



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY

July 25, 2022
5:00 P.M.
Hybrid Meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

D. Reed, C. Daubert, M. Ventura, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, W. Butler, J. Cepeda-Freytiz (in person)

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, M. Gombar, M. Rodriguez, E. Moran, J. Kelly, F. Lachat, J. Stoudt, M. Vind, R. Tornielli (in person), S. Smith, B. Murray, M. Oppenheimer, B. Ayers-Fisher, G. Walz, K. Zeiber, T. McMahan, K. Roberts, M. Lynch, BCTV, WFMZ (virtually)

The meeting was called to order at 5:09 pm by Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz.

I. City Council Appointments

1. Staff Oversight Committee Appointments

Mr. Gombar stated that the ordinance creating the policy to perform annual evaluations of Council staff was enacted on July 11, 2022 which calls for a committee of three Councilors. He suggested the Council President and two Councilors serve on this Committee.

Mr. Daubert, Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz, and Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz will serve on the Staff Oversight Committee.

2. District 6 Councilor Appointment

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz explained that Council interviewed all three applicants and used a scoring rubric to choose the best candidate.

Ms. Reed stated that this is consistent with the process that Council has used since 2012. She expressed the belief that this is a good and fair process and she is very comfortable using this process. She stated that Council has followed its established protocols.

Mr. Daubert questioned if the candidates have been notified.

Mr. Gombar stated that the resolution can be moved up on the agenda to allow the candidate to be sworn into office this evening.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that Council has not yet received the scores. (*Note: the scores were emailed to Council on July 19.*) She questioned if the highest scoring candidate has been notified and has officially accepted the position. She stated that Council should not make this assumption.

Ms. Kelleher left the meeting to contact the candidates at this time.

3. Redevelopment Authority Board Appointment

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that she and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz have submitted their scores.

Ms. Smith stated that she emailed the updated scores to Council this afternoon.

Ms. Reed clarified that one appointment would be made based on discussions in executive session. Mr. Gombar agreed.

4. RAWA Lease Agreement Work Group Appointments

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that this is an opportunity to be part of negotiations for the next lease agreement. She stated that three Councilors can participate.

Ms. Ventura questioned the duties of the appointees. Mr. Kelly stated that the group will negotiate the new terms of the next agreement.

Ms. Reed, Ms. Ventura, and Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz noted their interest in serving.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that the vote on the appointments would occur this evening.

Mr. Kelly questioned the best time of day to schedule meetings. He stated that he will coordinate with Mr. Murray.

Ms. Ventura and Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that the best time to meet is after work.

II. Debt Policy

Mr. Kelly introduced Mr. Vind and stated that he has been providing financial advice to the City for many years. He stated that this is the last remaining item to complete as part of the City's Act 47 Exit Plan. He stated that Council approval of this policy is required.

Mr. Vind stated that the policy has been in progress since January 2022. He stated that PFM and the City's bond counsel have reviewed and provided input on the policy. He stated that

the policy combines best practices with flexibility. He stated that the procedures are intended for transparency and describe the relationships and required communications. He stated that he will provide an annual review of the City's outstanding debt service at a public meeting.

Mr. Vind distributed a handout of the City's current debt obligations. He explained that page one is the total debt and page two is the debt paid from the General Fund. He stated that more detail will be provided at the annual review.

Ms. Kelleher returned to the meeting at this time.

Mr. Kelly stated that in 2033 the City will be debt free. He noted the need for discussions in the next 5 – 10 years about the possibility of financing large infrastructure projects with new debt. He noted the need for favorable interest rates and bond ratings. He stated that a project like the police training facility is a good example.

Mr. Vind stated that compared to other 3rd class cities Reading is in a favorable debt position.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that this is excellent news.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this has been years in the making. She thanked all who contributed to this work in the past.

Mr. Vind stated that he has been working with the City since 2004 and the City has shown great discipline through Act 47.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to be aware of the state of the economy before issuing new debt. She noted the need for any debt to be an investment and to move the City forward.

Ms. Reed expressed the belief that Mr. Vind's work has been an integral part of the City's success. She stated that the refinancing efforts have helped to reduce the City's debt.

Mr. Kelly stated that the Debt Policy does not reflect the consent decree. He stated that the PennVest loans for the WWTP are also being repaid. He stated that PennVest loans can also be considered for future projects.

Ms. Rodriguez questioned if page two of the handout shows General Fund debt only. Mr. Vind stated that it does. He stated that he can make the repayment schedules available to Ms. Rodriguez.

