



CITY COUNCIL

Standards of Living Committee

Monday, August 18, 2014
Meeting Report

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

Others Attending: S. Katzenmoyer, R. Johnson, D. Hoag, L. Agudo

The meeting was called to order at 5:05 pm by Mr. Sterner.

I. Installation of Natural Gas Regulating Station at 14th & Green Sts

Ms. Hoag stated that there is currently an underground station at this location but that there are problems in cold weather when the mechanics freeze. She stated that when the mechanics are frozen no gas can travel through the regulators. She stated that UGI wishes to move the station above ground before winter arrives.

Ms. Hoag stated that she has reviewed the plans and there will be two regulators and the station will take up 280 square feet. She stated that she is working with UGI for landscape improvements and fencing around the station.

Mr. Sterner announced that the Hillside Playground Assn may close down and there may not be a Christmas display.

Mr. Lloyd arrived at this time.

Ms. Hoag stated that she has spoken with UGI about the need to close in the top of the station to prevent items such as balls from getting inside and to prevent children from climbing over the fence. She stated that the station must be ventilated.

Mr. Sterner questioned placing the station behind the backstop of the baseball diamond. Ms. Hoag stated that there would be a large cost to relocating the station and the entire street would need to be excavated. She stated that the bank at the parking area is very steep. She reiterated that she would review the final plan and oversee the installation.

Mr. Sterner suggested that the fencing not be chain link to improve the aesthetics. Ms. Hoag noted that the station must be ventilated and extra piping may be needed for fencing other than chain link.

Mr. Sterner questioned when work would begin. Ms. Hoag suggested it would begin in September or October.

Ms. Hoag displayed a map showing other regulating stations within the City. She stated that there is already a station at 5th & Canal Sts and at 2nd & Buttonwood Sts. She stated that new stations are proposed at 8th & Oley Sts and at 6th & Robeson Sts. She stated that these locations are private property and the City is not involved in the installation.

Mr. Sterner questioned if negotiations occur directly with property owners. Ms. Hoag stated that this is correct and that most of the properties are commercially owned.

Mr. Marmarou described the problems he had with the relocation of the gas meter at his home and the disruption it caused his block during construction. He stated that his lawn is still not repaired.

Mr. Sterner thanked Ms. Hoag for her work on this project.

II. UGI Gas Meter Relocation Position Statement

Ms. Katzenmoyer stated that the statement has not been received. Mr. Johnson and Ms. Hoag stated that Mr. Coleman was working on this project. Mr. Johnson stated that he will follow up with Mr. Coleman.

Mr. Sterner suggested that the topic remain on the agenda for the next meeting. He stated that additional time will go by and the meters will continue to be relocated.

Ms. Hoag stated that there was a CCTV project for the City's sewer lines. She stated that there are several locations where utilities bore through the sewer lines to install their mechanics.

Ms. Hoag left the meeting at this time.

III. Complete Streets Strategy

Mr. Lloyd distributed information for the Committee's information. He stated that this is an integrated policy of safe streets for all – walkers, bikers, disabled, and autos. He stated that this concept is new in PA. He stated that this policy would be used on streets as they are improved to ensure they are safe for all.

Mr. Lloyd stated that Cotton St would have been reviewed for complete street standards had the policy been in place when improvements were made. He noted the need to prevent further deaths as a result of unsafe streets.

Mr. Lloyd stated that he, Ms. Snyder and Mr. Johnson will be visiting Lancaster to see their complete streets policy and that Philadelphia has also adopted the complete streets concept.

Mr. Marmarou questioned which states have been using complete streets. Mr. Daubert stated that the concept is used in California and Oregon. Mr. Lloyd stated that a page of the handout lists the states. He stated that complete streets is also endorsed by AARP. He stated that the City's grid street system is a great foundation for the concept.

Mr. Lloyd stated that complete streets will be part of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Daubert stated that he used a bike when visiting Portland and you can feel the difference on the streets. He noted his support of this policy.

Mr. Lloyd stated that the policy must fit Reading. He suggested that policy be put in place now so that it can be used during the reconstruction of the bridges. He stated that new federal transportation grants are beginning to require that complete streets be used.

