

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION  
CITY OF WATERTOWN  
February 13, 2023  
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, Michael Delaney, Scott Weller, Logan Eddy, Jennifer Voss, Michael Lumbis

**DISCUSSION**

**Water Quality Improvement Project Update**

Kevin Castro of GHD offered a Power Point presentation (on file in the City Clerk's office) on the pilot testing preliminary results for disinfection byproducts control at the City's water treatment facilities.

He began by explaining that the reason for this testing was because the City's water had a level of contaminants that exceeded guidelines and raised concerns with the New York State Department of Health.

Mr. Castro explained that GHD had set up tanks with differing levels of carbon to test their filtration, adding results can be monitored remotely and on his staff's phones. He indicated the testing would be in four phases so that water would be tested under all seasons and conditions, and informed Council that GHD had completed the first two phases. He explained the various tank results and displayed a chart showing the varying levels of carbon and their effects on the contaminant levels. He also mentioned that there would be testing of results when adding ozone to the carbon tanks.

Mr. Castro stated that the next steps in the process would be to begin discussions with manufacturers for acquiring the necessary equipment as well as preparing to seek grant money to cover the costs.

Mayor Smith asked if there were any cost estimates available for this treatment plan.

Mr. Castro indicated that GHD did not have any official cost estimates yet but they had been using the figure of \$34 million as a "place-holder cost."

Mayor Smith commented that, in his opinion, the coagulation basin is the single biggest problem with the water filtration system since there would be less to filter out in the treatment plant if cleaner water was coming into the plant from that basin. He asked the representatives of Development Authority of the North Country who were present at the meeting to speak on this topic and on their stake in the water situation.

Carl Farone, Executive Director of DANC, introduced himself and Chief Operating Officer Carrie Tuttle and distributed a book to members of Council (not available in the City Clerk's office), thanking Council for allowing them to speak.

Mr. Farone explained to Council that DANC is vested in the City's water treatment issues because of a 32 year-long partnership with the City to provide water, via DANC's water line, to Fort Drum and other communities along the line. He noted that not only did the City receive an administrative order from New York State, but this time DANC had received an administrative order as well. He explained that this has caused an issue with Fort Drum because they are now limited to the amount of water they can purchase from DANC and they have been forced to dig wells to supplement their drinking water needs.

Mr. Farone went on to say that in the past, the City has taken a "Band-aid" approach to dealing with the water issues and those temporary fixes were successful for a while. He commented that it is DANC's hope that this time the City will acknowledge that providing safe drinking water is a priority and commit to implementing a solution to pursue a permanent resolution. He also urged the City to apply for grant money to cover costs. He noted the book he provided Council had all the information DANC has on the City's water and suggested it could be used when applying for funds and reminded Council that DANC will pay 25% of all capital costs.

Ms. Tuttle pointed out that the water issues are not new to the City. She indicated that she believes the coagulation basin is the root of the problem and noted she is not alone in that opinion. She stated her belief that the current pilot testing being done by GHD is not addressing the basin and that this is like putting the cart before the horse. She explained an engineering report would be necessary before applying for grant funding and there has been no study of the basin.

Council Member Olney indicated he had heard of adding coconut oil to water to help the sediment settle as a natural process.

Mayor Smith concurred that the coagulation basin is like nothing he has seen anywhere else and added that he feels the basin should be addressed first, so the least amount of biologics would be going into the filters.

Mr. Castro noted that he agreed with DANC that the sediment pond was a cause of the problems but disagreed that it is the root cause, noting that only a finite amount of sediment can be removed by a coagulation basin. He also added that GHD will, in fact, be testing the sediment pond in a future phase. He noted they would be creating a conceptual design and updating the costs.

Mayor Smith asked if part of the pilot would be to test the filters with the best possible water coming in.

Mr. Castro indicated they would test that. He further noted they would be testing the coagulation basin in the spring because that was when the water was at its coldest and most turbid.

Replying to Mayor Smith's request for a preliminary cost of the sediment pond, Mr. Castro said the cost had initially been listed in 2017 at around \$15 million.

Mayor Smith then asked for the preliminary costs of the carbon filter process.

Mr. Castro explained they had no cost estimates as of yet since they had not completed their testing.

Council Member Hickey, noting West Carthage had an issue with testing facilities, asked if the numbers the City was getting on their contaminant testing were believed to be correct.

