

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
February 24, 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 Mix, Interim City Manager

City staff present: Patrick Keenan, Erin Gardner

DISCUSSION

Thompson Park Zoo Funding

Mark Irwin, Board Chairman of the Thompson Park Conservancy introduced Larry Sorel, Zoo Director, and explained that Mr. Sorel would be presenting the Zoo's Strategic Plan which is focused on the future of the Zoo. He noted that the last time the Zoo had a Strategic Plan was in 2005 and it was long overdue for an update. He added that the Zoo welcomed input and feedback from Council and the community.

Mr. Sorel began by noting that he had around 100 slides in his presentation and he would not be reading them all but wanted to touch on some highlights. Stating the first thing they did was compare the Jefferson Community College (JCC) Community Surveys from 2014 and 2019, he mentioned some of the differences, noting some troubling changes in the community's perception of the importance of the Zoo and an increase in the percentage of respondents who had never been to the Zoo.

Mr. Sorel explained that the Mission and Vision for the Zoo had evolved during the course of preparing this Strategic Plan and continues to evolve as they move forward. He stated that one of the first things the Conservancy looked to address was the name of the Zoo itself. Some of the considerations for the name are that the name reflect native focus, show that the Zoo is not State-operated, not be too long, last for the long-term, be flexible and be marketable. He showed some examples of other Zoo's names and logos and announced that they had settled on Zoo New York.

He further explained that the Zoo's plan intended to focus on the following:

- Animal Well-Being
- Guest Experience
- Organizational Culture
- Pursue AZA Accreditation
- Financial Stewardship
- Facilities Master Plan

Council Member Compo complimented Mr. Sorel and said she was excited about the plan. She suggested that the Zoo do more marketing of their event space, and promote more winter events, and she

noted = she knew the Zoo hosted a Brew at the Zoo in the fall but she had recently attended a Brew event which included skiing. She also stressed the importance of making Zoo exhibits interactive and mentioned the possibility of adding zip lines.

Mr. Sorel agreed that the Zoo needed to capitalize on winter activities adding that there had recently been a winter wine and chocolate event that they look to expand on in the future when the staff is more capable of handling a larger number of people. He added that the Zoo is looking to enclose and protect the Pavilion a little more to accommodate winter events and possibly add patio heaters. Indicating that zip lines and a ropes course had been discussed, he stressed that the key to success was that the Zoo and the rest of the Park work together to make the whole area accessible, functional and enjoyable year round.

Council Member Roshia congratulated Mr. Sorel and the rest of the Conservancy for all the hard work that had gone into the creation of this Strategic Plan, saying this would be a road map to get the Zoo where it wants to go. He stated he was pleased to hear about the partnerships with BOCES and JCC that were mentioned in the slide presentation.

Mr. Sorel mentioned that, as an example of these partnerships, the Zoo had recently worked with the JCC Business Center to complete a business plan.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero's query if the creation of a Strategic Plan would make it easier for the Zoo to apply for grants, Mr. Sorel said he hoped so and that people looking to give money liked plans. He also advised Council that the Zoo intended to go to the State and ask for a large sum of money, possibly as soon as 2021.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson offered a positive spin on one of the troubling results of the JCC Survey mentioned earlier in the presentation. He stated that the larger number of people who had never been to the Zoo offers untapped potential and these are people who do not already have a preconceived notion of what the Zoo can offer.

Mr. Sorel agreed, stating that, based on his experience, a Zoo of this size in an area like this should be drawing 60,000 and could draw up to 100,000 visitors a year. He noted that he intends to work with other agencies in Jefferson County and other counties as well as the State Department of Environmental Conservation to increase attendance numbers.

Interim City Manager Kenneth Mix inquired what amount of financial support the Zoo would be asked for from the City.

Mr. Sorel thought the \$50,000 amount already agreed to by the City was reasonable with an additional \$50,000 for marketing. He offered thanks to Council for their recent resolution to allow the Zoo to reallocate a portion of the City's funds to a publicity fund which would allow the Zoo to hire an educator with that reallocated money.

