



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY
June 21, 2022
5 pm
Hybrid Meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, M. Gombar, J. Kelly, J. Abodalo, J. Stoudt– in person and S. Smith, K. Zeiber, B. Reilly, F. Lachat - virtually

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz called the meeting to order at 5:05 pm.

I. Parking Study Results

Mr. Abodalo stated that the Desman consulting group completed the Parking Study on August 31, 2021. He gave a PowerPoint presentation. Desman analyzed the Downtown Central, South Central, Northeast, and Northwest neighborhoods where the highest amount of parking stress exists. He stated that the study shows that there are 714 metered spaces.

From community meetings held in all four areas, Desman learned that 28% believe in the need for increased parking violation enforcement, prefer parking on surface lots over garages, and increased enforcement for those who park in yellow curb areas as parking in these areas usually creates line-of-sight problems. They also learned that 75% believe that the available curbside parking spaces do not meet the needs in neighborhoods and that rear parking is desired. Mr. Abodalo expressed the belief in the need for “indented streets” to create additional parking. He suggested creating a smooth process to create and approve rear parking in neighborhoods with a \$1M allocation that could be some form of a grant or loan. He noted that there are currently 1588 vacant lots across the City.

Ms. Reed inquired if the grant/loan program will be applied for only owner occupied properties. Mr. Abodalo stated that the terms of the grant/loan program need to be created

through the legislative process, along with a second process to incentivize the de-conversion of rental properties.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that placing parking pads at the rear of residential properties may create storm water runoff issues and she suggested including the EAC in the review process for the rear parking. She also noted the need to consider these applications carefully as many alleys are not wide enough to allow ingress and egress from rear lots and she reminded everyone about the original intent of backyards and the need to avoid replacing the entire grassy areas in backyards.

Mr. Kelly noted the need to carefully create this program and avoid a “cookie cutter” approach.

Ms. Reed stated that in some cases backyard parking pads may require HARB approval if the area is visible from the public right of way.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed with the suggestions made. She inquired about how this application process would start and the timeline for the program to begin. Mr. Kelly stated that the first step will be receiving a zoning permit for the project.

Mr. Abodalo noted the need to amend the Zoning Ordinance to relax the process and stated that this process can include requirements about alley maintenance. He stated that his office can ask the consultant to prepare the draft zoning amendment ordinance and the templates for the process. He stated that the program can begin in July.

Mr. Kelly stated that the City’s priorities begin with enforcing the parking regulations, followed by pedestrian, including ADA, safety, residential parking stress and the City’s overall parking needs.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz disconnected from the meeting due to a work commitment.

II. Review Draft Vehicle Use Policy

Mr. Kelly stated that Ms. Guldin in HR drafted the draft policy distributed at the meeting and electronically, using policies used from comparable municipalities.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz noted that the language in the policy requires refinement with the many typos corrected.

Ms. Reed suggested adding mileage trackers to City owned vehicles, similar to the technology used by the County to ensure that County-owned vehicles adhere to the County’s vehicle use policy.

Chief J. Stoudt explained that each person filling “chief” positions in the department has access to City owned vehicles and each person in the department who drives a City-owned piece of apparatus is assigned a gas card with individual PIN numbers so that gas purchases are tied to the employee who is filling up, which allows the gas cards to be monitored.

Mr. Kelly agreed, noting that gas usage monitoring begins with the Fleet Secretary.

III. Ordinances Review

1. **Amending Charter Section 912(a)(2)** allowing the Capital and GF Public Hearings to be held on the same night

Ms. Kelleher stated that the Charter currently requires Council to hold General Fund and Capital public hearings on separate evenings. She stated that while the concept is good, over 24 years, we have learned that it would be more efficient on all fronts to hold both hearings on the same evening.

Council agreed.

2. **Amending Charter Sections 1102 through 1109** to replace the current Referendum & Initiative with the procedure in the Third Class City Code

Ms. Kelleher stated that over the past 24 years approximately 10-15 referendum or initiative processes have been undertaken by citizens and each time flaws in the Charter process were identified and unfortunately to the citizens undertaking the process believe that problems were created by the City Clerk, which is not accurate. She stated that approximately two years ago, she and the Law Department began to consider how this process could be improved by changing the Charter’s Initiative and Referendum process to the existing requirements in the Third Class City Code which would improve the process for the City and the citizens and create the proper checks and balances.

