

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
March 9, 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

Not Present: Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero

Also Present: Kenneth A. Mix, City Manager

City staff present: Geoffrey Urda, Fire Chief Matthew Timerman, Michael Delaney, Michael Lumbis, Patrick Keenan

DISCUSSION

Fire Department Accreditation

Ernst Piercy, Senior Technical Advisor for Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE), introduced himself and provided background to the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) program. He stated the accreditation process allows fire and emergency service agencies to measure their organization based on nationally accepted practices, which is similar to Hospital Accreditations and University Accreditations. He explained that there are two stages to the process, which are self assessment and then validation by peer review. He noted that there are almost 300 accredited agencies, three of which are in New York State - Rochester, Town of Ridgeroad and Fort Drum. Reviewing what needs to be done to prepare for the process, he mentioned the identification of goals, collection of historical performance data and the establishment of performance benchmarks, as well as the creation of documents such as Community Risk Assessment: Standards of Cover, Strategic Plan, and Self-Assessment Manual. He stressed that this is fact-based decision making to evaluate risk and develop solutions to improve the service and it is not intended to look at growing the agency nor right-sizing the agency. He reviewed the process benefits, noting that it creates a plan for continuous improvements while identifying strengths and measuring shortfalls. Discussing the peer review process he indicated that it provides third party verification and he discussed the required annual compliance reporting.

Council Member Compo asked why there are not more than three agencies in New York State accredited.

Mr. Piercy replied that it is mostly due to the amount of work that the process involves. In response to Council Member Henry-Wilkinson's inquiry of the accreditation status timeline, he indicated that the community risk assessment portion takes the longest time but accreditation could be achievable in 24 months. He further explained that a registered agency has a maximum of 18 months to become a candidate agency. Lastly, he drew Council's attention to the page of his presentation (on file in the City Clerk's Office) which reviewed the cost and fees of the accreditation and he said it is based on the population served.

Council Member Roshia noted that Mr. Piercy referenced "community standards" and he wondered if a focus group would be put together to determine the community standards or if the standards were set by other communities.

Mr. Piercy said that he would recommend the agency look at national standards first and then look at past performances and the Fire Chief should develop a proposal to bring to Council. He explained that this document is called Standards of Cover, which is essentially a contract between Council and the Fire Department showing what they can, and cannot, do with the resources available. Regarding Council Member Roshia's question about the annual compliance report, he confirmed that if the Fire Department was not meeting the established criteria, a corrective action would be set and they would have a certain amount of time to bring things up to that criterion without losing the accreditation.

Mentioning the City's insurance company is already doing a risk assessment of the all the City departments, Mayor Smith asked how this risk assessment would be different.

City Manager Ken Mix explained that the insurance company is focusing their risk assessment on safety issues within the work environment.

In response to several questions from Mayor Smith, Mr. Piercy confirmed that the Fire Department would conduct the self assessment and that the peer review would be done by accredited Fire Departments from outside of New York State that are of similar size providing similar services. He also explained that there would be the development of community standards, such as response time standards, which would then be measured against the actual performance of the standards. He indicated that the CFAI model requires the agency to determine the right number of resources that are needed for any emergency and then they will measure whether or not the City is sending the right number of resources based on the risk assessment of the community. He pointed out that it is not going to be done based the idea of "that is what was done in the past" and mentioned an incident this evening at the Fire Station in which he witnessed the number responding to a call and he questioned the Fire Chief if that was the right number to respond. He clarified for Mayor Smith that the body of authority, which he assumes is the City Manager or Council, would define the standards of cover and it would not be CFAI or the Fire Department defining the standards. Lastly, he responded to questions regarding situations in which the City might not be able to afford what is being recommended by stating that the CFAI recognizes that the City needs to work under the financial constraints within the budget and so as long as the City identifies the issue and develops a plan for the future, it is considered creditable in accordance with the model.

Complete Streets Policy

Geoffrey Urda, City Planner, advised Council that the Complete Streets Program was adopted on January 17, 2017 and since each member of the current Council is new from that time, staff felt this was a good time to review it. He began his presentation (on file in the City Clerk's Office) by reviewing the timeline of the program adoption from the beginning stages in 2015 up to January 17, 2017. He stated that Complete Streets are designed for all users, not just for private automobiles, which would include pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, those with disabilities and freight, and that all modes are to be treated equally. He showed Council examples of streets that did not meet Complete Streets criteria, illustrating the detriments to the other users besides automobiles, and examples of streets built under the model of Complete Streets, highlighting the enhancements for all users. Stressing that not every street needs to accommodate every mode, he recommended there should be alternate parallel routes which accommodates every mode making the "network" complete.

Reviewing the safety and traffic calming benefits of the Complete Streets Program, Mr. Urda discussed the number of deaths due to pedestrians being struck by vehicles as well as the increased percentage of death based on the speed at which the vehicle is traveling. He highlighted the health benefits of walking and noted that streets designed only for cars discourage more active modes of transportation, such as walking and bicycling. He displayed this further by showing a map of the obesity rates by state and compared it to the most bikeable cities in the country. In addition to the safety benefits, he noted benefits of economic development by the use of “placemaking” which is the desire to go through a space must be balanced with the desire to go to a place.

Mr. Urda advised Council that the policy was distributed to them (on file in the City Clerk’s Office) and explained its purpose is to formalize the City’s intent to make streets safer, set goals and objectives, identify design criteria, direct staff to apply standards, establish a scope of applicability, make appropriate exceptions and lay out steps for implementation. Informing Council of the members of the Complete Streets Committee, he explained why the various departments were represented and he listed the committee responsibilities as the following: treat every transportation project as an opportunity to increase safety for all users; put the project “through the lens” of Complete Streets prior to design; recommend potential treatments using the Complete Streets checklist; and write an annual report to Council. Reviewing streets examples, he showed streets that had gone through the Complete Street process and highlighted the benefits of treatments, such as a road diet, curb extensions, crosswalk stop bar and pedestrian refuge island. Lastly, he mentioned prominent local projects and reviewed the policy metrics which were included in the recent annual report.

Council Member Compo asked if the committee looks at lighting as a factor.

Mr. Urda said the committee considers whether there is adequate lighting for safety issues.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson discussed on-street parking and that it seems to slow traffic down, noting that he parks in front of his house on Holcomb Street for this purpose, and he wondered if there had been any community outreach for on-street parking.

Mr. Urda replied that there had not been, but agreed that it does have that benefit.

Discussion turned to the changes recommended to North Pleasant Street by the Complete Street Committee and Mayor Smith asked if the committee considered the added cost to a project due to their recommendations.

Mr. Urda read from the Complete Street Policy regarding the exceptions and stated that if the cost outweighs the demand for the change of the street then the committee would bring that to Council and seek approval for an exception to the policy.

Work session ended at 8:20 p.m.

Ann M. Saunders
City Clerk