CITY COUNCIL
Standards of Living Committee

Monday, March 17, 2014
Meeting Report

Committee Members Attending: D. Sterner (Co-Chair), C. Daubert (Co-Chair), S. Marmarou

Others Attending: C. Jones, D. Ruyak, C. Peiffer, S. Katzenmoyer

The meeting was called to order at 5:40 pm.

I. Review Administrative Reports

Ms. Katzenmoyer stated that there were no reports to review at this meeting.

II. Legislative Review

Ordinance - Amending City Code Chapter 346 Litter and Advertising Material, Section 103 prohibiting the placement of advertising material on automobiles. **(Waltman)**

Ms. Katzenmoyer explained that Mr. Waltman would like to bring this amendment forward. It adds placing advertising material on automobiles to the restrictions.

Mr. Daubert stated that this will make campaigning very interesting.

The Committee recommended bringing the amendment forward.

III. BAMBA Trail Proposal

Mr. Ruyak introduced himself to the Committee and stated that he was approached by BAMBA over a year ago. He stated that they have performed trail maintenance behind

the fire tower and have done much trash removal. He stated that an agreement is being drafted to continue to foster the relationship.

Mr. Sterner questioned the City's responsibilities in the agreement. Mr. Ruyak stated that the City would continue to own the property but that BAMBA volunteers would make improvements and maintain the trail.

Ms. Snyder and two representatives from BAMBA arrived at this time.

Mr. Ruyak stated that the trail would be rerouted away from Drenkel Field so as to not interfere with the planes and that several old jumps would be removed from the trail.

BAMBA stated that they plan to use the existing trail and make it more specific to mountain biking. He stated that BAMBA has standards and it is their hope to bring the trail up to those standards. He stated that the proposal is divided into three phases of work but that they hope to begin soon so that the trail is addressed prior to the Duryea Downhill event in May. He stated that the top section of the trail needs the most attention as there are erosion issues.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the organization would be doing the work. BAMBA stated that they would be using their volunteers and would do the work at no cost to the City. He stated that they are currently coordinating signage with the City. Mr. Ruyak explained that the City is also coordinating with the County and the Conservancy so that signs on the mountain are consistent. He stated that the signs will be for marking trails and will also contain rules, etc.

BAMBA noted that it is their goal to increase use of the trail and increase visitors to Reading. He stated that the mountain is an untapped resource. He stated that BAMBA also hopes to add parking areas and trail entry and exit locations.

Mr. Sterner questioned if others would be able to continue to use the trail. BAMBA stated that they would. He stated that all the groups who use the trails have been cooperative and friendly and that the trail would be user friendly for all. He stated that currently the trail is used for walking, biking, hiking, running and horseback riding.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if BAMBA has been in contact with Lower Alsace Township. BAMBA stated that they have been and that Lower Alsace is supportive.

Mr. Marmarou questioned the parking area near Rotary Park. Mr. Ruyak stated that it will be to the left of the entrance to Camp Lily.

Mr. Marmarou questioned the impact on Rotary Park. Ms. Snyder stated that this group is not affiliated with Pretzel City Sports. She stated that Pretzel City is the group that Rotary Park had issues with in the past.

BAMBA stated that it was their intention to work together and formalize this agreement to increase tourists and trail users.

There was a discussion of parking at Rotary Park.

Mr. Ruyak stated that the trail maintenance will also open up the lines of sight for those using the trail to be able to see what is ahead.

Ms. Snyder stated that her intention was to introduce this group to Council and that the Administration recommends moving the agreement forward. She stated that the agreement will be formally drafted by Law and that it will be in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding. She stated that this group comes highly recommended.

The Committee supported moving this agreement forward.

Mr. Sterner questioned the length of this trail. BAMBA stated that it is ½ mile. He stated that the only road activity of the bikers will be riding in a vehicle to get back to the beginning of the trail.

Mr. Sterner questioned if there would be rules to use the trail. BAMBA stated that there are rules and that most bikers know them and follow them.

Mr. Ruyak stated that BAMBA has been very proactive.

BAMBA stated that the signage will include rules, maps, trail difficulty level, and trail features. He noted that they are ready to begin clean up before the May event. He questioned if that would be possible without the formal agreement. Mr. Ruyak stated that it would as long as it was maintenance consistent with that done by BAMBA in the past.

Mr. Sterner questioned the timeline for the agreement. Ms. Snyder noted her hope that it would be complete within 1 – 2 weeks.

Mr. Ruyak stated that he has also reviewed the plans with Ms. Hoag to ensure there were no issues with runoff or erosion.

IV. Street Cut Ordinance Implementation Update

Ms. Snyder stated that the new regulations include an inspection fee. Mr. Jones explained that an inspection occurs during backfill and when the cut is repaved.

Mr. Jones distributed a report outlining activity to date. He stated that if one cut is requested only that one spot must be repaved. However, if there are several cuts in the same area the entire lane or the entire street must be repaved.

Mr. Jones stated that 134 permits were issued to date and $14,300 was collected in fees in the first quarter. He stated that at this pace, the salary and benefits of the inspector will be covered by the fees. He projected that permits will increase when the weather breaks.

Mr. Jones stated that so far, four permits required the degradation fee as the street cut occurred on a street that was recently repaved.

