

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
Tuesday, February 11, 2020
7:00 p.m.**

Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith Presiding

Present: Council Member Sarah V. Compo
Council Member Ryan J. Henry-Wilkinson
Council Member Jesse C.P Roshia
Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero
Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith

Also Present: Kenneth A. Mix, Interim City Manager

City staff present: Michael Lumbis, Vicky L. Murphy, Michael DeMarco, Jennifer Voss, Patrick Keenan, Michael Delaney

DISCUSSION

City Center Industrial Park – Rail Project

Donald Rutherford from Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency (JCIDA) began the discussion by telling Council that staff asked him to explain the new developments in the City Center Industrial Park. He gave a quick summary of the background on the subject to give the new Council a chance to catch up on the relationship between the Local Development Corporation (LDC) and the City. He said that in 2003 an option agreement was executed between the City and the LDC to allow the Local Development Corporation to market and handle negotiations with prospective buyers. He explained that it was done to alleviate the politics and pressure on the City. He pointed out, that at the time, there were two businesses located in the development which were Alteri Bakery and Frito Lay. Currently there are seven tenants in the park, three being major manufacturers that employ a large number of people. He told Council that the Rail Project has been proposed by Renzi Bros. and Roth Manufacturers. He explained that the rail was installed back in 2000 and was installed by a specific business for which grant monies were received, but unfortunately, the business did not happen. He noted that the rail system has not been used in the last 20 years and has deteriorated to the point that it can no longer be used. He explained that Roth came to JCIDA and asked if it could be repaired, and he was then approached by Renzi Bros asking if they could purchase some City owned land for expansion. He talked in length about the advantages and disadvantages for Renzi Bros and Roth in obtaining the land and rail, and he used a PowerPoint presentation (not on file in the City Clerk's Office) to explain this to Council.

Planning and Community Development Director Michael Lumbis added that the next step would be a subdivision of land which will have to be presented to the Planning Board for approval and that should happen within a couple weeks.

Mr. Rutherford said he would like to see the clearing of land for the project begin this winter. Stating he understands the legal part of the project will take some time, he said he would like to have all attorneys involved work out an agreement so the contractors can have access to the land and get the project started.

Mayor Smith said that having businesses expanding in the City is good news.

Town of Pamela Water Project

Vicky Murphy, Water Superintendent, started the discussion by introducing John Condino, Barton & Loguidice, and Scott Adams, Pamela Town Supervisor. They presented Council with a proposal for the City to supply water to the Town of Pamela.

Mr. Condino explained to Council what the water system consisted of, and he offered a brief background on the project. He noted that it is now financed and has been designed with hopes to be under construction next year. He discussed at length that over the past four years designs and plans have been proposed and he said he is happy where things stand. He also showed Council the layout of the water system. He explained to Council that the current water system has a lot of issues and is not serving the town as it should. He explained that the agreement the town has with the JCIDA calls for a usage of 160,000 gallons per day and currently the usage is 120,000 to 130,000 per day. He highlighted that the new system will more than double that, using up to 350,000 gallons a day. He told Council that the objective for tonight's meeting is to provide Council with background and to show Council the current agreement the town has with the City to supply water on Bradley Street Road. He informed Council that the town has drafted a new proposal with an amendment stating the original agreement for water on Bradley Street will remain the same but will be used as an emergency backup, adding additional hookups on West Main Street. He added that this presentation is to give Council a heads up and that there will be discussions between the City and Town attorneys to work out details of the amendment.

Mayor Smith wished to know what would draw residents and businesses to the City if they can get all of the City services outside the City. He expressed concern even though the City might see more revenue and asked if it really help the City.

Mr. Adams told Council that the system is designed to help the people of Pamela, adding that people have approached him very upset about the water problem and wells running dry. He explained to Council that the only way he can help the people is to bring in water from another municipality. He highlighted that they received assistance from the JCIDA to help with the growing population of Fort Drum which would in turn help all the communities in the area.

Mayor Smith replied that he is looking out for the tax payers in the City, noting that the increase in water revenue does not help with the General Fund. He pointed out that with the amenities of the City, this could possibly keep a business from establishing in the City and set up in the Town of Pamela instead.

Mr. Adams reflected upon the fact that the Fort Drum expansion was designed to help the whole area and this would be one community helping another.

Ms. Murphy drew Council's attention to the fact that all municipalities have water disinfection by products, adding that the more water used, the healthier the water becomes. She pointed out it is also possible that, with more revenue coming in, the City's water rates could go down.

