



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES
January 10, 2011
5:00 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

D. Reed, S. Marmarou, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, V. Spencer, J. Waltman, F. Acosta, J. Waltman

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, S. Katzenmoyer, F. Denbowski, C. Geffken, C. Younger, T. McMahon, D. Kersley

Mr. Spencer called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 5:10 p.m.

I. Council Appointment of Managing Director

Council entered executive session at 5:10 pm as this is a personnel issue.

Council exited executive session at 5:40 pm.

II. Tax Collection Agreement

Mr. Geffken explained that City staff has begun meeting with the Treasurer's Office staff to set procedures for the new processes. He stated that the Council issues were not discussed.

Mr. Younger stated his hope that Council would address their preferences in this document before he begins discussions with the County.

The updated agreement was reviewed.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that Council be given copies of the new procedures in regards to tax collection. She stated that this would aid in monitoring the agreement.

Mr. Marmarou questioned where residents should call with concerns or questions regarding their tax bills, the City or the County. Mr. Geffken stated that all tax issues should be addressed with the County.

Mr. Spencer questioned the acceptance of partial payments. Mr. Geffken stated that partial payments will not be accepted.

Mr. Spencer noted his concern that the refusal of partial payments may mean that increased numbers of properties may become delinquent. He questioned if the County will be aggressive with delinquent collections. Mr. Geffken stated that the County will begin using the "Portnoff" model.

Mr. Spencer questioned if the agreement can be terminated if problems are discovered. Mr. Geffken stated that the agreement is for a three year period. He stated that delinquency collection will begin in 2012 for the 2011 taxes.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if reporting to Council should be included in the agreement. Mr. Geffken stated that he will discuss this with the Administration.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for this document to protect the City. Mr. Spencer agreed, noting that past history with the County shows that all issues must be expressed in writing.

Mr. Marmarou questioned how many properties are delinquent in 2010. Mr. Geffken did not have that information.

Mr. Marmarou noted his fear of increased delinquencies caused by the lack of a partial payment program. Mr. Geffken stated that 2010 delinquencies will continue to be handled by Portnoff. He again stated that the County plans to pursue delinquencies in the same way.

Ms. Reed noted the need to communicate and educate residents about the refusal of partial payments. She noted the need to communicate that this change will begin in 2011.

Mr. Waltman questioned penalties for not paying taxes on time. Mr. Geffken stated that penalties and interest are added to the tax amount. He stated that penalties and interest can be waived on a case-by-case basis as warranted.

Mr. Spencer questioned if the County Treasurer would pursue collection for municipalities differently. Mr. Younger noted that they could but that it would not be good practice. He stated his belief that the collection practices should be the same for all municipalities.

Mr. Spencer noted his belief that the collection procedures may become a political decision.

Ms. Kelleher questioned the 5% fee. Mr. Geffken stated that this would apply to delinquencies only, not current billing. He stated that the 5% would be added to the tax owed to the City and would not detract from the City's revenue.

Mr. Younger stated that he will discuss the agreement with the County and update Council as necessary.

III. Citizen Advisory Board

Mr. Denbowski stated that this Board is part of the Recovery Plan (P103). He stated that staff meets with the Act 47 team every other week and that Ms. Kelleher noted that this Board was created in the past and is still listed as a City board. He stated that the ordinance will be amended and that one amendment will be introduced this evening.

Mr. Denbowski suggested that the membership be amended to 21 to allow the Mayor to name seven candidates and each Councilor to name two from their district. He stated that this will encourage diversity and a geographically mixed group. He suggested that stakeholders, not only residents be considered.

Mr. Denbowski also suggested that the term limits be changed from three years to expire on December 31, 2014, the same as the expiration of the Recovery Plan. He stated that the Administration plans to have a seminar on the Recovery Plan to bring this board up to date on the initiatives and the work done to date.

Mr. Denbowski stated that he will discuss these items with the Act 47 team at their next meeting.

Mr. Spencer questioned a removal process. Mr. Denbowski stated that it is included.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if candidates would follow the same appointment process as the other boards, authorities and commissions. Ms. Katzenmoyer suggested that they do.

Mr. Denbowski expressed his concern with excluding those already serving on other City boards, authorities and commissions. There was discussion that this will not be problematic.

Ms. Reed noted the need for this board to be filled with new people with different views and not those already serving. Mr. Denbowski agreed.

Mr. Spencer stated that these new members may enjoy serving the City and agree to serve in another capacity after the expiration of the Recovery Plan.

Mr. Waltman expressed his hope that many initiatives contained in the Recovery Plan would be complete before the expiration of the Plan. He suggested that this group remain active even after the Plan expires.

Mr. Denbowski stated that the board will meet quarterly beginning in April. He stated that he will work with the Law Department to further amend the current ordinance. He suggested that the first Town Meeting be held after the initial meeting of the CAB. Ms. Kelleher noted that the Recovery Plan requires Council and the Mayor to hold a Town Meeting in June 2011.

Mr. Spencer stated that preparation must be made in regards to the presentations to the CAB.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that the City must also be willing to listen to their input.

