

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
September 12 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: Geoffrey Urda, Jennifer Voss, Michael Lumbis, Michael DeMarco

DISCUSSION

Zoo Master Plan Update

Lawrence J. Sorel, Executive Director/CEO of Zoo NY, began by introducing Mark Crandall of GYMO. They started the presentation with a slide show which showed Thompson Park and the Zoo separately. Mr. Crandall discussed, at length, three study areas, the first being the entrance and parking lot area, walkway, and the internal area of the entrance and ticket area. He told Council this also includes a building pad for concessions or rentals. He also drew Council's attention to the second study which is the undeveloped area of the park and mentioned several ideas for upgrades to the elk barn and the pens that hold the other hoof stock. The third study is the adventure area. He explained they have been working with a company called Tremendous which specializes in zip lines and aerial courses and that the company is working with the Zoo to come up with design plans and potential expenses. He summarized the different areas that would house the trees used to climb up and access the zip lines. He further noted the new parking area will have a shared space with the Zoo and the City. He drew Council's attention to the area which could be used for a vertical people mover or "Magic Carpet" as it is called. He explained that it is basically an escalator which will enable people to easily move around the Park. He added they would also like to see the old Thompson Park Ski Hill get used again. He reflected on the many years the ski hill was used, and the great memories it holds for many people, adding they would like to see a new generation have the same experiences. He said there would also be a warming station for participants or parents watching their children. He informed Council the adventure park would be open year-round.

In response to Council Member Olney's request for clarification on the escalator, Mr. Crandall explained that it will be accessible for people who want to carry equipment to different areas of the Park. It could also be accessible for people who want to have easier access to the trails. He said it would be a great way to enhance the whole park experience.

Mayor Smith asked when shovels are expected to hit the ground.

Mr. Crandall explained there is still a lot of planning and budgeting that needs to be done, but the beginning of 2023 is a reasonable estimate.

Zoning Discussion

Michael Lumbis, Planning and Community Development Director, began the presentation by reminding Council that, at the April 20, 2020 meeting, Council approved a contract with Elan Planning for the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Project. He informed Council that, since then, Elan has worked with the Planning Department Staff and the Zoning Re-Write Steering Committee on updating the City's Zoning

Ordinance – the first update since 1959. He informed Council that a draft of the Ordinance was introduced at the August 8, 2022 Council meeting where each Council Member received a printed copy including the draft map. The draft ordinance and map were also placed on the City's website for the public to view and there were several open houses, including one this evening from 4 to 6 p.m. at City Hall. He then introduced Lisa Nagle of Elan Planning, Design & Landscape, Attorney Lawrence Howard Esq. and Jennifer Voss, City Planner.

Mayor Smith offered praise for all the hard work that has gone into the Zoning project, noting it is not an easy task to endure.

Ms. Nagle informed Council that the open houses had a good turnout. She drew Council's attention to the slider map created by the City GIS department. She agreed with Mayor Smith that Zoning is very complex with a lot of moving parts. She added that the goal is to make the process more user-friendly, more flexible and easier to navigate. She discussed at length the benefits of change and how it can be beneficial to the homeowner.

Mayor Smith expressed his concerns with the elimination of Residential A/Single-Family neighborhoods. He pointed out this has dramatically changed in the proposals and could have a negative effect, over time, on the families who choose to live in these neighborhoods. He added that townhouses should not be in single-family neighborhoods. He noted there have been a lot of changes regarding special use permits, which can be difficult because you cannot say no to them. He indicated that, even though the permits can be regulated, they should still have to go through the Planning Board.

Ms. Nagle reminded Council that they are working with staff and the steering committee on facilitating this whole process and her company will not be the ones making the decisions.

Ms. Nagle then summarized what the different residential areas are and added that she and staff walked 27 miles throughout the City, noting the many different zoning districts within the City. She added that simplifying the number of zoning districts could be beneficial.

Mr. Howard added that the committee is not defending the decisions, but rather attempting to explain how the committee came to its decisions and try to guide Council to the best conclusion.

Council Member Ruggiero drew attention to a property on Ten Eyck Street that was a four- or five-unit house that sat vacant until it was sold, and at that point, the new owner was informed they would only be allowed to use it as a single-family home. Under the new Zoning guidelines, she explained, it could revert to a multi-family dwelling which could, again, upset the neighbors.

Mayor Smith reiterated his concern about community outreach programs being allowed in single-family neighborhoods.

Mr. Howard explained that this is a tough situation because State law governs the location of the facilities and, if a neighborhood is deemed suitable, there is a process where the State can, for a lack of a better term, force their way in. He stressed that is not likely but should be mentioned for consideration.

Council Member Hickey stressed that warming centers and homeless shelters are two different things and need to be considered for the area because they are coming.

Mayor Smith and Council discussed at length the long-term effects that the changes could have on the

City and how, down the road, more people could seek to live outside the City of Watertown. Discussion also was brought up that living in a residential, single-family neighborhood is a choice and when people choose to live in these neighborhoods, they may not want to live next door to a warming shelter or a homeless shelter or any other community type housing. Discussion also was focused on how Fort Drum created a housing boom in the 1980s and a lot of the old Victorian homes were converted to apartments, only to be condemned or changed back into single homes in the 1990s.

Ms. Nagle informed Council how much time they spent scouring the City streets, adding that more than 50% of their time was spent studying the Use Table and the GIS Map. She reiterated that she and her team have spent a great deal of time coming up with the best possible solutions for the City, but added there will be challenges. She stated she hopes that by working with City staff and gathering public input, it will make her team's job a bit easier for implementing the best possible solutions for the City.

Mr. Howard informed Council that the team worked hard to provide opportunities for almost everyone to be within a few blocks of some commercial activity, even if they are in a residential neighborhood.

Council Member Ruggiero asked about the "Live/Work unit" definition and inquired whether the new changes will affect it since there are residents that work out of their homes within the City.

Mr. Howard said there are two levels: one being Home Occupations and the other is a Live/Work unit. Of the two, he noted he believes the location of the live/work unit may be more restrictive than home occupation.

Council Member Ruggiero asked whether a resident who already has a business in their home will be grandfathered in with the new Zoning changes.

Ms. Voss said their business would still be allowed under Home Occupation.

Mayor Smith noted that there are Home Occupations classified as major and minor.

Ms. Nagle explained in detail the difference between Home Occupation minor and major and pointed out that the Use Table provides supplemental regulations on this topic. She also added that a Live/Work unit is a commercial and residential space occupied by the same tenant.

Council Member Pierce asked how the public feedback was at the open houses and wondered whether there was a common theme to the questions and concerns.

Ms. Nagle, Mr. Lumbis and Ms. Voss all agreed that the main question from people was how the new changes will affect their property. Ms. Nagle noted they also received many questions regarding Code Enforcement but pointed out that Code Enforcement is not Zoning.

Mayor Smith expressed his hope that the media would distribute more information to the public and instructed Ms. Nagle, staff and the rest of the steering committee to work on getting more public feedback. He suggested they incorporate some of the changes and bring the proposal back to a work session at a later date.

Work session ended at 8:45 p.m.

Margaret M. Puccia
Deputy City Clerk