

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
August 8, 2022
7:00 p.m.

Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith Presiding

Present: Council Member Patrick J. Hickey
Council Member Clifford G. Olney III
Council Member Sarah V.C. Pierce
Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero
Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith

Also Present: Kenneth A. Mix, City Manager

City staff present: Vicky Murphy, Angel French, Jennifer Voss, Michael Delaney, Dana Aikins, Michael Lumbis, Geoffrey Urda, Michael DeMarco

DISCUSSION

Biosolids

Water Superintendent Vicky Murphy and Chief Operator Angel French introduced Jason Greene, GHD Associate, who offered a PowerPoint presentation on the future of the City's biosolid treatment.

Mr. Greene explained to Council that the treatment of biosolids had been a phased approach that began in 2012 under former Water Superintendent Michael Sligar. He noted that Phase 1A which decommissioned the City's incinerator was completed in 2017 and Phase 1B which upgraded the plant from Class C to Class B was completed in 2021. He explained the various benefits that each of these upgrades had provided.

He introduced Phase 2 of the project which would be to take the plant to Class A status. He noted that Class A biosolids (biochar) are the most desirable and, at the very least, would be free to dispose of or, at best, had the potential to be sold. Mr. Greene broke down Phase 2 into three parts.

Mr. Greene explained that Phase 2A would require biodrying and pyrolysis which would achieve the goals of PFAS destruction, energy recover and the ability to have offsite solid removal. He explained the steps in biodrying and noted this is a proven method of producing Class A biosolids and of PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) destruction. Mr. Greene pointed out that the biodryer/pyrolysis equipment was an add-on process and this would allow the City's plant to stay operational. He showed Council the site plan for what the plant would look like with the new equipment in place. Mr. Greene explained that Phase 2B would include the addition of mechanical thickeners which improve the potential for plant revenue. Finally, Phase 2C would be in hauled waste recovery, noting that all the plant improvements would allow the City's plant to take in more waste from other areas. He listed the cost of each phase: \$28 million for Phase 2A, \$3.5 million for Phase 2B and \$3.5 million for Phase 2C.

In conclusion, Mr. Greene informed Council of the potential funding opportunities, indicating possible grants available.

Mayor Smith thanked Mr. Greene for his presentation and asked Council if they had questions.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero's question on whether the biochar could be sold and to whom, Mr. Greene replied it could, stating that usually biochar is sold for agricultural or industrial applications, but noted that, based on the materials that the City regularly processed, most likely the City's biochar would be used for farming.

Council Member Olney inquired as to whether the biochar could be used to filter water, noting the City was currently working on a water filtration project.

Mr. Greene indicated he believed it could be used in that way but it would depend on input materials.

Ms. Murphy explained that the City's input would be wood char which would not be suitable for water treatment.

Mr. Greene cautioned that when you are dealing with drinking water the City faces certification issues.

Council Member Pierce asked what the deadlines would be for applying for the various funding streams Mr. Greene mentioned.

Mr. Greene informed Council that this year's deadline was September 9, which he acknowledged was too soon to be done this year, so the City was probably looking at 2023.

Council Member Olney asked for the benefits of this conversion so he could explain to the general public why the City needs to spend these funds.

Mr. Greene replied that the project will not pay for itself but is an investment in what he described the "life cycle cost" of the plant, adding that this would give the City 20 years on the equipment and 40 to 60 years on the concrete. He said the goal was to get the lowest cost life cycle to achieve a Class A treatment plant.

Council Member Olney reiterated that he needed to be able to explain to the public why this was necessary.

Mr. Greene said preparing for the future would provide a holistic benefit to the community and preparing for the future before reaching a crisis situation.

Ms. Murphy noted that there had already been regulation change regarding the destruction of PFAS which the City is currently working to be in compliance with and if, further regulations change, staff will be scrambling to keep up.

Mayor Smith stated that there had already been cost savings to the City with the implementation of the first Phases, begun by Mr. Sligar ten years ago. He noted that the City no longer had landfill costs and had reduced energy consumption. He asked if the City was currently using all the methane the plant produces.

Mr. Greene indicated that the City was using as much as it currently can.

Ms. French added that the plant could use more but staff is waiting for a replacement part for the boiler which will allow the system to use more of the gas in low-flow situations.

In response to Mayor Smith's question about the proposed biodryer being large enough to serve a potential increased capacity, Mr. Greene explained that the biodryer/pyrolysis system is modular and is sized for the City's perceived future needs, but, if intake is increased down the road, additional dryers could be added without interrupting processing.

Mayor Smith asked if the City would be looking to add increased leachate from other locations.

