



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY

April 4, 2022

**At the conclusion of the Special Meeting
Hybrid Meeting**

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

D. Reed, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, C. Daubert, J. Cepeda-Freytiz, J. Waltman – in person and W. Butler - virtually

OTHERS PRESENT:

M. Gombar, L. Kelleher, W. Stoudt, F. Denbowski, J. Kelly, M. Rodriguez, J. Abodalo, F. Lachat – in person and S. Smith, M. Oppenheimer, J. Stoudt - virtually

I. Retaining PFM after Act 47

Mr. Denbowski stated that the administration recognizes the great work and assistance provided by PFM and will apply for a 1 year STMP grant (Strategic Management Planning Program – formerly called the Early Intervention Program) offered by the PA DCED for financial assistance. He noted that all four (4) collective bargaining unit agreements expire next year and the City will need PFM's assistance to manage this process.

Mr. Kelly explained that the STMP is a grant program covering 2-4 years. He stated that Scranton utilized this program when they were approved to exit the Act 47 program. He explained that the City will apply when it exits Act 47 and the existing contract with PFM expires, which will allow PFM to be eligible to assist under the STMP program. He noted that this grant requires a 50% local match that can be covered by the General Fund.

II. 5th & Penn Properties

Mr. Denbowski explained that a portion of this topic related to the buildings must occur in executive session. Mr. Lachat and Mr. Gombar concurred that his a real estate matter eligible for an executive session. He stated that the City purchased these five (5) properties in 2013, entered into a management agreement with Our City Reading (OCR) in 2014 which was repealed in 2017 by the former administration. The last two (2) RFPs were rejected as there were only two (2) bids submitted. He noted the importance of the redevelopment of these buildings as they are at the center of the downtown.

Ms. Kelleher noted that during the prior two (2) administrations several other RFPs were issued and the bids rejected.

Mr. Abodalo explained the differences between an RFQ (Request for Qualifications) and an RFP (Request for Proposal). He opined that an RFP is too specific to the scope of work and that the RFQ is more relaxed looking mainly at the qualifications of those who make submissions. The RFQ submissions are evaluated based on the different studies that have been prepared about the downtown, the current downtown conditions and the knowledge of those submitting proposals. Also considered is finding the highest and best use for these properties located in the heart of a historic district and the overall capacity, including financial ability, of the developer to perform successfully. He stated that an internal committee is evaluating the submissions, scoring them, interviewing and negotiating with the developers, and a recommendation will be made to Council.

Mr. Denbowski noted that while the committee is actively working on this issue, a defined process must be followed over a period of time to evaluate the submissions, score them, followed by interviewing and negotiating with the developers before a recommendation is made for Council consideration.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned who is participating on the committee. Mr. Abodalo stated that that information is confidential. She then inquired about the potential conflict of interest for those participating on the committee. Mr. Abodalo stated that all members must submit an executed confidentiality agreement and conflict of interest form.

Ms. Reed noted that in the past bids were rejected when only two (2) submissions were received and questioned why three (3) submissions are sufficient. Mr. Denbowski stated that three (3) submissions have been deemed sufficient.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for the committee members to have an agreed upon baseline so the scoring process is fair. Mr. Denbowski stated that the baseline is provided. Mr. Abodalo read from the RFQ.

Mr. Waltman noted that Council will place additional scrutiny on the submissions. He asked Council to remember that the Downtown Plus plan submitted by Stantec has not been approved and that a presentation on the parking study has not occurred. He noted the importance of that large gap, reminding Council that the administration intentionally delayed this RFQ until the Downtown Plus study was completed and approved.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz again asked for the boarded up windows to be repaired in the part of the building that faces the parklet and the CollegeTowne building. She noted the need for the City to maintain the properties it owns.

III. Board, Authority and Commission Appointments

Mr. Waltman stated that Mr. Gombar distributed a memo outlining his legal opinion on the appointment authority for the City's Boards, Authorities and Commissions. He stated that there is some difference between his opinion and that of the former and current Solicitor.