Ms. Kelleher stated that there are pros and cons to the change:

- Cons
 - Requiring citizens to sign the petitions in City Hall (*note suggest amendment allowing the submission of forms qualifying as signatures via email, snail mail or electronically to expand participation*)
 - Reducing the period signatures can be collected
 - Increasing the hours the City Clerk’s office must be open to the public
- Pros
 - Reducing the number of signatures required (*20% of the electors who voted in the past mayoral election*)
 - Ensuring that only registered electors are signing
 - Ensuring that the petitions are properly prepared

- Advertisement of the petition process

Mr. Lachat stated that an additional pro is the availability of case law with the process in the third Class City Code, noting the lack of case law to provide guidance on the Charter requirements.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz expressed the belief that using the Third Class City Code requirements eliminates the grass-roots benefit that is afforded by the Charter process, noting that many do not trust government and will be unwilling to come in to City Hall.

Ms. Kelleher agreed in part and noted the number of times those undertaking the grass roots approach failed to circulate the petitions as required by the Charter, failed to inquire if the person signing is a registered voter, etc. She stated that the proper process would be followed if the process is handled by the City Clerk's Office. She suggested adding a component that allows someone to use a form that can be submitted by 1st class mail, email, etc.

3. **Amending Charter Section 404 (a) - (b)** – requiring Council approval for the termination of the Managing Director *Note: select simple majority vote or super majority vote*

Mr. Gobar explained that this ordinance was drafted as the result of the discussion on the Government Study topic at a COW meeting May. He stated that he and Ms. Kelleher have differing beliefs on if the Council vote should be by majority or super majority and decided to have Council make that determination. Ms. Kelleher stated that if that determination is made tonight, the ordinance requiring Council approval for the termination of the Department Directors can be drafted.

Mr. Daubert stated that while he believes in the need for the reconsideration of the current form of government due to the lack of continuity in high level management positions, this is a good first step to apply checks and balances. He stated that if Council approval of the mayor's nomination to hire is required, the same should apply to termination.

Ms. Reed agreed that a government study commission is needed and this is the right step in the interim. She stated that while continuity in high level administrative positions does not occur on the administrative side, that problem does not exist with legislative staff, noting the many years the existing Council staff has been in place and the institutional value that comes with that. She suggested that the lack of institutional knowledge on the administrative side weakens their ability to get things done as administrations frequently change. She added that while administrations change ever 4-8 years; Council changeover occurs every two (2) years and Council staff has remained in place. She expressed the belief that this change, if approved by the electorate, should add an increased level of security for those applying for top executive positions.

The group discussed the pros/cons of super majority approval v. simple majority approval and after a straw vote requested that the decision should be made through a simple majority vote of 4 Council members.

4. **Amending the 2022 Fund 47 ARP Fund Budget** is hereby amended to provide the funds needed for the Mayor's Summer Youth Initiative Program expenditures. The funds will be made available by a budget appropriation in the City's 2022 ARP Fund budget.

Mr. Kelly stated that this initiative was announced in the schools. The training for the selected students will occur on July 15th and the program will run from July 18th – August 12th. Background checks for City staff occurred prior to their employment and the required child related background checks will occur for those who have not had those checks. He explained the referral process to be used by the schools followed by an interview with the City. The student is required to only produce a copy of their report card, no written referral letter is required.

In response to a question from Ms. Reed, Mr. Kelly stated that the actual cost is \$72K for this 6 week program with 32 participants. He stated that an ordinance to fund the program will be introduced on the June 27th agenda.

5. **Authorizing the conveyance of 513 S. 14 ½ Street** to the RPA to be used as Residential Parking
6. **Authorizing the execution of a lease agreement to convey 924 – 932 Penn Street** to the RPA to be used as Residential Parking

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz inquired if community input was considered prior to proposing these lots for parking.

