



CITY COUNCIL

Public Works Committee

Monday, July 18, 2011
Meeting Report

Committee Members Attending: S. Marmarou, D. Sterner, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz Chair

Others Attending: S. Katzenmoyer, O. Smith, C. Jones, D. Campbell, M. Stabolesky, A. Molteni

The Public Works Committee meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm.

Citadel Traffic issues

Mr. Stabolesky, from Spotts, Stevens, McCoy, reviewed the plans for the Citadel. He stated that the Reading School District is requesting that the 200 block of N. 12th St which runs through the Citadel campus be changed to one way northbound. He noted the many busses during drop off and pick up times and the poor visibility created by the pylons.

Mr. Campbell stated that both lanes are used for busses and that the school has been closing the southbound traffic lane. He stated that the two-way street causes dangerous situations and one student was hit by a vehicle last school year. He stated that the building housed 2,100 students during the 2010-2011 school year and is anticipating 2,400 students for the 2011-2012 school year. He stated that these students perceive that this street is "their" street.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if this would be a temporary or permanent change. Mr. Campbell stated that he is requesting a permanent change. Mr. Stabolesky requested that this block of N. 12th St also be vacated and used for school business only.

Mr. Campbell stated that approximately 800 students are bussed to and from the school daily. He stated that some students wait up to 45 minutes for a bus and sometimes lines encroach into the street.

Mr. Marmarou stated that many residents have complained about the need to stop at the new stop sign on Walnut St at N 12th St. He stated that Council did not approve this stop sign and it has created a hazard. Mr. Jones explained that the Planning Commission approved the plans for

the school including this stop sign. He stated that Council approval is still necessary and should be obtained before installation.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the purpose of this stop sign. Mr. Stabolesky stated that it was a safety issue as students cross Walnut St to walk home. He stated that there is a major pedestrian/vehicle conflict.

Mr. Sterner questioned snow removal on Walnut St. Mr. Jones stated that it is one of the first streets which gets plowed as it is a busy street. Mr. Campbell concurred stating that Walnut St is always cleared when he arrives at the building early in the morning.

Mr. Denbowski arrived at this time.

Mr. Stabolesky stated that the angle of Walnut St hill is similar to those of Elm, Oley, and Spring Sts where stops are often necessary.

Mr. Campbell suggested that students be informed that they must cross at N 11th St or N 13th St during their walk home. He stated that this could alleviate the pedestrian problem and the stop sign could be removed. He noted that there are also problems with parents who double park during drop off and pick up of students.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to strive for a win-win situation. She stated that she agrees with vacating this block of N 12th St but that it will affect many local residents.

Mr. Stabolesky agreed with Mr. Campbell that if the pedestrian issue is removed from Walnut St at N 12th St that the stop sign can be removed.

Mr. Sterner questioned if public meetings were held regarding the traffic changes to the area in the past. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the meetings were not specific to traffic changes but were Planning Commission meetings.

Mr. Sterner suggested holding a public meeting on the traffic concerns.

Mr. Campbell stated that he always felt that the two way traffic pattern would be problematic. Mr. Jones stated that the Planning Commission suggested the two way traffic pattern but now supports making the street one way northbound.

Mr. Marmarou suggested that the stop sign on Walnut St at N 12th St be removed.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested a public meeting to educate residents about the upcoming changes. Mr. Jones reminded all that laws and policies must continue to be followed. Mr. Campbell suggested that the meeting be held at the Citadel.

Mr. Campbell stated that the District owns the cottage at Walnut and Locust Sts. He stated that many parents are dropping off and picking up students on Locust St. He suggested that there be a no parking zone on the north side of Walnut St between Locust and N 12th St to provide a drop off/pick up lane for parents.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that Mr. Campbell attend the August Public Works Committee meeting with a complete plan for further discussion.

Mr. Campbell stated that the area has also not been designated as a school zone. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested erecting Drug Free School Zone signs. Mr. Jones stated that there is no funding for flashing signals. Mr. Campbell stated that flashing signals are not used at high schools.

Mr. Stabolesky questioned if the Committee would support left turns into City Park from Walnut St at N 12th St traveling west. The Committee did not support this turn and suggested that turns be made from Walnut into City Park using Rose Garden.

Mr. Jones questioned the removal of the crosswalks on Walnut St at N 12th St. Mr. Stabolesky stated that this would not be necessary.