Mr. Gombar noted that some have multiple variables to consider such as Charter language, the language in the enabling legislation, State law, and limited case law. He noted that the case law is relative to appointments to the Water Authority in Harrisburg PA, which is not totally on point with the form of government here and that in Harrisburg. He stated that 5-10 of the boards require additional research; however, he noted that appointments to the Water Authority belong to City Council, not the mayor. He will initially focus attention on the Water Authority appointments.

Mr. Waltman noted Council's intent to work collaboratively with the mayor and to seek his input.

Mr. Denbowski stated that the administration intends to begin putting Parking Authority appointments through the background check process coordinated by the Council Office.

Mr. Waltman stated that this issue will be discussed again in a few weeks.

IV. Fire Report

Chief Stoudt's report was distributed electronically last week:

I. ACCOMPLISHMENTS –

Following the decline in COVID the Department resumed the installation of smoke detectors in owner occupied dwellings, during the month of February Firefighters installed a total of 21 detectors in 4 owner occupied dwellings.

ONGOING PROJECTS -

- **9th and Marion Station – Block work continues on both the interior and exterior walls, they should be reaching the Mezzanine level shortly. Once they reach that level they will then begin the structural steel work as well, after which the progression and pace of the project should pick up speed as other contractors will then be able to start working on their specific services.**

II. Fire and EMS Responses for the Month of – February 2022

Total Responses by the Department's EMS Units –	Total Incidents	1321
	City Units	1265
	Mutual Aid from County Units	56
	Mutual Aid to County	46
	Naloxone Events	16

Total Response for Fire Apparatus – 530 Incidents

III. Office of the Fire Marshal Updates for the Month of – February 2022

Total Inspections - 57

Health and Safety Inspections – 17

Annual Inspections - 38

Complaints - 1

Fire Protection System Permits Issued - 9

Fire Investigations – 3

- IV. Emergency Management – We are working with Linda to schedule a 20 -30 min. presentation by the City’s Emergency Management Coordinator at future COW that will provide Council with an overview of Emergency Management.**
- V. Training – During the month of February the Suppression and EMS units participated in Air Consumption drills that were conducted by the shift officers with guidance from the Training Lieutenant.**

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz inquired if Fire will organize a program similar to the Police Youth Academy. Chief Stoudt stated that this topic is currently under consideration.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the increase in opioid overdose cases and she congratulated the EMS Division for their ability to manage this problem. Chief Stoudt stated that overall the number of overdoses is somewhat reduced.

V. Other

Chief Stoudt noted his agreement with Mr. Butler’s request for a Stop Sign at North 13th and Pike Streets, as he responded to an accident at that intersection this morning and heard about the need from citizens.

Mr. Denbowski stated that the administration is completing a traffic study. Mr. Butler noted that a look at the accident history at this intersection should be enough of a study. Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed noting the number of horrible accidents at North 5th and Oley and Douglass – the only two intersections without some type of traffic control on this long stretch from Penn Street to Marion Street.

Mr. Denbowski stated that the city cannot use a traffic sign to control traffic and is considering other traffic calming approaches.

Council members noted the need for Ms. Reed to work with Mr. Rebert from PennDOT about the need for traffic calming or signs/signals at 13th and Perry, 18th and Perkiomen and on Hampden Blvd.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz inquired about the administrations evaluation process and the need for a salary study to cure the pay inequities in various areas and positions. Mr. Denbowski explained the annual timeline and noted that the administration is currently working with the bargaining units to move forward with a salary study.

VI. Executive Session

The six members of Council, Mr. Gombar, Mr. Lachat, Ms. Kelleher, Ms. Smith, Mr. Denbowski, Mr. Kelly and Mr. Abodalo entered executive session to discuss real estate at 6:25 pm. At 7:07 pm Mr. Kelly and Mr. Abodalo were excused and the remaining group entered executive session to discuss litigation.

The executive session concluded and the meeting adjourned at approximately 7:10 pm.

*Respectfully Submitted by
Linda A. Kelleher, CMC, City Clerk*