When asked by Mayor Smith how long the City would be asked for this additional money, Mr. Sorel indicated that it was a five-year request, with a goal to go to the State for additional funds, perhaps as soon as 2021.

Dr. Alfred Gianfagna, who was in attendance and is a founding member of the Conservancy Board, explained that the last time a plan of this size and scope was completed was in 2000 and that the Zoo needed to keep growing and expanding.

Mr. Sorel added that entertainment venues need to keep changing to stay viable, noting that theme parks add new rides about every two years, and that the Zoo needed to be able to do that.

Dr. Gianfagna also noted that volunteers are what make a Zoo work, indicating that the Zoo would not survive without them.

In response to Mayor Smith's inquiry if the Zoo still reached out into the community, Mr. Sorel offered several examples of how the Zoo worked with various schools.

Mr. Irwin explained that all the pieces were now in place to grow and improve the Zoo, complimenting Mr. Sorel's experience and adding that consistency was a priority.

Mr. Sorel added that there had been too much turnover with Zoo directors since 2005 and that the goal was to have this Plan as a framework for how the Zoo could continue to move forward, even after he was gone and the next director took over.

5311 Transit Funding Application

Interim City Manager Mix began by explaining the funding the City was applying for and noting there was a tight time frame to request the money, adding that in fact the application was due by the close of business today, and so the City had sent in the application. But, he added, the funds will be of no use until Council adopts a Resolution to use the funds and so the purpose of tonight's report was to inform Council about the funds and offer to prepare a Resolution to be voted on at a future Council meeting. He noted that Superintendent of Public Works Patrick Keenan was in attendance as well as Jennifer Cross-Hodge and some of her co-workers from the Volunteer Transportation Center to answer questions and concerns.

Superintendent Keenan informed Council that since the 2000 census, the City's CitiBus program operated exclusively using 5307 transit funding, which is for small urbanized areas. He explained that to extend the bus service to areas beyond the City and MPO bounded urban areas would require 5311 transit funding. Mr. Keenan indicated that a Transit Study completed by the MPO (on file in City Clerk's office) showed the different progressions for how the expansion would be implemented.

In response to Mayor Smith's question regarding whether the 5311 funds were for capital spending only, Mr. Keenan indicated the funds were for both capital and operational costs with an 80/20 split.

Sam Purington, Executive Director of the Volunteer Transportation Center, reminded Council that the 20% match mentioned by Mr. Keenan, 10% was from the State and 10% was local funds, and added that the City can do whatever they want with the money as long as it is used for managed mobility. He further explained that the City could use the money to contract out as the plan has been with some of the 5307 funds. He added that when contracting out the City could ask the contractor to hold out the 10% match and that way the City would incur no costs. He went on to inform Council that the reason the City should be involved is because anything involving transportation in Jefferson County is centered around the City: people coming to the City for work or entertainment and people traveling from the City to

other outlying locations. He added that Mobility Management was going to look at all types of transportation including micro mobility like scooters and eBikes.

Mr. Purington stated that this funding application is just an opportunity for the City to take advantage of monies that are already out there.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero's query of whether the application that went out today was just to fund the Mobility Manager, Mr. Purington said that it was to fund a portion of the Mobility Manager, specifically for areas outside the MPO. He added that what the Mobility Manager does is find out what people need, learn what the available resources are and find ways to fund transportation that did not strain City government or the Department of Public Works and in this way find a much more efficient system.

Mayor Smith clarified that the MPO was essentially Carthage to the City and then to Dexter to include the Airport. He stated that his concern was that the City not incur any additional costs in funding regional transportation.

Mr. Purington stated that the City would never be "hung out to dry" for any additional costs because nothing could be done and no money spent without a Resolution from Council.

In response to Council Member Compo's query about when the funds would potentially be available, Mr. Keenan indicated that it would be in the fall.

Interim Manager Mix reminded Council that the County was handing over its eligibility for these funds so that the City could do this and asked Council's permission to prepare Resolutions for voting at the next Council meeting.

All members of Council agreed.

Work session ended at 7:54 p.m.

Lisa M. Carr

Deputy City Clerk