Mr. Sterner questioned if Reading can institute this policy before the State. Ms. Lloyd stated that it can.

Mr. Lloyd stated that a one day workshop is needed to set the policy. He stated that the policy would make the City's streets more inviting to visitors and would increase the use of the downtown area.

Mr. Sterner suggesting using the policy on the bridge projects and linking the bridges to the bike paths that are nearby.

Mr. Daubert stated that you need to get people out of their cars to spend money.

Mr. Lloyd stated that after Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Reading is rated third in the State for being bike friendly. He stated that this is another competitive advantage.

Mr. Lloyd stated that N 13th Street could easily accommodate bike lanes and has walker issues because of the schools.

Mr. Sterner noted his support for a resolution setting this as a policy. He questioned how it would get implemented. He questioned if there is a grant for a consultant to do a study. Mr. Lloyd stated that it would be included with the work URDC is doing on the Comprehensive Plan. He stated that complete streets was part of the RFP. He stated that the Berks County Community Foundation (BCCF) has also indicated it would assist.

Mr. Sterner noted his concern that the City has many studies but that there is no follow through.

Mr. Lloyd distributed the resolution passed by Lancaster. He stated that he will be attending a conference in Philadelphia in several weeks and will be attending workshops on this issue.

Mr. Johnson stated that part of complete streets is simply a change in mindset. He stated that he has begun meetings about the Penn St bridge and that linking the trails to the bridge projects is an excellent idea.

Mr. Sterner suggested that complete streets also be used by Main Street.

Mr. Johnson explained that PennDOT will not install bike lanes on the bridges unless they connect to something on the street. He stated that connecting with the trails will modify the project.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if the policy would assist with jaywalking. Mr. Lloyd noted his hope that it would.

Mr. Marmarou stated that many people around college campuses and in the downtown area walk into the streets without looking.

Mr. Daubert expressed the belief that this is a great opportunity. He stated that nationally people are moving back into cities so they don't have to drive as much.

Mr. Agudo stated that Philadelphia adopted complete streets with the hope of attracting empty nesters. He stated that the young people returned first. He stated that this would give Reading an advantage in the competition for federal funding. He stated that the change in mindset has already begun.

Mr. Agudo explained that the City has funding commitments from the BCCF for \$50,000 for a study or for implementation and \$500,000 with a 1:1 match for Main Street streetscape projects. He stated that CDBG funds can be used and that the City is applying to DCED for additional funds after the policy has been set.

Mr. Agudo stated that he was recently reviewing old studies done by the City and many of the same issues remain. He stated that he will be using these items for future projects.

Mr. Daubert stated that exceptions can be made when costs are excessive in relation to the return.

Mr. Sterner stated that working with the biking organizations and linking the trails to the bridges is a great place to start. Mr. Agudo agreed and stated that the trails connect many neighborhoods.

Mr. Lloyd stated that complete streets will increase property values and increase demand for real estate on complete streets. He stated that the City's streets have been neglected but that 20% of the City is streets. He suggested that this is a missing link.

Mr. Sterner thanked Mr. Lloyd for the presentation.

The Committee voiced its support of the complete streets concept.

Mr. Lloyd stated that this is part of the City's vision. Mr. Agudo agreed and stated that the City's downtown vision is described in the Main Street plan.

Ms. Snyder arrived at this time.

Mr. Marmarou stated that increased use of the trails will mean the need for increased police presence nearby.

Mr. Lloyd left the meeting at this time.

IV. Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Agudo distributed the scope of the Plan. He stated that the Plan must be completed by June 2015.

Mr. Sterner questioned the key items included in the Plan. Mr. Agudo reviewed the scope of services and explained that it will include things such as natural resources, land use, historic preservation, transportation, and community facilities.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the Plan would include development of the riverfront. Mr. Agudo stated that it may.

Mr. Agudo stated that after the Comprehensive Plan is complete that the City will update its Zoning Ordinance. He explained that the Plan will steer the City based on population trends over the next 10 years. He stated that the SALDO will be updated several years after the Plan. He stated that the Plan is a planning tool and that recommendations will be made in three year increments.