Chief J. Stoudt inquired about the length of the leases, as the fire station project for Penn Street may be reconsidered at some point in the future. Mr. Kelly stated that the agreements continue until one party wishes to extinguish the lease agreement.

Ms. Reed noted that East Reading residents have mixed feelings about the reuse of the S 14th ½ Street lot that was formerly the East Reading Pool – return to a swimming pool, creation of a park property and parking.

Ms. Kelleher noted that the Neversink Playground is less than a block away from this property.

Mr. Daubert opined that a balanced approach is required, noting the need for additional green space and off-street parking in East Reading.

Ms. Ventura recalled that this lot can serve approximately 20 cars and the lot also includes green space.

IV. Public Works 2022 Paving Project

Mr. Zeiber stated that the following paving projects are planned for this year:

Phase 1

- S. 6th Street (Penn to Cherry, Willow to Canal, Spruce ADA) 760.00
- N. 6th Street (Penn to Court, Elm to Spring) 4,200.00
- Front Street (Walnut to Windsor) 3,850.00
- McKnight Street (Robeson to Windsor) 1,060.00
- Windsor Street (Lincoln to Front) 1,260.00
- Court Street (10th to 11th) 540.00
- Cedar Street (Greenwich to Walnut) 2,270.00
- 8th Street (Penn to Franklin) 575.00
- Riverfront Drive (2nd to 4th) 850.00
- Luzerne Street (Mercer to Dead End @ SR12) 1,105.00
- Wunder Street (Spruce to Muhlenberg) 330.00
- Old Wyomissing Road (600-1400 Blocks) 3,300.00
 - **20,100.00 LF**
 - 3.81 Miles**

Phase 2

- W. Spring Street (Centre to Ritter) 1,720.00
- W. Robeson Street (Weiser Street to Centre Ave - SR61) 1,210.00
- Weiser Street (Robeson to W. Green) 3,010.00
- Clinton Street (River to W. Greenwich) 2,015.00
- Tulpehocken Street (W. Douglass to W. Green) 1,940.00
- Lincoln Street (W. Douglass to W. Oley) 600.00
- McKnight Street (W. Windsor to W. Green) 1,873.00
- Pear Street (W. Windsor to W. Greenwich) 1,596.00
- N. 2nd Street (W. Douglass to Hudson, Pear to Buttonwood) 1,820.00
- Jameson Place (Lincoln to Ritter) 290.00
- W. Douglass Street (Clinton to Centre) 3,920.00
- W. Oley Street (Clinton to N. 2nd) 3,050.00
- W. Greenwich Street (Miltimore to Schuylkill) 182.00
- W. Green Street (Tulpehocken to Schuylkill) 700.00
- W. Elm Street (Front to N. 2nd, N. 3rd to Reed) 2,440.00
- Angora Road (Hill to Alsace Township Line) 2,650.00
 - **29,016.00 LF**
 - 5.50 Miles**

Mr. Zeiber explained that these areas were selected via staff reports and citizen complaints/requests.

Ms. Reed requested that the roadways in the Glenside Elementary School area be added to this list, as repaving has not occurred for over 30 years.

Mr. Zeiber asked Council to submit streets for the upcoming schedule. He noted that Mr. Butler has made some requests.

Regarding personnel needs, Mr. Zeiber reported that there are some key unfilled openings at the WWTP.

V. Community and Economic Development Monthly

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that this topic is deferred.

VI. Council President Vacancy

Mr. Gombar outlined the Charter required process to fill a vacant seat within 30 days of the vacancy, which in this case is on or about July 13th. He stated that Council went through the process after the District 1 Council member resigned earlier this year. He stated that Council is able to decide if, in this case, they wish to appoint a sitting member of Council or go through an application process that is open to the public. He noted that discussions about the replacement need to occur at public meetings, not executive sessions.

Ms. Reed stated that the last two times the Council President seat was vacated, Council selected a sitting member of Council for the position, then following up with a public process to fill the vacated District seat.

Council members present agreed with the need to appoint a sitting member of Council.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that further discussions will occur on June 27th when Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz is present.

VII. Other

Mr. Kelly stated that the first ARPA Committee meeting is scheduled for this Friday, June 24th during the lunch hour.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:15 pm.

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