V. Repaving of Cotton St

Mr. Jones stated that he has met with PennDOT and that all the issues have been resolved. He stated that the bid documents will be prepared this week and that he hopes they can be received the end of April. If that is the case, repaving should begin in June. He expressed the belief that the paving should begin after school is dismissed for the summer as Cotton St gets a lot of traffic from Amanda Stoudt.

VI. Wyomissing Park Street Lighting

Mr. Jones stated that he has been working with Economic Opportunities on the engineering issues. He stated that a meeting was held with Met Ed last week and that they are very cooperative. He stated that Med Ed likes the scheme. He stated that once the documents are finalized the project can proceed. He stated that several options for poles and fixtures will be presented to the neighborhood so that they can assist with the choices made. He noted his hope that work will begin in May.

Ms. Snyder stated that a core group of neighbors will be reviewing the bid documents. She stated that the neighborhood has also asked for an alternate in the bid to keep the poles and fixtures that are already in place and have them repaired.

Mr. Jones stated that there was a brief time when several lights were working but that they are now out again.

Mr. Sterner questioned if this project and the repaving of Cotton St were included in the 2014 budget. Mr. Jones stated that they are. He stated that Cotton St will use liquid fuels funds and that the street lights are contained in the general fund budget.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the utility that cuts the street is responsible to repave. Mr. Jones stated that it is. He stated that the amendment made that language clearer and that UGI has already paid the City for their portion of repaving Cotton St.

VII. Zoning Backlog Update

Mr. Peiffer distributed a spreadsheet showing progress made to date. He stated that there were 2,671 cases at the beginning of the project. He stated that there are 582 cases requiring a hearing master and that the cases involving Councilors have not yet been addressed. He stated that he has processed 775 of the 2,000 cases that can be addressed by the Zoning Administrator. He stated that these cases are very time consuming and that many properties have the correct zoning but that it was not accurately reflected in the database. He stated that this process began in 2007 but did but work did not begin until 2013.

Mr. Peiffer stated that the 2014 budget has permitted him to hire a full time temp to address the backlog. He stated that he is meeting with HR this week and that he hopes to have the backlog cleared by the end of 2014.

Mr. Sterner questioned why this issue was not addressed in 2007. Mr. Peiffer stated that he began working for the City in 2013 and that he cannot address why his predecessor did not address it sooner. He stated that there was a problem with the AHO approving everything and that this process was stopped. He stated that to date there have been no appeals to denials and that if these properties do not comply, they will be found and fined at their next scheduled housing inspection.

Mr. Sterner questioned if this was units or properties. Mr. Craig stated that it is properties. The spreadsheet does not account for the number of units being requested.

Mr. Sterner questioned the timeframe for completion. Mr. Peiffer noted his hope that it be complete in 2014 but that it may go into the beginning of 2015.

Mr. Marmarou noted that there is only one case listed for his District. He stated that there is more than one issue in his block alone. Ms. Katzenmoyer explained that the other properties may be included in the Zoning Administrator or Hearing Master categories.

Mr. Marmarou noted the loss of per capita for renters, especially students. Ms. Katzenmoyer explained that per capita is paid to the municipality of permanent residence and is paid to the home municipality for college students.

Mr. Marmarou described the problems with parking when there are many rentals in one area.

Mr. Sterner questioned when hearings by individual Councilors would begin. Mr. Peiffer stated that to date there has been no response to his letters.

Mr. Sterner expressed gratitude that the backlog was moving forward and that additional staff would be able to address it more timely. Mr. Peiffer thanked Council for approving the additional staff.

VIII. 2014 Priorities

Ms. Snyder stated that this Committee covers a very broad variety of topics.

Mr. Sterner stated that the Pagoda MOU should be a priority. Ms. Snyder explained that she spoke with the Mayor about this issue this morning. She stated that the topic will be added to the March 24 Committee of the Whole agenda as it is controversial. She stated that the forensic audit is complete and that a draft report has been received by Law.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the issue was the use of the $30,000. Ms. Snyder stated that it is not about the amount of funds used but rather about the process used to transfer the funds.

Mr. Daubert stated that there were two gas leaks on S. 5th St and that UGI did not notify the public. Mr. Sterner stated that these issues need to be addressed quickly and that it

is difficult to notify residents. Mr. Marmarou stated that when they are able, UGI and the Fire Department go door to door. Ms. Snyder stated that the utility uses its best judgment.

Mr. Sterner suggested the continued requirement to use copper piping should be reviewed. He stated that this issue was discussed earlier this evening during the Nominations & Appointments Committee. Ms. Snyder stated that the Police are also looking at this issue as it increases theft. She stated that this will be a discussion topic and that she will include Building Trades and Police.

Mr. Sterner suggested adding other topics that make the City unfriendly to businesses. Ms. Snyder stated that plan review takes a long time and that this is also beginning to be addressed. She stated that she will bring Building Trades to the Committee on this issue also.

Mr. Sterner stated that the City has hired a Deputy Community Development Director to focus on housing. He requested this person attend an upcoming meeting to introduce himself and give a report to Council. Ms. Snyder agreed.

Ms. Snyder suggested that Ms. Katzenmoyer email the Committee for additional priority topic recommendations.

No further issues were discussed and the meeting adjourned at approximately 6:46 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Shelly Katzenmoyer
Deputy City Clerk