Mr. Campbell again suggested that there be no parking on Walnut St between Locust and N 12th St to provide for parent drop off and pick up. The Committee was agreeable to this as there are no homes in this block.

Mr. Campbell stated that he could also use one lane of N 12th St for parent drop off and pick up if the street is vacated. He questioned adding gates at both ends of the block to allow the District to control the flow of traffic. The Committee did not support this concept.

Mr. Stabolesky suggested that the traffic light at N 12th and Elm Sts become a no turn on red signal during school hours. He also suggested extending the yellow curbs in these two blocks of Elm St to allow the school busses to make the necessary turns.

This topic will be discussed at the August 15 Public Works Committee meeting with a public meeting the week of August 22.

Mr. Stabolesky stated that this timeline will not allow PennDOT to approve the changes before the start of the 2011-2012 school year.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the topic of crossing streets needs to be addressed at the public meeting as people are responsible for themselves and their behaviors.

Note: if the street is vacated, there is no need to change the direction of traffic flow.

Buttonwood Gateway Area Update

Mr. Denbowski stated that there is no further update. The area has been addressed.

Mr. Marmarou stated that not all the abandoned vehicles have been removed.

Egelman's Park

Mr. Denbowski stated that he attended a meeting including representatives of Lower Alsace, Mr. Geffken and Commissioner Barnhart. He stated that any agreement regarding this park would not include the baseball field area. He stated that the park encompasses several separate parcels and would require the parcels to be joined before the park could be leased or sold. He stated that the agreement would include the dam. He stated that to date he has heard no opposition.

Mr. Jones stated that the dam is currently being studied.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the City owns much land on the Mt. Penn preserve and that the boundaries must be better defined.

Mr. Denbowski stated that the Law Department is looking to join the parcels and the dam issues are not yet known.

Mr. Jones stated that he attended a recent meeting regarding events held on Mt. Penn. He stated that the area covers three municipalities but that there is no coordinator or application process. He stated that Lower Alsace has volunteered to take the lead and noted that trails are being damaged.

Mr. Marmarou stated that Rotary Park participates in a bicycle event by allowing vehicles to park in their lot.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this park is owned by the City but located in Lower Alsace. She noted the need for the Recreation Commission to work to clarify this issue. Mr. Jones stated that the Public Works Department maintains the park.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for a meeting for all those who use the Mt. Penn preserve.

Mr. Molteni questioned if the Committee was familiar with the Conservancy's trail keeper program. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that it was and noted the work recently completed on Neversink Mountain trails.

Mr. Sterner stated that a constituent recently contacted him about people stealing stones out of

the wall on Mt. Penn. Mr. Jones stated that people take the loose stones out of the wall.

Mr. Sterner stated that he wished to make the City aware of the problem. Mr. Jones stated that the majority of the wall is not contained within City limits.

Recreation Commission Update

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the creation of this Commission will be before Council for formal action on July 25.

Mr. Denbowski stated that the full body of Council will be receiving an update at this evening's work session. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for discussion with the full body.

Mr. Denbowski stated that he attended the Reading School Board's Committee of the Whole meeting and there was little comment. He stated that the vote had unanimous support. The District will contribute \$7.50 per student as determined by the average enrollment. The City will contribute \$488,000 per year for five years.

Mr. Denbowski stated that after Council acts to form the Commission the positions can be filled. He stated that this is a big accomplishment for the City and School District.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the City will be unable to change the contribution during budget discussions. She stated that the Commission will need to determine what land is included in the agreement, maintenance items, and the transfer of staff.

Mr. Marmarou noted the difficulty the City may have in continuing to make that contribution if revenues continue to decline.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the agreement will force the City to remain committed to recreation.

Mr. Denbowski stated that the funding could be provided through the recycling fund or CDBG if necessary.

Mr. Smith stated that a work group has been working toward the formation of the Recreation Commission for several years. He stated that it is coming together nicely and will be a great benefit to all residents of the City. He stated that he has confidence that the Commission will work well.

Mr. Molteni stated that the Environmental Advisory Council has been discussing ways to partner with other municipalities on parks and open space issues.

Mr. Smith stated that youth is the main focus of the agreement but noted the need to expand to

include all ages. He stated that this will assist all citizens in their well-being. He stated that its great to focus on keeping youth occupied but recreation should be for all. He stated that there will be a better buy-in from the community if programs benefit all ages.