Council Member Ruggerio asked if the City can handle the increase in volume.

Ms. Murphy replied that it would, explaining that the City has shrunk in size over the years and the plant was designed for a much larger capacity.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson agreed with Mayor Smith and expressed concern that down the road it could be harder to control future expansion outside the City.

Mayor Smith said he cannot make a decision at the moment, reiterating his concerns about the revenue not doing much for the General Fund and he has to think of the City taxpayers.

Mr. Condino and Mr. Adams both explained that they just want Council to be up to date on the project and they still need to work with the attorneys regarding the amendment and then they will be back to discuss the proposal more.

Water/Sewer Service Lines Curb to Curb

Vicky Murphy, Water Superintendent and Patrick Keenan, Department of Public Works Superintendent, began the presentation by providing a handout to Council and Mayor Smith.

Mayor Smith discussed with Council that he was familiar with the rules and regulations from when Peter Clough was on Council and summarized the different rules that were in place at that time regarding what a homeowner was responsible for regarding the water and sewer pipes to and from their homes. He pointed out that, at that time, Mr. Clough and Council agreed that anything curb to curb was the City's right-of-way and therefore, the City was responsible for any work to be done and the homeowner was responsible from their house to the curb. He stressed the importance of cleaning up the code so everyone is on the same page.

Ms. Murphy said that a change was never resolutioned. She summarized that water is charged at a lesser rate and it does not matter which side of the road the main is on. Ms. Murphy also explained at length the different types of piping that is used and the cost of them. She went on to explain that the fees have not changed since 2009 and fees charged are approximately 75 percent of costs, which does not include equipment costs. She informed Council that approximately 150 to 170 customers per year are unable or struggle to pay their quarterly water/sewer bill and seek relief from not-for-profits.

Mr. Keenan informed Council that, prior to 1990, City DPW crews installed and repaired sewer laterals in addition to providing a sewer lateral cleaning service with the property owners billed accordingly. He said that these services ended as a result of significant staff reductions which occurred in 1991 and 1993. Mr. Keenan also told Council that in 2000, City Council directed DPW to begin the repair of sewer laterals within the City street boundary at no cost to the property owner. He explained that the City Code was never changed to reflect the directive nor were staffing levels increased to support the program. He then detailed the four year summary of sewer lateral repairs undertaken by DPW.

Mayor Smith asked how many repairs could be fixed by cleaning the sewer.

Mr. Keenan explained that if a plumber is unable to clear a blockage or suspects there may be an issue with the portion of the lateral which is in the City street boundary, DPW will initiate cleaning and inspections to determine the problem at no cost to the homeowner. He pointed out that in about 50% of the instances where an investigation is required, DPW is able to remedy the problem without resorting to

excavation. He said the major cost incurred by the City is the time lost to performing basic maintenance work on our main sewers.

Mayor Smith said he thinks this is a good policy.

Mr. Keenan stressed that currently, cleaning and inspection of sewers is not happening as it should be due to staffing and he would like to see the program put back in the budget.

Emerald Ash Borer Management

Michael DeMarco, City Planner, presented Council with a handout regarding the Emerald Ash Borer. He then introduced Sue Gwise from Cornell Cooperative Extension, noting she is horticultural educator and invasive species educator.

Ms. Gwise explained to Council that the Emerald Ash Borer is going to be a huge problem and said that after many ice storms, many ash trees were planted in the City. She stressed that the trees are going to die and there is no way to save the trees unless they receive trunk injections which are 98% effective. She told Council that Tree Watertown has put together a plan to decide what to do about the trees, explaining that once they are attacked nothing can be done. She informed Council that over 10 million trees have been killed from the Emerald Ash Borer. She expressed concern that if the trees are just left to die, they develop Ash Snap which is a result of the Emerald Ash Borer. The wood becomes very brittle and the trees will spontaneously fall apart without wind or other weather conditions, which in turn creates a hazard for the community and a liability. She added that if the trees are not going to be treated, then a decision has to be made as to how to dispose of them. She explained it is best to cut them down while they are still green before the Ash Snap develops. She pointed out that, to a homeowner, it will appear the City is removing healthy trees and this is why it is important to educate the public.

Mayor Smith asked how often the injections have to be done.

Ms. Gwise said it has to be done every two to three years in the springtime. She noted the cost is based on the trunk's diameter with a cost of approximately \$10 per inch of diameter.

Mayor Smith asked how many ash trees are in the city.

