



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE
CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES
July 28, 2014
5:00 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

D. Sterner, S. Marmarou, D. Reed, J. Waltman, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, F. Acosta, C. Daubert

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, S. Katzenmoyer, D. Cituk, R. Johnson, C. Younger, C. Snyder, E. Stock, R. Dietrich, P. Hoh, F. Kasprowicz

The Committee of the Whole meeting was called to order at 5:03 pm by Mr. Acosta.

I. Reading Public Library Strategic Plan

Ms. Dietrich distributed the strategic plan. She stated that Mr. Hoh chaired this project and turned the presentation over to him.

Mr. Hoh reviewed page 10 of the plan which delineates the four parts of the plan.

Mr. Bembenick arrived at this time.

Mr. Hoh explained that the library is working to improve its website and has begun using a mobile app. He stated that he is proud of the awards the library has earned for its best practices. He stated that the library is investigating providing library services to private and charter schools in the Reading area. He stated that there is a language barrier and that the library is willing to work hard and be creative to bring down the language barrier.

Mr. Lloyd arrived at this time.

Ms. Dietrich stated that as the library begins its second century, technology will be key.

Mr. Kasproicz stated that online services are being expanded. He stated that research librarians receive approximately 40,000 questions via text message each year. He stated that e-books are available along with ancestry information and many other online tools.

Mr. Kromer, Mr. Agudo, and Mr. Boscov arrived at this time.

Mr. Kasproicz explained that there are two early learning computer stations for preschoolers; an e-café and e-readers available to tweens; and laptops, ipads, and wifi available to teens. He stated that the library has embraced social media and uses Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and Instagram.

Ms. Dietrich stated that the Reading Public Library is important to the Reading community and that its free services are essential. She stated that this summer story time traveled around the City to the playground programs to reach more children. The library offers free blood pressure testing on Tuesdays and Thursdays and is planning a “Food for Fines” program that will remove fines from accounts when food donations are made. The food will be donated to the Greater Berks Food Bank. She stated that the library will be working with the City on a records archiving project.

Ms. Dietrich stated that the library needs additional financial support from the City. She stated that the library currently cannot reach State mandated minimum services and their district center status is in jeopardy. She requested that the City increase its contribution to the library by \$400,000 making its annual contribution \$500,000. She expressed the belief that the library will help people out of poverty and illiteracy. She noted the need for the City and the library to work together to help people and keep them out of the court and prison systems.

Mr. Waltman stated that this is a good time to approach Council with budget requests. He stated that he would support a dedicated tax to support library services. He stated that Council must find a way to increase the City’s contribution to the library as this service is critical to residents. He expressed the belief that the library should also educate residents on local history and its many assets. He noted the need to more closely review the library’s financial status.

Mr. Hoh explained that the Library Foundation uses approximately \$600,000 per year from its investments to close the budget gap. He stated that the Foundation has been told that it can only sustain \$350,000 per year. He explained that the budget has been cut to the bone. He noted that it is time to rebuild and that if the library funding increases they can provide more services.

Ms. Reed stated that she supports the library but expressed concern about additional taxes. She questioned the percentage of residents who use the library and suggested that the Foundation increase its private fundraising.

Mr. Kasprovicz stated that approximately 22,500 people are active borrowers (25% of residents). He stated that there are also many who use library services but don't check out resources. He stated that there are also many who have library cards but are not active at this time. Mr. Hoh explained that the Foundation employs a part time fundraiser. He stated that fundraising has improved but that it needs more work. He stated that approximately \$100,000 is raised annually.

Mr. Acosta suggested a follow up presentation where specific information is discussed and reviewed along with financials.

Mr. Marmarou voiced his support to increasing funding to the library. He noted that this service is important to the Latino population. He questioned how the library is reaching out to the Latino community. Mr. Kasprovicz stated that classes were held for English speakers to learn Spanish and vice versa. He stated that at one time there were computer classes taught in Spanish. Mr. Hoh stated that the Foundation has met with Latino pastors to make presentations at their churches. He stated that there are bi-lingual materials available and bi-lingual staff.

