

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
August 10, 2020
6:00 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, City Manager

City staff present: Michael Lumbis, Jennifer Voss, Geoffrey Urda, Dale Morrow, Vicki Murphy, Michael Delaney

DISCUSSION

Energy Performance Audit

Michael Delaney, City Engineer, began the presentation by introducing Adam Tabela, Keith Crew and Tim Dietrich of Wendel Companies. Mr. Tabela informed Council that Wendel Company is an 80 year old firm that employs three hundred people and is based in Upstate New York. Mr. Tabela also provided Council with a printout of all the precautions the company is using during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Mr. Tabela stated the purpose of tonight's meeting was to explain the comprehensive energy project which will accomplish two main objectives. They are upgrading infrastructure, mainly in the City facilities, and saving on energy costs. He explained in detail how the project will identify and evaluate facility energy and efficiency and operational cost reduction opportunities, and develop a project showing how the energy and operational savings will pay for the cost of improvements. The buildings that are being looked at for energy conservation measures are CitiBus, new Central Garage, Massey, State and Mill Street Fire Stations, the Ice Arena, Fairground ball fields, Northside Flynn Pool, Thompson Park, City Hall and municipal parking lots. He stressed that the project would pay for itself. He explained to Council that, with their approval, he would like to start the program with an audit and study some of the different opportunities and evaluate them. Mr. Tabela presented a slide presentation to Council and discussed the different options for saving money while performing the audit, making the project cash flow positive.

Mr. Crew drew Council's attention to a three-bar chart, which is traditionally used to project savings over the financing time. He pointed out that the City's contract with National Grid and with the hydro generating at capacity, there is an opportunity now to conserve energy and yield some positive revenue for excess power which can be marketed and generate increased compensation. He highlighted the City is in a unique situation and his company will work with the City and the City's legal team to revise the City's contract with National Grid.

Mayor Smith discussed the good and bad points of this plan and how the paybacks on the market rate are skewed, noting that comparisons should be made to an open market.

Mr. Dietrich summarized how the savings would be returned to the City. He told Council they can run the figures two different ways based on market value and the purchase agreement.

Mr. Tabelski, Mr. Dietrich and Mr. Crew all discussed the breakdown of the estimated schedule. It was explained that the estimated completion time for the audit agreement is two weeks, the delivery of the comprehensive energy audit is six to ten weeks and the sign project is four weeks. They stressed that it is the intent and commitment of Wendel to work diligently toward meeting this timeline.

Mayor Smith told the group that it was a very good presentation, noting that any energy saved now will generate more revenue. He added, however, that he is concerned if there is going to be a lot of comparing to the current contract, and that they should use a market rate for electricity to show Council what the payback is and that it must be guaranteed that the City will see savings. He said that the guaranteed savings should be based on the market rate electricity costs, otherwise the figures are too skewed.

Mr. Crew informed Mayor Smith that it is up to Council to determine what they want Wendel to study and they can narrow the scope to find the best cost savings.

Sign Ordinance Amendment

Planning and Community Development Director Michael Lumbis, and City Planner Jennifer Voss began the presentation by introducing Lisa Nagle and Lawrence Howard of Elan Planning. He then reminded Council that staff had been previously tasked with developing an amendment to the City's sign ordinance to regulate Electronic Messaging Centers (EMC), also known as Digital or LED signs. Staff was asked to investigate whether or not two existing, non-conforming billboards located on the roof top at 104 Court Street could be converted to EMCs. Mr. Lumbis presented Council with a draft to review of the EMC regulations. He explained that the purpose of the new language is to promote and protect public health and safety, ensure traffic safety and to provide standard rules and regulations for these types of signs. He told Council that, during their investigation of the 104 Court Street billboards, they determined that those boards, along with several that run along Arsenal Street and Eastern Boulevard, are on state-designated scenic byways and cannot be converted to EMCs per state and federal regulations. Mr. Lumbis provided Council with a map that depicts the locations of the billboards in the City, as well as their proximity to the scenic byways and state routes.

Ms. Nagle described in great detail to Council what the green dots on the map represent along with explaining the difference between on-premise signs, those that advertise the sale or lease of property upon which it is located or advertising activities conducted on the property on which it is located, and off-premise signs. She also explained that only one EMC is allowed per lot except in the case of a single EMC with two faces that are back to back and not more than 24 inches apart. She noted that all EMCs shall be on-premise signs.

Ms. Nagle informed Council that it is up to the City to decide if the green dot signs along the byways could be converted to EMCs.

Mayor Smith and Council agreed to convert the signs to EMCs as long as the sizes maintain the character of the area.

Mayor Smith asked how many foot candles, which is the measurement of the amount of light reaching an object, are allowed now and how many will be allowed with the change.