Mr. Vind left the meeting at this time.

III. Dangerous Intersection and Security Camera Updates

Chief Tornielli reviewed the dangerous intersection report provided to Council. He stated that Police will focus their efforts on Hampden Blvd, where speeding is a problem along with accidents. He stated that this is the most severe problem at this time.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked Chief Tornielli for his report. She stated that her concerns at S 18th St & Perkiomen Ave was with pedestrians but that is not supported by the data. She stated that she saw the third accident today at 5th & Washington Sts in the last several months. She stated that the large planters are often hit by cars. Ms. Kelleher stated that there is a similar problem at 6th & Washington. Chief Tornielli stated that these intersections already have traffic signals. He stated that in some cases adding more signals can cause additional confusion especially when dealing with sun glare.

Ms. Ventura questioned next steps. Chief Tornielli stated that Council would need to decide if they wanted formal engineering studies of specific intersections.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested working with PennDOT at 18th & Perkiomen because of the pedestrians crossing there. She expressed the belief that this should be a priority and that young people are at risk.

Mr. Kelly questioned the speed tables on N 14th St at Hillside. Chief Tornielli stated that these speed tables predate his service. He suggested contacting Public Works. *(Note: former Councilor Sterner worked with the Hillside Playground Assn to have the speed tables installed to reduce speeding problems at the pool and playground.)*

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz noted that incidents are increasing. She questioned the number of incidents needed before signage or signals are installed. Chief Tornielli stated that it would depend on the results of engineering or PennDOT studies. He stated that some types of incidents are difficult to quantify. He recommended working with PennDOT at 18th & Perkiomen to see if there are issues with pedestrians.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that both 5th & Douglass and 5th & Oley have had an increase in incidents. Chief Tornielli stated that these would need PennDOT review.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned how the City decides to study intersections. Mr. Kelly stated that a bid for engineering services would be required. He suggested building on the Active Transportation Plan to expand the intersections that get addressed.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that Mr. Waltman worked on the 5th & Douglass and 5th & Oley intersections for many years.

Ms. Kelleher stated that the City has a contract with a traffic engineering firm. Traffic studies at these intersections did not meet the PennDOT warrants (traffic volume and/or reportable accidents) several times.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned the installation of crosswalks. Ms. Reed stated that PennDOT would determine that as well. She stated that State legislative support can help with PennDOT issues.

Ms. Reed noted the issues caused by their not being a crossing guard at Schuylkill Ave & Lackawanna St and the pedestrians that cross in the middle of the block at Schuylkill Ave & Ave B. Chief Tornielli stated that this will be an enforcement focus area when school reopens. He stated that there is already a signal at Lackawanna so enforcement is key.

Ms. Reed questioned what could be done at Ave B. Chief Tornielli stated that if left turns are not allowed, residents will turn right and then make dangerous U turns on Schuylkill Ave which may cause more problems.

Ms. Reed questioned installing flashing lights or crosswalks. Chief Tornielli stated that this is also PennDOT's decision.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned the status of 4th & Cherry. Chief Tornielli stated that Public Works is conducting a traffic study at this location. He stated that Council will receive that report when the study is completed.

Mr. Zeiber stated that the 13th & Pike traffic study will begin when school reopens this fall. He stated that he will discuss these other intersections with the City's traffic engineer and ask that the engineer approach PennDOT.

Ms. Ventura questioned what will be done on Hampden Blvd. Mr. Zeiber stated that fog lines have been painted along the parking lane to calm traffic because the driving lane will appear to be narrower.

Ms. Ventura stated that she has not noticed any behavioral changes and that people continue to speed.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that poor driving behaviors exacerbate incidents and that incidents will continue to increase. She stated that not following traffic laws has become an acceptable norm.

Chief Tornielli stated that the City is pursuing PennDOT grants to address aggressive driving.

Mr. Zeiber stated that the 4th & Cherry Sts intersection is part of the Active Transportation Plan. He stated that the draft Plan should be received within the next few months.

Mr. Kelly stated that the draft Plan should be received by year end. He stated that this Plan will include pedestrian issues.

Chief Tornielli stated that 15 new camera locations are being identified. He stated that seven cameras will be upgraded. He stated that this is a capital project.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the cameras are located on public or private property. Chief Tornielli stated that it is both. He stated that many cameras are located on schools and government buildings. He stated that the cameras will be placed in areas with increased crime, quality of life issues and traffic issues. He stated that the system will be expanding from downtown into neighborhoods.