Ms. Murphy stated that the City needed to be cautious of how much leachate they take in.

Ms. French added that the proposed equipment would present an opportunity to take sludge from other waste treatment plants and turn that into biochar.

Mr. Mix asked Mr. Greene to address food waste.

Mr. Greene suggested the City foster partnerships with other places to handle food waste.

Ms. Murphy indicated that the City would need to team with another facility to macerate the food waste.

In response to Mayor Smith's question about whether DANC could pay for 25% of this project as a capital cost, Mr. Mix replied that they could if they determined that the City had a need for such a process.

Council Member Hickey requested a copy of Mr. Greene's PowerPoint presentation.

Council Member Olney asked for a potential timeframe to complete this project.

Ms. Murphy indicated that the funding would have to be put in place for next year so June would be the deadline for the first step in the process with design to follow. She added that she would need an answer from Council on which way they would like to go by the end of this year.

In response to Mayor Smith's question on whether there were any grants for PFAS, Mr. Greene said he did not believe so, noting that treatment of drinking water was farther ahead in this process than wastewater.

Council Member Olney asked if a bagger was included in the proposal for equipment to bag the biochar.

Mr. Greene indicated that the biochar would be bagged in 1000-pound sacks to be sold to a suitable party - either vendor, feed stock or agriculture - as determined by product. He noted there would be a reduction in the amount of material produced which would decrease transportation costs.

Council Member Ruggiero asked if there was an estimate on what the City could hope to profit from the biochar.

Mr. Greene said he had no estimate but could guarantee the City zero-cost disposal and suggested the City could market the product locally.

Zoning Re-Write Presentation

Senior Planner Jennifer Voss distributed a large packet of information to Council.

Planning and Community Development Director Michael Lumbis informed Council that what is in front of them is the draft of the zoning rewrite and ordinance update that has been in the works for a year and a half. He requested Council take its time and review the packet and the concepts contained within. He introduced Lisa Nagle of Elan and Attorney Lawrence Howard.

Ms. Nagle explained that the document before Council has been created by a committee and this was the document's debut and the first time anyone outside the committee has seen it. She noted there were two public open houses being held on Tuesday to reveal the document to the public and, on Wednesday, the document would be available on the City's website.

Displaying a PowerPoint presentation (on file in the City Clerk's office), Ms. Nagle touched briefly on the highlights of the proposed zoning plan. She began by what zoning essentially is for and by explaining why the update was necessary. She noted that the current zoning is more than 70 years old and there are uses in it that simply do not exist in a modern world. She summarized that a resident's main interest in zoning is in the following three questions: What are the land zones? What can I use them for? and What is the size of the lot? She displayed the existing zoning map followed by the new one. She indicated one of the biggest changes was that the number of City zones would drop from 12 to 8 with the biggest change being a single residential district. She presented an easy-to-read table that would change the way variances in the zoning would be handled and followed up with an explanation of the proposed change in the review process.

Lastly, she explained the zoning document addressed parking, stating that the plan was for "right-sizing" parking based on need.

She informed Council that the next steps were the following: present the plan to the public, public review on the City's website, a Council Work Session to discuss the input and potential changes and then a formal adoption process which entails a County 239-m review, formal public hearings, a SEQR evaluation and finally adoption by City Council. She noted the last step would be to train staff, Planning Commission and the Zoning Board of Appeals to implement the zoning.

Ms. Nagle acknowledged that the 100-page document was a lot to digest and she suggested Council take their time with it and they could reconvene to discuss it at the September 12 work session.

Mayor Smith thanked the committee and staff and requested that at least one additional public open house be held as he thought Tuesday would be too soon, since no one had seen the document.

Council Member Olney inquired what would happen to a home in the City if something should happen to the house, like a fire, and their potential reconstruction did not comply with the new zoning.

Mr. Howard indicated this is taken into account by what is known as "grandfathering" or more accurately non-conforming and added that as long as the property owner took steps to repair and replace existing structures, they could keep that designation forever.

Council Member Olney commented that no one builds new homes in the City of Watertown. He also noted he likes the elimination of parking as not everyone has a vehicle.

Mayor Smith again noted he would like at least one other public forum after people have had a chance to look at the document.

Ms. Nagle informed Council that there would be a comment button available on the posting of the proposal on the City's website.

Ms. Voss noted that the two maps would be on the site as well and the maps could be combined to see the various changes. She added this would be live on Wednesday.

In response to Council Member Olney's question regarding how the zoning change was an improvement, Ms. Nagle stated that their hope was it be easier for everyone to work with. She mentioned again that it was time for an update.

Work session ended at 8:30 p.m.

Lisa M. Carr
Deputy City Clerk