Ms. Nagle said that now that she knows Council agrees to convert the green dot signs, she can go back to the sign people in the area that have been giving advice on the project and see what works best and what options are now available.

Council Member Compo asked if the on-premise signs could advertise for personal things such as a community event.

Mr. Howard said that they could.

Mr. Lumbis added that they cannot really regulate what the signs say because that would be a free speech issue.

Ms. Nagle drew Council's attention to the map which shows all the existing billboards. She explained there are rules in New York State relating to scenic byways, pointing out that there are a few running through Watertown. She indicated that any of the purple dots on the map are on a scenic byway and not allowed to be converted per State highway law.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero's question of whether a downtown sign that had been grandfathered in could have a new billboard placed in front of it, Ms. Nagle indicated that if it were on a scenic byway it would not be allowed.

Ms. Nagle explained what the remaining colored dots are on the map represent and told Council that DOT has their own set of standards when handling the billboards on Route 81.

Council Member Ruggiero asked if a DOT permit is granted permanently or renewed every year.

Ms. Nagle replied that they are renewed and inspected every year.

Mr. Lumbis added that they might possibly get inspected more than once a year, and there are specific people that drive around inspecting the billboards and making sure they are in compliance.

In response to Mayor Smith questioning whether Ms. Nagle had received the guidance she was looking for tonight, she replied that she had.

Crow Management Program

Mr. Lumbis began the presentation by reinforcing to Council that the previous crow harassment was the first in a three-year contract between the City and Loomacres Wildlife Management, which has been the City's chosen crow harassment contractor since 2011. He reminded Council that the 2019-2020 winter season saw an increase in crow roosting in the City compared to recent years.

Mr. Lumbis introduced Cody Baciaska of Loomacres to provide background on the program.

Mr. Baciaska brought Council up to date by explaining that the initial harassment commenced on November 8, 2019. He stated that in the beginning, crows were observed in small numbers on Mechanic

and Polk streets and also near Knowlton Technologies. He said, as the season progressed, larger numbers of crows congregated in the City. He told Council that the flock size went from approximately 200-500 birds to 1000-4000 birds. He then summarized the other streets within the city that began to see large flocks spreading throughout the City. Mr. Baciуска confirmed that after many attempts to harass the crows, Loomacres did use lethal harassment because the crows were becoming less scared of the non-lethal techniques.

Mr. Baciуска presented Council with a handout prepared by Bradley Lewis, Loomacres Wildlife Biologist, which detailed the total number of crows harassed, harassment instances, pyrotechnics used, deterrents used and total number of crows killed. He also went over many options and suggested some other alternatives, including training City Staff to perform the harassment when Loomacres is not present. He explained that Council would decide who would be doing the harassment, when they would do it and how many staff would be involved. He also pointed out that there would be costs to consider including materials, licensing and training.

Mayor Smith told Council that he believes the best solution is to hit them early and hard. He understands that non-lethal is a good option but the reality is the birds are destroying the historic buildings downtown and making a mess.

Mr. Urda informed Council that the contract does not limit the City to just 10 nights. There are other options available and he is asking Council for permission to have Loomacres come extra nights with a cost of between \$500 and \$600. He pointed out that the contract can be amended to have the harassment season start on October 1 instead of November 1.

Mayor Smith replied that he has no problem amending the contract to start earlier and asked the City Manager to think about what members of City Staff could potentially be trained to do harassment.

Mr. Mix said he will start working on the training, concentrating first on non-lethal harassment. He also made a point that not all of the DEC or State workers are back to work, so he will look into the timeframe for the training.

Sewall's Island and Factory Square Redevelopment Plan

Darren Meyer and Sean Hare from MKSK Landscape Designs joined the meeting via Zoom to discuss redevelopment possibilities.

Mr. Hare started the presentation by saying how excited they are to have such a great project to work on with the citizens of Watertown. He told Council that at the beginning of the project they spent a lot of time digging into the history of the area and learning how the island used to function. He said that the site is a great opportunity for the future of the City. He mentioned the beautiful scenery and the opportunities that can come from the island and the river. He presented slides of historic buildings and what the area once looked like. He then recapped the schedule, noting the project started in October 2019 and was expected to wrap up this summer but, due to Covid-19, things have been set back. He was pleased to announce that they will hopefully be finishing up sometime this month. He reminded Council that in January they spoke with the public and the Steering Committee and also conducted an online survey to get citizen feedback on the proposal. Stating the survey had approximately 200 participants, he said all the participants had some sort of recollection of driving past that area as children and expressed excitement at the cleanup of the area and for what the future could hold for the area. The key elements

focused on activity and a greater sense of community and creating a year-round destination and not just during the summer tourist months. He suggested that old warehouses often can be converted into great higher scale apartments. He also suggested the potential for retail opportunities.