IV. Recreation Commission

Mr. Denbowski stated that the possible creation of a Recreation Commission is contained in the Recovery Plan (PW17). He stated that there will be a meeting of the study committee tomorrow evening. He reviewed a handout regarding the goals and objectives of the committee. He stated that the committee is being aggressive and hopes to have the study completed within 6 months.

Mr. Waltman stated that this concept has been discussed for many years. He noted how he is bothered that the school buildings are closed evenings and weekends. He stated that the Commission is an opportunity to fight gangs. He suggested including field trips (to places like Daniel Boone Homestead, Nolde Forest, Antietam Lake, and Angelica) and to develop summer job opportunities. He also suggested having adult programming and volunteer opportunities.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she has had interaction in the past with the Lancaster Recreation Commission. She noted that their work has improved neighborhoods and is well organized. She noted that there are also other balls in play that may affect the Commission. She noted the deteriorated condition of many of the City's facilities.

Mr. McMahon noted that Ms. Landes was also integral in the formation of the Lancaster Commission. He noted that the Commission can also tap private resources.

Ms. Reed noted that this would create a perfect opportunity for PILOTs from non-profit organizations.

Mr. Denbowski expressed his optimism with the prospect of the Commission as the Reading School District leadership has been very supportive. Mr. Spencer agreed saying that the Board voted 9-0 to support the study.

Mr. Waltman noted the need to view any programming costs as an investment as they will save other costs such as crime, court, and other social service costs. He noted his belief that this is a core activity for the City and that the Commission structure will keep kids positive.

Mr. Spencer stated that the study committee will be reviewing the condition of the facilities. He stated that this should be done without interference. He noted the potential for revenue from the Commission.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the role of the current members of the Park and Recreation Advisory Committee if the Recreation Commission is created. Mr. Spencer stated that this will be discussed by the study committee. He noted his belief that the PARC will play a role in the commission.

Mr. Denbowski explained that the study committee is a small group of officials working with a consultant and should result in an intergovernmental agreement. He stated that after the agreement is signed, the membership of the Commission will be determined.

V. Ambulance Services

Mr. Geffken stated that this topic is not ready for discussion. He noted that the issue is currently in arbitration.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if a search has been done to determine if there is an outside agency willing to run the service. Mr. Geffken explained that this cannot be done during arbitration and that the union must be given the opportunity to work on the issue first. He noted the need to assess all future options.

Mr. Spencer noted that this issue was studied in the past and that there are pros and cons for each possible solution.

VI. Agenda Review

Council reviewed this evening's agenda including the following:

- Resolution to appoint William Harst to the Zoning Hearing Board

Mr. Acosta expressed his belief that it may not be wise to appoint Mr. Harst at this time. Ms. Kelleher stated that it had been known for a year that there would be an opening on this board. Ms. Katzenmoyer noted that there are also two alternate opportunities on this board.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that generally there is only one person per opening for many boards, authorities and commissions. She noted the need for more candidates.

Mr. Spencer stated that there have been times when there have been multiple candidates for an opening.

Ms. Reed noted that Mr. Harst's interview was thorough and that she was impressed by his knowledge and experience.

Mr. Marmarou noted his understanding but noted the need to fill vacancies as candidates come forward.

Mr. Acosta stated that the Zoning Hearing Board deals with sensitive issues and can create neighborhood problems. He noted that they are critical to rebuilding the City.

Mr. Waltman stated that the Administrative Oversight Committee should suggest serving elsewhere when more suitable positions are available to candidates. Ms. Reed stated that the Committee did that at a recent meeting.

Ms. Reed stated that the Committee does not bring the names forward for Council consideration if they are not appropriate.

Mr. Denbowski stated that some BACs require the Mayor's recommendation. He stated that the Mayor meets with candidates and does not bring their name forward if he does not feel they are appropriate.

- Award of Contract for repair to fire station roofs

Mr. Geffken distributed a memo from the Purchasing Manager regarding this contract award. The memo explains that the lowest bid must be awarded when CDBG funds are utilized. Mr. Geffken explained that HUD does not allow a bid to be disqualified based on location.

Ms. Reed stated that this regulation leaves no choice for Council but to award the contract to the lowest bidder.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this award is not listed on this evening's agenda. She questioned how to move it forward. Mr. Spencer stated that the agenda must be amended to add it.

Mr. Geffken expressed his thanks to Council for adding this item to the agenda and stated that it would assist in an active grievance.

VII. Other Matters

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz requested that Council observe a moment of silence recognizing the tragedy in Arizona. Mr. Acosta reminded all present to be aware of their surroundings. He noted that many people are feeling frustrated.

Mr. McMahon stated that there will be a change in the Administrative Report. He stated that there will be short report followed by a brief update from staff on their current projects.

Mr. Younger advised Council that the federal lawsuit involving Ms. Ciarlone will begin on January 24. The jury will be chosen in Philadelphia and the trial will be held in Reading.

Mr. Spencer stated that he has received a request from the President of Council in Pittsburgh to support their recent legislation regarding the Marcellus Shale. He will share the letter with the rest of Council and ask Council staff to prepare a resolution supporting this legislation and to add it to the January 24 Committee of the Whole agenda.

The meeting adjourned at 7:04 pm.

Respectfully Submitted
Linda A. Kelleher, CMC
City Clerk