Mayor Smith clarified that the village had water tested by two facilities and had radically different results.

Vicky Murphy indicated the state was investigating these issues with testing.

In response to Council Member Olney's question on whether the water had been tested above where it comes into the coagulation basin, Mr. Castro said it had.

In response to Council Member Olney's question on whether Carthage's sewer system empties into the river, Ms. Tuttle mentioned that they do not have a combined sewage system but added that their treated water does return to the Black River.

Ms. Tuttle suggested that the City address its water problems holistically. She noted that the City's coagulation basin is unconventional and a challenge to deal with because of the river running into it. She noted that everything affects that basin. She went on to say that she is frustrated because she has been working with the City through DANC for 20 years and, in those 20 years, there have been continual water problems and still no capital funds have been spent to address those problems.

Mayor Smith asked if it made sense to just spend money on filtration when the City should be looking at the whole system. He asked if there were updated numbers on the coagulation pond and what the City's next steps should be.

City Manager Kenneth Mix said grant money would require those updated sediment numbers and they would get a third-party estimate. He noted there was an upcoming webinar that City staff would be attending on funding. He also mentioned that Council had just approved a resolution for three applications to byproduct disinfectants.

Mayor Smith asked Mr. Castro again for a ballpark figure on the costs and when GHD might be able to provide them.

Mr. Castro said the company would have numbers in time for June grant applications.

### **Preliminary Draft of the Thompson Park Master Plan**

Gail Wittwer-Laird of Starr Whitehouse and Peter Clough Jr. of GYMO presented Council with the preliminary draft of the Thompson Park Master Plan (on file in the City Clerk's office.)

Ms. Wittwer-Laird began by noting that the Park is 429 acres and only about 100 of the acres are being used. She noted that the plan had been prepared by consulting with historical plans, looking at current uses and soliciting community outreach. She then went through each section of the plan in a highly detailed explanation of where the Park is now and where it could be in the future.

She focused primarily on circulation (routes through the Park) and cohesiveness in everything, from the Park's edges to the entrances, to the furnishings and signage throughout the Park. She noted how just having the same types of lighting or park benches placed through the Park could make it feel more like a cohesive place. She also urged Council to consider ways to add a water feature to the Park.

She displayed the many suggestions and options for improvement in the Park and offered a phasing and prioritization of potential projects. She informed Council that there were some things that could be

done right away at very little cost, such as reducing some of the roads throughout the park to one-way driving so that increased parking could be provided in the other lane.

Ms. Wittwer-Laird suggested the City choose some projects and then pursue grant funding.

Mayor Smith thanked them for their extensive and highly detailed report and suggested he would need some time to review everything as this was his first time seeing any of it.

Council Member Pierce asked what was meant by “install blaze system to mark trail loops.”

Ms. Wittwer-Laird explained “blaze” signs were just to delineate trails so hikers would know which trail they were walking along.

Council Member Olney also thanked the presenters and called their presentation “near perfect.” He listed all the many suggestions and ideas that he found appealing. He asked if the current areas known as Goose Pond or Swan Lake held water.

Mr. Clough said it had water in it during parts of the year but needed to be reinforced with clay to keep water in it year-round.

Mr. Mix added that it is a “vernal” pond in that it has water in the winter and spring and then dries up.

Ms. Wittwer-Laird also mentioned there is a running spring near the reservoir that might also be developed into a water feature.

Mayor Smith asked if there were any cost estimates on anything.

Ms. Wittwer-Laird said cost estimates were not in the scope of her proposal. She did note that the projects were listed in a way that the City could choose them “a la carte.”

Mr. Mix added that cost estimates at this stage were not useful since by the time any work was decided on and put out to bid, the costs will have changed.

Council Member Pierce asked if the community members would have the ability to comment now that the Master Plan had been made public.

Ms. Wittwer-Laird and Mr. Clough agreed that they could open another survey on the website where the Master Plan will be available.

Mr. Mix also advised the Master Plan would be available for viewing on the City’s website.

Council Member Ruggiero thanked the plan’s creators and said she appreciated how thorough it was.

Council Member Olney noted he could see the community input in the plan and asked where the City should start.

Mr. Mix explained that Council could choose projects but that, currently, the City was going to continue on with the buckthorn clearing project.

Work session ended at 9:20 p.m.

Lisa M. Carr, Deputy City Clerk