Ms. Snyder noted the need to ensure that the Plan dovetails with the Recovery Plan amendment. She noted the need for URDC to include PFM in the process. Mr. Agudo agreed and stated that URDC will be presenting a progress report in January when they are 50% complete. He stated that the Recovery Plan amendment will be provided to them and that they have already been given a copy of the current recovery plan.

Ms. Snyder stated that the Plan will also include the Park and Open Space Plan as prepared by the Recreation Commission. Mr. Agudo stated that the Plan must include information on parks and recreation.

Mr. Sterner noted the need for open communication during the process.

Ms. Katzenmoyer stated that the timeline shows that the Planning Commission is not involved until month 10. She suggested that this was late in the process. Mr. Agudo stated that there will be Planning Commission members on the Steering Committee and that Mr. Miller will be serving as staff liaison throughout the process.

Mr. Agudo requested that Council send recommendations for key persons to interview and to serve on the Steering Committee. He stated that the lists will be shared with Council.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if non-residents could serve. Ms. Snyder stated that they could. She noted the need for people with good insight and knowledge of the City.

Mr. Sterner suggested that Mr. Gulati, Mr. Shuman and Mr. Boscov be involved. Mr. Agudo stated that he will contact them. He stated that they may have difficulty making a large time commitment.

Mr. Agudo stated that Council adoption of the Plan must occur before June 30, 2015.

Mr. Agudo thanked the Committee and for the great discussion.

Mr. Agudo left the meeting at this time.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz joined the meeting at this time.

V. Updates

- City of Reading Guidebook

Ms. Snyder stated that the project is still at the printer. She promised the books would be received before the next committee meeting.

- Wyomissing Park Street Lighting

Mr. Johnson stated that the project will be delayed as it must go through another bid process. He stated that the City is working to get additional responses and hopes that the cost is closer to the estimate.

Mr. Daubert noted the need to keep the project moving forward. Ms. Snyder agreed and stated that updates are being posted to the City's website. She stated that the new completion date has been moved back to January 2015.

- Pagoda MOU

Ms. Snyder stated that the MOU has been signed. She stated that the transfer must be performed. Policy is being written to prevent this type of situation in the future.

- Snow Emergency Plan and Snow Removal

Mr. Johnson stated that he will be beginning this project shortly.

- Truck Parking

Mr. Johnson stated that he has requested additional enforcement by the Parking Authority.

- Increased Deer Population

Mr. Daubert questioned if this issue was investigated. Mr. Johnson explained that he reviewed the property ownership issue with the Law Department. He stated that it appears that the Wyomissing Park Apartments owns the property. He stated that he followed up with the resident who spoke to Council.

- Trade Code Updates for new language re PVC versus copper piping

Ms. Snyder stated that this project is currently in the Law Department.

Mr. Sterner noted the need for this to move forward.

- SALDO and Official Map

Ms. Katzenmoyer explained that these items should have been completed several years ago as part of a project when the Zoning Ordinance was updated. She stated that they have not yet been completed.

Ms. Snyder stated that this project is currently in the Law Department.

Mr. Sterner stated that Council has been waiting a long time for this project to be complete.

Ms. Snyder explained that she has recently instituted a system in the Law Department to track time to see what projects are being addressed and the possibility of shifting workloads.

- Triangle at 2nd & Penn

Mr. Sterner suggested that this triangle be addressed as it is no longer appealing. He suggested Mr. Olsen be approached for a new design.

Mr. Daubert suggested a piece of sculpture.

Mr. Johnson explained that the triangle may no longer be in place after the bridge is reconstructed.

Ms. Snyder suggested an art contest for a new design. She stated that plans are needed now during bridge discussions but that a design is not needed until later in the process.

- Cotton Street Repaving

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the project is complete and that residents are thrilled. She stated that the contractors feared working in this part of Reading when they started but that they left feeling good about Reading. She stated that she is holding a neighborhood meeting this Thursday as a wrap up and that a picnic will be held at Pendor Park in September to celebrate.

Ms. Snyder suggested that residents be approached about the street sweeping request. She suggested that residents take pride in their properties and clean up themselves rather than having regular street sweeping.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she will have sign-ups at the meeting for residents to help with projects.

The meeting adjourned at 6:52 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Shelly Katzenmoyer
Deputy City Clerk