Mr. Demarco said there are about 435 City owned ash trees and, at this point, there is the potential for 200 trees to be removed.

Council Member Ruggeiro asked if there are any grants available.

Mr. Demarco said there were and added that in 2018 the City was rewarded a \$20,000 tree planting grant through the NYS DEC. He indicated that recently \$6,000 more were allocated to start a pilot treatment program.

Mr. Demarco then presented Council with a PowerPoint presentation showing where most of the ash trees are located within the City and talked in length about the background of urban forest management within the City. He told Council that this is nothing new and has been part of the City's history, even before it became a City.

Mr. Demarco told Council that some of the Emerald Ash Borer and Ash Tree Management Strategies will be: Public Outreach, where there will be workshops and press releases; Tree Watertown Outreach, and Ash inventory on public property. This will help educate and prepare people for trees that will possibly be coming down.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson asked if there are any streets in the City that stand out as far as trees that need to come down and asked if it would change the canopy of the neighborhood.

Mr. Demarco said there were but that the trees will not be removed all at once. He indicated the City will assess the situation and determine which trees need to be taken down first.

2020 CDBG Annual Action Plan

Michael Lumbis and City Planner Jennifer Voss presented Council with a handout of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) 2020 Annual Action Plan.

Mr. Lumbis began the presentation by informing Council of the goals for the new year and explained that the CDBG funds have to be used to meet three national objectives that are defined by HUD. The goals are to benefit low to moderate income individuals, aid in eliminating blight and meet immediate needs such as natural disasters.

Mayor Smith asked if community policing could be included in the objectives.

Mr. Lumbis said there are some options for that but it would have to be done in targeted areas.

Ms. Voss explained to Council that police would only be allowed to foot patrol the targeted areas, which makes it difficult to start a program like that since the areas have to prove that they are a target area.

Mr. Lumbis reviewed and discussed at length the City's obligations to be eligible for the funds, which consist of having a consolidated plan every five years. He noted that the current plan runs from 2016 to 2021. He also said an annual action plan must be met, a Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) must be done along with administering the program and the money must be spent in a timely manner. Mr. Lumbis then discussed the eligible activities, noting that housing projects are one of the most popular forms of assistance. He then summarized and added that another eligible activity is public facilities improvements, which includes parks and playgrounds, curbs, streets, sidewalks, water and sewer lines, and facilities for persons with special needs, such as homeless or domestic shelters, nursing homes and group homes for the disabled. He added that another eligible activity is Public Services. This service is limited to 15% of the annual grant and must be a new service or quantifiable increase in the level of an existing service. Some of the services eligible but not limited to are job training and employment services, health and substance abuse, child care, education and services for seniors and homeless. He then informed Council the planning and administration part of the program is limited to 20% of the annual grant amount and discussed the ineligible activities which are any activity not specifically authorized by the regulations.

Mr. Lumbis and Ms. Voss drew Council's attention to the CDBG 2020 Overview and discussed at length the obligations that must be done, such as submitting an Annual Action Plan to HUD no later than May 15, a CAPER and evaluation report by September 28 and close-out grants from prior years. Some of the important dates are as follows: February 1st to March 20th - Community outreach program

meetings; February 11 - City Council Presentation; February 13 - Meeting with the Citizens Advisory Board and Advantage Watertown; March 2 - Public hearing and March 3 to March 20 - finalize the draft plan.

Ms. Voss showed Council a map of the target area for housing and discussed the affordable housing rehabilitation and homebuyer program along with public services such as the Watertown City School District Backpack Program and neighborhood revitalization.

Ms. Voss and Mr. Lumbis summarized previous projects and discussed the demolition of blight. They also informed Council that four new bus shelters have been put in place along with ADA accessible sidewalk ramps. Mr. Lumbis then drew Council's to the consolidated plan goals and discussed the 2020 proposed project ideas and costs

Staff Report

Update on Funding Opportunity – Fire Department

Mayor Smith discussed a staff report, updating funding opportunities for the Fire Department. He stated that he was pleased with the report which was prepared by Fire Chief Dale Herman. The report highlighted the main items that the funding would be used for.

Council Member Ruggiero pointed out that the Fire Department did not receive funding last year but was successful at getting funds for washers and dryers which were greatly needed.

All members of Council agreed the funding is essential to the Fire Department.

Mr. Mix said a resolution will be prepared for the March 18 meeting.

Work session ended at 9:30 p.m.

Margaret M. Puccia
Deputy City Clerk