaller buses in reserve. He informed Council that the buses are cycled through every five to seven years. He added that 23 of the 26 concrete pads have been installed between the sidewalks and curb so the bus can put the ramp down to let passengers on and off. He mentioned that 90 of the bus signs have been installed. He highlighted that the Automated Vehicle Annunciator System will keep the City in compliance with the ADA and provide audio and visual communication on the buses by announcing where the bus is and when the stops are approaching. He summarized the benefits of this system adding that there is a mobile app available also.

Mr. Keenan then introduced Brandy Smith, Mobility Manager for Citibus. He informed Council that she has been working on several projects, such as completing the Passenger Code of Conduct User Guide. He then directed Council's attention to new projects that are in the works, such as wireless transactions that can be completed on users' phones and a mobile kiosk where riders can purchase pre-paid bus fare. He told Council that there has been discussion about route extensions, but expressed concern that at this point, the City can barely maintain keeping the buses on the road right now due to staffing issues. He explained that currently there are five full-time drivers but soon that number will be down to three and only one part-time position. He stressed that this has caused an increase in overtime.

Council Member Ruggiero asked about the buses going county-wide.

Ms. Smith discussed the different plans that are in place to hopefully make going county-wide possible, which will be done in phases and currently looks like possibly in two to three years.

Mayor Smith asked about possibly using the buses for special events.

Frank Doldo, Regional Mobility Manager, discussed the rules and regulations that would have to be set in place before going county-wide or using the buses for special events.

Mr. Keenan wanted Council to know that "bumpouts" really are not a big deal for the snowplows. He also told Council that due to Covid, passenger riding had decreased, but is on the rise again. He then thanked Doreen Doherty and all the bus drivers for doing a great job, noting that even during Covid the buses were still running, just with limited capacity.

### **Sale of Tax Foreclosed Houses**

City Manager Mix explained to Council that, because of Covid, it has been a couple years since the City has sold any properties. He informed Council that one of the concerns when selling a house is that minimal improvements are made after the sale and the properties continue to have a negative effect on the neighborhood. He explained there is also a high probability that they will be rental units, rather than owner occupied. He suggested to Council that the City sell the houses through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process instead of auctioning them. He advised Council that under the RFP process there would be a rating system developed that would take into consideration the buyers rehab experience, the amount proposed to be invested, the proposed tenancy (rental or owner occupied) and proposed purchase price. Staff would rank their proposals and present the highest ranked ones to Council for approval of the sale. He added that he is investigating the use of Auctions International for selling vacant parcels and houses if Council decides to stay with auctioning them.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero's question about what would happen if no one responded to the RFP, Mr. Mix stated that the properties would go to auction.

Mayor Smith expressed concerns about small developers versus big developers.

Mr. Mix said most people that participate are small contractors.

Mayor Smith stated that he believes the RFP is a good idea and would like to see it get moving.

### **Thompson Park Master Plan**

Moving on to another topic, Mayor Smith stated that he would like to discuss the conceptual plans for Thompson Park. He said he wanted to make sure that the plans have been formalized and questioned if a resolution would be needed to proceed.

Council Member Ruggerio questioned why not go through Starr Whitehouse directly instead of going through GYMO.

Mr. Mix responded that the City could do that, noting that Starr Whitehouse and GYMO were a team on the amphitheater project but could do it the other way around if that is what Council wants. He noted that Starr Whitehouse are experts on parks and GYMO could provide support for them. He noted he does not have a preference and will be meeting with GYMO and Starr Whitehouse to discuss finances for the project.

Council Member Ruggerio agreed with a preference to keep money local but added that the City really needs the expertise of a company like Starr Whitehouse.

Mr. Mix indicated the price charged by Starr Whitehouse and GYMO should be similar and stressed that using a local firm is beneficial when there is a need for them to be on-site right away.

Mayor Smith agreed that having a local company do the work has its advantages.

Council Member Spaziani asked for more information on what exactly the City is looking to do at the Park.

Mr. Mix responded that the biggest item is vegetation. There are a lot of invasive species that have destroyed trees and shrubs which need to be cleared out and replanted. He informed Council that nowadays design is done differently than back when the Olmsteads and Thompsons were designing the Park. Now the public has a voice and there is a lot of give and take. He stressed that there is much more involved to designing a Park than most people realize. He added there are miles of pipelines, sewer and electrical components that have to be taken into consideration.

Council Member Spaziani mentioned the necessity of a Dog Park being built at the Park.

Mayor Smith, Council Member Spaziani and Mr. Mix discussed the pros and cons to a Dog Park.

Mayor Smith asked if there are any attendance numbers on pool's usage and any estimates yet for the cost to repair the Northside pool. He told Council that he has heard \$300,000. He asked Mr. Delaney to supply Council with a finalized cost and what repairs need to be done to the pool.

Mr. Mix said there will be an update within the next couple weeks.

Council Member Spaziani asked for an update on the Alteri pool.

Mr. Delaney replied that equipment has been ordered, the DPW Electric Department is working on the electrical, and he will be securing bids within the next week or so for doing the actual work on the pool. He told Council the goal is to have work done on the pool during the off season.

Work session ended at 9:00 p.m.

*Margaret M. Puccia*  
Deputy City Clerk