

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
January 8, 2024
7:00 p.m.**

Mayor Sarah V.C. Pierce Presiding

Present: Council Member Robert O. Kimball
Council Member Clifford G. Olney III
Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero
Council Member Benjamin P. Shoen
Mayor Sarah V.C. Pierce

Also Present: Eric F. Wagenaar, City Manager

City staff present: Michael Lumbis, Jennifer Voss, Logan Eddy, Kyle Meehan

DISCUSSION

Downtown Revitalization Initiative - Downtown Branding, Wayfinding and Signage Project Update

Mayor Pierce introduced Barbara Martin, Chief Executive Officer of KMA Design and Michael Martin, Design Director of KMA Design.

Planning and Community Development Director Michael Lumbis began the discussion reminding Council that this is a Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) project, which began a couple of years ago. He explained the purpose of it is to create a recognizable brand for the City and Downtown and a coordinated network sign system, as well as provide designs for new gateway, directional, destination and informational signage. He added that staff was asked to seek proposals from firms that have experience in this field and, in May of last year, KMA Designs out of Pittsburg, PA was chosen. He informed Council that KMA has extensive experience and has worked throughout the United States. He noted that Council approved the contract with KMA in August, and shortly afterwards, the work began on the project. He summarized the steps that were taken to start the project, including street tours with Ms. Voss and public surveys. He added that the DRI funds will help pay for a portion of the project.

Ms. Martin told Council that they have worked extensively with the sign committee and said they have a good feel for the community. She noted she feels they can take the City in the right direction to celebrate who the City is and guide the City through ways to update and enhance the City. She informed Council of the different states that KMA has worked with and the numerous cities they have helped which are similar to Watertown and added she looks forward to bringing in new signage for the next generation.

Mr. Martin introduced the presentation to Council with a slide show (on file at the City Clerk's office), explaining branding designs for the signs. He noted their firm worked very closely with the sign committee and showed Council different conceptual ideas for the signs, keeping in mind the footprint of the community. He suggested the tagline be "The Heart of Northern New York" and said this was selected from several other options. He added that the color options were intertwined with the wave feature within the word Watertown. He then drew Council's attention to the different color options and shield versus no-shield design concept. He discussed at length the existing conditions and explained they

did a full inventory of signage in the City. He pointed out the four different types of signage and explained in detail what each one is.

Mr. and Ms. Martin then drew Council's attention to the results of the public survey. Ms. Martin said the consensus was that there are a lot of signs with the blue and white colors, which give a very Department of Transportation feel, and people tend to ignore them as they are not eye-catching. They stressed that they still must follow all NYS DOT rules when preparing new signage for cities. Much discussion surrounded the survey results such as the designs' visual appeal, colors that match Watertown's personality and the colors and design which best reflect Watertown's identity. They explained that after much input and thought, they are bringing forward two options to Council.

Ms. Voss informed Council that the committee has been meeting once or twice a month and is made up of individuals from the Chamber of Commerce, CitiBus, DPW, Parks and Recreation, Watertown City School District, hospital, downtown revitalization committee and City staff.

Council Member Ruggerio said she likes the theme "The Heart of Northern New York" but was concerned that it will be too small for people to read as they are driving by. She also asked if the signs are painted or vinyl.

Ms. Martin replied that is a valid concern and noted the font can always be changed. She told Council Member Ruggerio that the signs would be an aluminum cabinet and the paints would provide longevity, which should last 15 to 20 years. She stressed that whoever does the bidding for the project must stick to the detailed specs that KMA have recommended.

Council Member Olney asked about solar panels for lighting.

Ms. Martin said it exists but is very costly.

Mr. Martin explained a solar study would have to be done, especially considering the amount of sunlight the north country has.

Council Member Olney, Mr. Lumbis and Ms. Martin discussed at length the different sign colors and designs.

Council Member Shoen said he was happy with the options and liked the more modern look. He asked if it was possible to combine signs with a modern flair in some areas and more historic flair downtown.

Ms. Martin explained that Option Two offers a modern design with a historic feel to it. She stressed that she would discourage having two different programs or combining them.

Council Member Kimball asked for clarification on the lighting and expressed concern about the added cost of the lighting.

There was discussion about the results of the survey pertaining to colors and City Manager Wagenaar noted that purple is the City School District's color.

Ms. Martin explained that she would not suggest purple because the blue hues represent water in Watertown, and they would like to stay within that vein.

Mr. Martin reiterated that anything is open for some change and maybe purple could be mixed in with the sign.

Much discussion occurred about lighting vs. non lighting.

Mr. Lumbis reiterated there could be grant funding of roughly \$250,000 to \$260,000 available to pay for the first phase of the project. He added more funding could be discussed down the road.

Mayor Pierce said she prefers Option Two as it has a good mix. She asked if, eventually, all street signs would be replaced.

Ms. Martin commented that is basically up to the Council.

In response to Mayor Pierce's question of what the other potential tag lines were, Ms. Martin offered to email them to her.

Mayor Pierce reiterated that all of Council agrees on Option Two and told Mr. and Mrs. Martin to supply her with any more feedback.

City Manager Update

City Manager Wagenaar filled Council in on some topics, beginning with the hiring of four new firefighters and twelve new recruits for the Police Department. He said the City has made an offer to a potential new Director for Human Resources. He indicated he had also sent out an email to officially start the 2024-2025 Budget season. Lastly, he informed Council that he received updates from CitiBus that there will be a mobile app to pay for bus fare in the next 4 to 6 weeks along with a new route to Summit Village and BOCES.

Mayor Pierce reminded Council that they would not be going into executive session as listed on the agenda.

Work session ended at 8:10 p.m.

Margaret M. Puccia
Deputy City Clerk