Mr. Marmarou explained how difficult it can be for children to learn English and then try to teach their parents.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked the library representatives for their excellent presentation. She stated that she is saddened by the state of the City and that it does not provide any good direct service. She expressed the belief that much funding goes to legacy costs leaving little to provide services. She stated that she fully supports the library.

Mr. Sterner thanked the library representatives for their presentation. He stated that he would support the library tax and explained that a portion of the property tax currently supports shade trees. He noted the need to help citizens improve their position and that the library plays a large role in their improvement. He suggested that the Administration explore sharing the .2 mills that are put aside for the shade tree with the library. He stated that this service is highly utilized and funding must increase. He noted the need to sell this to residents.

Mr. Daubert stated that libraries are a great equalizer and are important to education. He stated that Reading residents are already heavily taxed but that he likes the idea expressed by Mr. Sterner. He stated that without access to libraries equality is lost.

Mr. Hoh noted his shock when he learned that most job applications are now completed online.

Mr. Cituk agreed with Mr. Sterner and suggested that the County also be approached for an increase in funding. He stated that there are also many County residents who use the City library services.

Ms. Dietrich stated that a budget is a statement of values. She requested that the library be a higher priority and stated that positive results will be seen.

Mr. Waltman requested a pro forma statement and additional statistics.

The library representatives left the meeting at this time.

II. Code of Ethics Amendment

Mr. Lachat joined the meeting at this time.

Ms. Kelleher distributed a memo from the Mayor's office explaining the need for the legislation.

Mr. Acosta questioned why this amendment was being brought forward. He stated that Councilors are part time and many hold outside employment. He stated that he understands that this may apply to full time employees and those who work directly with procurement.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that this issue be discussed directly with Mr. Spencer.

Ms. Snyder questioned where this amendment originated. Ms. Katzenmoyer stated that the legislation was forwarded through Mr. Lachat. Mr. Lachat stated that this was requested by Mr. Murin.

Mr. Acosta used himself as an example as a banker and stated that the City has many arrangements with local banks. He stated that this would interfere with his personal career. Mr. Lachat agreed.

Mr. Acosta noted the need for Council to understand why this legislation has been drafted.

Mr. Waltman stated that if the City's purchasing policies are working well this should not be needed. He stated that the City cannot control people's lives.

Mr. Lachat suggested amending the language to explain that this would apply only if there would be a conflict of interest during employment.

Mr. Acosta stated that the way it is currently written a complaint can be filed to control or interfere with a person's career. He suggested that if there is a current problem it should be addressed individually.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the memo from the Mayor's office was disgraceful. Mr. Waltman agreed and stated that this example is not good but that evidence is needed. He

suggested that it not be assumed that all former officials and employees will follow this route. He stated that this legislation will impact the innocent.

Mr. Stock stated that the legislation has been reviewed by the Board of Ethics. He stated that a memo has been submitted to Council with their suggestions. He stated that the Board also did not have any background information during their review.

Mr. Stock stated that the three years as suggested was not consistent with federal and state law. He stated that the Board recommends placing a one year limitation on this issue. He stated that this should also be a separate stand alone section. He stated that the Board has not taken an official position on the issue.

Mr. Daubert suggested cleaning up the language. He stated that the passage of the legislation will promote transparency and the appearance of propriety. He stated that he would support the amendment for a one year time period.

Mr. Waltman questioned enforcement. Ms. Katzenmoyer explained that it will be placed in the Code of Ethics and will be enforced by the Board of Ethics on complaint.

Ms. Reed noted the need to be very careful with private industry.

Mr. Waltman stated that personal rights cannot be taken away.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to craft this language very carefully and noted the need to follow current ethical standards. She noted the need for additional discussion.

Ms. Reed questioned why this is a priority at this time.

Mr. Stock left the meeting at this time.

III. Penn Street Properties

Ms. Snyder stated that the report has been received from PFM. She stated that part of the report is confidential. Mr. Younger agreed.

Mr. Acosta stated that the Administration has requested this resolution be voted on this evening. He stated that the resolution authorizes the Mayor to negotiate with Our City Reading and that Council would then approve the final plans.

Ms. Snyder stated that time is essential. Mr. Acosta stated that the process needs to move forward so that federal funding for the project is not lost.

Ms. Snyder stated that the resolution has been amended to address Council's initial concerns. She stated that negotiations will begin with Our City Reading and other developers will be encouraged to participate, after the resolution is approved.