Mr. Denbowski noted the need for the District funding to be youth focused. He noted that the Commission intends to expand in the future.

Mr. Sterner stated that the creation of the Commission will allow individuals and businesses to make donations. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the Commission will be a separate 501 (c) 3 and compared it to the Reading Public Museum Foundation and the Pagoda Foundation.

Street Paving Projects

Mr. Jones stated that a list of possible paving projects was distributed at the June meeting. He stated that he agrees with the list and noted the need to determine which streets would be eligible for funding through CDBG.

Mr. Sterner questioned how repaving of streets not eligible for CDBG would be funded. Mr. Jones expressed his hope that liquid fuels funds would be used for these streets. He stated that a street assessment would allow liquid fuels be spent on paving rather than on the cost of street lights. He stated that street assessment could provide approximately \$1 million annually for the cost of street lights and street repairs. The street assessment is included in the Recovery Plan (PW 20).

Mr. Jones stated that liquid fuels could provide approximately \$700,000 annually for repairs to streets not eligible for CDBG funds. He stated that the City is working on an RFP for a consultant to study a street assessment.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if the City continues to receive requests for additional street lights. Mr. Jones stated that it does not. He noted that the contractor who is repairing the street lights is doing an excellent job.

Mr. Sterner questioned why the requests for additional lights have decreased. Mr. Jones suggested it was due to better maintenance. Mr. Sterner added that light efficiency has also increased.

Mr. Jones stated that there is not enough time remaining to complete paving projects this season and have them completed by October 1 through the CDBG program. He stated that he has other projects in mind. He stated that N Front St, between Spring St and Cathedral St, will be completed this year. He stated that the cost of installing new handicapped ramps will exceed the budgeted amount and the ramps will be completed as a separate project.

Mr. Sterner requested further updates when street projects are chosen. Mr. Jones stated that the

projects will be completed in 2012. He stated that he has not yet prioritized the list and he will keep the Committee updated.

Automated Red Light Enforcement Transportation Enhancement Grant Program

Mr. Jones stated that the grant is not intended solely for the installation of traffic cameras. He stated that there are many opportunities for funding and he will be submitting projects.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if Council can suggest projects. Mr. Jones stated that they could if they do so quickly.

Ordinance Regulating Utilities in City Streets

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the condition of Cotton St remains in disrepair.

Mr. Marmarou stated that UGI has begun replacing meters on N 10th St.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned how the City can control utility work. Mr. Jones explained that there is a position included in the Full Time Position Ordinance for a utilities engineer. He stated that the position is currently vacant and is in the process of being filled. He noted his hope that this ordinance be in place shortly.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for utilities to supply timelines for work performed. Mr. Jones stated that the utilities engineer would meet with utilities about projects when they apply to perform work.

Mr. Marmarou stated that the meters being installed by UGI are on the sidewalk and protrude into the right of way. He questioned the safety if these meters are hit by vehicles. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she also questioned this issue and was told by UGI that this is not a hazard. Mr. Jones noted the danger to pedestrians.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the meters could also be subject to tampering. Mr. Jones noted the need for public education on the new meters. He suggested this be provided by UGI.

Mr. Marmarou questioned how many blocks of N 10th St would be affected. Mr. Jones noted the need to check with UGI.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she was told by UGI that this project would eventually be city-wide to assist with meter reading.

Mr. Marmarou noted that these meters are inappropriate for row homes with limited front footage.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the timeline for the ordinance. Mr. Jones noted his hope

that it would be finalized in September.

Mr. Sterner stated that at the last meeting it was also noted that the depth of some utilities in City streets is problematic. Mr. Jones stated that this would also be addressed in the ordinance and would set a minimum depth for utilities.

Washington Street Bridge

Ms. Katzenmoyer explained that there is a hole in the bridge in the right lane along the sidewalk that goes straight through and the railroad tracks are visible.

Mr. Jones explained that if the hole is in the street it is PennDOT's responsibility. He explained that the sidewalks contain electric wires and Met Ed did not allow the City to replace the sidewalks when repairs were needed. He stated that this is why some portions of the sidewalk are asphalt. He stated that the entire sidewalk needs to be replaced and the Law Department is in contact with the PUC.

The Public Works Committee adjourned at 6:28 pm.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Katzenmoyer, Deputy City Clerk