Mr. Kelly stated that placing a camera at the Pagoda would be very expensive. He questioned if cameras could be located at Riverfront Park. Chief Tornielli expressed the belief that this is too far to reach a signal. He noted his hope to expand to the riverfront in next year's upgrade.

IV. City's Electricity Rate

Ms. Ayers-Fisher shared her screen and reviewed a Power Point presentation. She introduced Gene Walz from Edge Insights of Wyomissing.

Mr. Walz shared his screen and reviewed a Power Point presentation. He stated that the price of electricity changes daily and that Edge Insights would manage the bid process for the City.

Mr. Kelly stated that Council is being asked to adopt a resolution to authorize the Mayor to sign the contract without Council approval due to the volatility of the electricity market. Mr. Walz explained that a price is good for a 24 hour period and that it is important for the City to act quickly to capitalize on market changes.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned the term of the contract and the rate. Mr. Walz stated that he will work with City staff to determine these details. He stated that he will ensure staff is fully informed to make a responsible decision.

Mr. Kelly noted the need for flexibility to execute the contract.

Mr. Walz disconnected from the meeting at this time.

V. Agenda Review

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that there are two minor corrections to the July 11, 2022 minutes needed. She stated that the minutes show that she voted on Resolution 112-2022 and 113-2022 and that Ms. Ventura did not vote. She stated that she was absent from the July 11 meeting and did not cast votes.

Council reviewed this evening's agenda including the following:

- Resolution authorizing the disposal of Public Works handicapped applications from 1984 – 2010 in accordance with the Record Retention Schedule

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the documents were no longer relevant. Ms. Kelleher stated that these records can be disposed of according to the Record Retention Schedule.

- Award of Contract to Boyle Construction at the price of \$1,623,886 for project and construction management of the new Police Training and Special Operations Facility

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the ARPA funds to be used for this project have already been budgeted. Mr. Kelly stated that the ARPA funds have been allocated for this project.

- Resolution confirming the appointment of C. Thomas Neff as the City Zoning Administrator

Mr. Kelly stated that one of the City's critical vacancies has been filled.

- Award of Contract to OpenGov at the price of \$94,457.56 for year 1 and year 2 to automate the bid and RFP processes

Mr. Kelly stated that DocuSign has increased efficiency for contract executions and OpenGov will further automate the contract process. He stated that there is also hope that using this platform will increase local vendors.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if the program could also be used for the RFP process. Mr. Kelly stated that it will also be used for RFPs.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for consistency. Mr. Kelly agreed and stated that the City has chosen not to use Munis contract management because OpenGov has a better public interface. He stated that OpenGov and Munis will work together.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned the start of year one. Mr. Kelly stated that year one will include configuration. He stated that year two is being prepaid.

Ms. Rodriguez questioned if this is an 18 month time period. Mr. Kelly stated that it is a full two years.

Ms. Rodriguez stated that the prepayment would end during the summer of 2024. She questioned if these expenses are being paid from the General Fund. Mr. Kelly stated that the initial expense is being paid from Capital. He stated that after year two is complete the expense

will move to the General Fund. He stated that the cost should be approximately \$34,000 annually moving forward.

- Bill 50-2022 amending the Charter Board Ordinance

Mr. Butler questioned if this Bill should remain tabled. Mr. Gombar stated that it should be tabled this evening. He stated that discussion is scheduled in the near future.

- Resolution appointing O. Chris Miller to the Council District 6 vacancy

Ms. Kelleher stated that Mr. Miller has accepted the nomination but is unable to attend this evening's meeting. She stated that she has also contacted the other candidates and informed them of Council's decision.

Ms. Reed questioned when Mr. Miller would be sworn in. Mr. Gombar suggested it be done as soon as Mr. Miller is available. He stated that he cannot vote on issues until after he is sworn in.

Ms. Reed suggested he be sworn in as part of one of Council's other meetings this week. Ms. Kelleher stated that she will work with Mr. Miller's schedule.

- Resolution appointing Fred Thompson to the Redevelopment Authority

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz explained that Mr. Thompson had the highest score of the remaining candidates.

VI. Executive Session

Mr. Gombar noted the need for executive sessions on personnel and real estate.

The six members of Council, Mr. Gombar, Mr. Lachat, Mr. Kelly, Mr. Abodalo, and Mr. Denbowski remained in the room. Mr. Abodalo left the meeting after the real estate discussion.

The executive session ended and the meeting adjourned at 7:06 pm.

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