IV. Agenda Review

Council reviewed this evening's agenda. Ms. Kelleher noted the need to add the RAWA lease agreement amendment to Introduction of New Ordinances and the resolution extending the term of Gary Mogel as acting fire chief to the consent agenda.

- Awarding of Contracts for WWTP

Mr. Johnson stated that both bids came back within budget. He stated that there was only one response but that this is the respondent's specialty.

- Ordinances establishing stop intersections

Mr. Marmarou questioned if studies were conducted. Mr. Johnson stated that they were and that they are attached to the agenda.

- Resolution amending the MOU with the Pagoda Foundation

Mr. Waltman questioned if there were any remaining sticking points. Mr. Sterner stated that there are none. He stated that Mr. Olsen supports the resolution.

Mr. Waltman stated that this is a good starting point and that he hopes to see a ten year plan shortly.

- Resolution designating Our City Reading as the redevelopment partner for the Penn Street Properties

Mr. Waltman questioned if this was a funding issue only. Ms. Snyder stated that it is not.

Mr. Acosta explained that it is necessary to begin the HUD paperwork. Ms. Snyder agreed and stated that it would also allow the Mayor to negotiate all items which were not addressed in the RFP and make any necessary changes to the plan. She explained that a new entity would be created which would need Council approval.

Mr. Agudo stated that the resolution would authorize the Mayor to negotiate a partnership with Our City Reading and authorize Community Development to work with HUD for grant and BEDI funds and for an Economic Development grant. He stated that other developers will be included in the project. He stated that Council will have the opportunity to approve or reject the final recommendations. He stated that the project must be complete by September 2015 to qualify for the grant.

Ms. Snyder stated that the State may or may not take action the first week of August on an amendment to CRIZ. She stated that one amendment would allow federal funds as part of local matching funds.

Mr. Waltman stated that he never liked where the City is with these properties. He stated that there are many differing timelines and much uncertainty. He stated that a clear vision of downtown is needed first and that is still unknown. He stated that many times Council is seen as an obstacle but that there are too many unknowns. He stated that money is easy to spend when there is no expectation on the return. He stated that Council still has no clear vision from the Main Street Board.

Ms. Snyder stated that the unknowns will become clear during the process.

Mr. Waltman expressed the belief that by approving the resolution this evening the City is selecting the lead developer. Ms. Snyder agreed but stated that terms must still be reached for development to take place.

Mr. Acosta stated that he will only take the resolution out of pending this evening if there is majority support. He stated that if this doesn't work out and the final plans are rejected by Council, Council is then targeting an upstanding member of the community. He noted the need for the Administration to be sure that Council's concerns are met and requests are not ignored. He noted the need for open communication and frequent updates.

Ms. Reed noted her concern about housing as part of this project. She requested a guarantee that if housing is part of the project that it be market rate only. She stated that she does not want to perpetuate the current condition of downtown. Ms. Snyder stated that she cannot make any guarantees at this time but that housing may not be a part of the project.

Mr. Acosta stated that if the project includes any low income housing he will not support it. Ms. Reed agreed but stated that two is not the majority of Council.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for continued dialog on the project and frequent updates to retain Council's support. She requested that the project contain no housing of any kind.

Mr. Sterner stated that the Goggleworks project needed to include low income housing as HUD funds were used for the project and questioned if the same funds would be requested for this project. Mr. Agudo stated that the funds used for this project will require one job created for every \$35,000 spent. He stated that if housing is part of the project it must be live/work housing and hoped it would be focused on professionals who would live in part of the space and have offices in another part of the space. He stated that this is a different HUD program.

Mr. Agudo explained that the City can sell the properties in several years at a higher price to recoup funds spent. He suggested that a Council member be on the team which will focus on this project. Mr. Acosta thanked Mr. Agudo for this offer.

Mr. Waltman noted the need for a strategic plan. He stated that there is much speculation and many unknowns. He noted the need for Council to understand the overall downtown vision.

V. Executive Session

Mr. Acosta announced that Council would be entering executive session to discuss a personnel matter and pending litigation.

Council entered executive session at 6:49 pm and exited at 7:24 pm.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:24 pm.

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