Darren Meyer explained to Council that the vision statement was derived from their work with the community. He talked in length about the stories people told him about the area and what they remember about growing up. He showed slides of the industrial buildings and the potential they hold, and he showed the park space that will be developed attracting both business and people. He explained that the development would be done in three stages. The first phase focusing on Factory Square, the second phase would focus on parks and public space improvements and the third phase would focus on induced development.

All of Council agreed it was a great presentation and thanked everyone involved. They all agreed it will be a great revenue maker and the area will be greatly enhanced.

Mayor Smith said it was a great presentation and also thanked everyone involved.

Alteri Pool De-commissioning

City Engineer Michael Delaney and Parks and Recreation Assistant Supervisor Scott Weller brought Council up to date on the decommissioning and options for Alteri Pool. Mr. Weller informed Council that last year it cost approximately \$125,000 to run the pool, which included the cost of labor, chemicals, materials and supplies.

Council Member Ruggiero asked if this also included utilities and water.

Mr. Delaney replied that it did. He then discussed the preliminary options available based on material cost and noted that until Council decides for sure what they want to do with the pool, the contractors are reluctant to give estimates. He said if they fill the pool with topsoil, grade it and seed it, the cost would be roughly \$100,000 dollars. He indicated that another option would be to fill it with gravel, which costs \$20,000 to \$30,000 and the most expensive option would be to fill it with concrete for an approximate cost of \$250,000. He stressed to Council that a decision needs to be made beforehand if the pool will at some point be reopened because if they decide to reopen it and the fill/gravel is removed, it can cost significant damage to the pool. He said that staff can present a very detailed report with cost on decommissioning/closing the pool but he is asking Council for direction first. He added that the most cost effective way is to disassemble the mechanics in the pool, cover it and put an eight foot fence around it.

Mayor Smith suggested filling the pool in with topsoil along with the concrete around it and to add gravel and more topsoil. He mentioned that this would be a good option if a splash pad was to be installed down the road.

Mr. Delaney said that Mayor Smith's suggestion is the cheapest way to fill in the pool but explained that if a splash pad was installed over the pool, the gravel would most likely have to be removed.

Mayor Smith pointed out that one of the reasons staff recommended the closing of the pool was because the mechanics and filtration system needs upgrading and noted that the North-side pool already had completed that work at a cost of \$250,000 to \$350,000.

Mr. Weller added that the filter is towards the end of its life and removing it would open up space for another use.

Mr. Mix confirmed with Council their desire to close the pool permanently and reviewed the potential for problems down the road if they decide to build a splash pad over the pool area.

Council Member Ruggiero asked that it be noted that she is against closing the pool, adding that she believes it is a perfectly good asset and noted there were 17,000 visitors to two pools last year. She stressed concern that if one of the other pools break down, the public will not be able to be served with just one pool. She pointed out that Council and staff took pay cuts and there have been layoffs, but spending \$100,000 or more to close a pool is being proposed. She said it was an injustice to the taxpayers. She informed Council that Jefferson Community College does community surveys and thinks this would be a good time to do one to get a idea of how the community feels about closing the pool. She would like to see the pool covered, everything turned off and let it be for now.

Mr. Delaney said there would still be restoration costs if they take this route.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson asked how much it would cost to winterize the pool and put a fence around it.

Mr. Weller said it has not been open this year so there is nothing to do to it.

Mr. Delaney said there would have to be security fencing around the perimeter of the pool since there is access to the pool from the ice arena and informed Council Member Henry-Wilkinson it would cost around \$10,000 for the fence.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson told Council that, for the record, he would support putting a fence around the pool and saving it for the future.

Mayor Smith addressed Council by saying it is not an easy decision to close the pool, but the reality was that the City cannot financially afford it. He noted that cities this size do not have three pools for a season which is only eight to ten weeks a year. He then summarized the cost of operating the pools especially during these times of staff taking pay cuts and layoffs.

Council Member Ruggiero and Mayor Smith disagreed on the subject with Mayor Smith saying the most cost effective way to deal with this decision is to fill the pool, close it and move on.

Council Member Ruggiero said the cheapest way is to put a fence around it and leave it.

Mr. Delaney wanted to confirm that this would only be a temporary fix, reiterating that a decision has to be made on whether to close it or keep it open.

Council Member Compo agreed that, financially, closing the pool seems like the right decision and said she would like to see a splash pad that can be used as a skating rink in the winter.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson said his vote is to wait on making a determination until there can be a decision made on what to do with the area down the road.

Council Member Roshia told Council that he is excited for the Thompson Park Pool to open and feels there is not a need for a third pool in a City this size. He stressed that the taxpayers cannot support a third pool.

Work session ended at 9:30 p.m.

Margaret M. Puccia
Deputy City Clerk