



CITY COUNCIL

Strategic Planning Committee

Monday, June 1, 2015
Meeting Report

Attending: J. Waltman, C. Daubert (Co Chairs), D. Reed, D. Sterner, S. Marmarou, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz

Others Attending: L. Kelleher, C. Younger, C. Snyder

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Waltman at approximately 5:07 pm.

1. Parking Proposal

Ms. Kelleher reported that the Parking Authority Executive Director submitted the proposed ordinance today. The ordinance allows Council to set the maximum rates charged at the parking meters in the downtown; however, the Parking Authority Board can set the rates at or below the maximum by approving a resolution.

Ms. Kelleher also reported that the proposed ordinance expands the parking meter area to cover North Front Street north to North 10th Street and Elm Street to Chestnut Street.

Several Councilors expressed concerns with the dramatic expansion of the parking meter zones into residential neighborhoods and the impact that would have on residents in areas that already experience parking stress.

This topic will be further discussed at an upcoming Committee of the Whole meeting.

2. Charter Board Mediation Policy

Ms. Kelleher distributed a brief outlining the mediation process submitted by the Charter Board which is attached to the meeting agenda. She reviewed the brief with those present. She explained that the mediation policy will become a part of the Charter Board's Rules of Administration and Procedure and that the Charter Board is also requesting a modification to the Charter Board Ordinance noting the existence of the Board approved Rules.

Mr. Waltman expressed concern that allowing the complainant to be excused from attending the mediation session if he does not have legal counsel, could lead people to believe that they need legal counsel to file a complaint. *(Note: Charter Board agreed to modify the language)*

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the importance of providing a mediation option to settle complaints expeditiously and without costly litigation.

Mr. Waltman suggested reviewing the entire Charter Board ordinance along with the various workflows and attempting to place a cap on legal expenses associated with complaints.

There was discussion about replacing the phrase “complaint form” with “question” to allow someone to first inquire if an action is indeed a Charter violation. This modification will be considered with the review of the Charter Board ordinance. *(Note: Charter Board agreed to review this suggestion)*

3. Act 47 Project Update

Ms. Snyder stated that the new Act 47 Recovery Plan contains numerous initiatives. She provided an update as follows:

- Debt Service – 4 initiatives - all were covered except the refinancing that will be introduced at the June 8th meeting
- Work Force – 9 initiatives most relating to health care, salary caps and benefits – being monitored
- Administrative Services – 11 initiatives mostly relating to the need for the development of policies for the use of fund balance, windfall revenue, repeat audit findings, sale of assets and real estate, etc.
- Police – 9 initiatives, 5 are related to bargaining unit issues
- Fire – 11 initiatives, 4 are bargaining unit related – 2 have been completed and the collection of EMS fees is currently being worked on
- Public Works – 10 initiatives, 2 relating to solid waste and recycling are dependent on the outcome of the current litigation – others such as the street assessment will be discussed prior to the development of the 2016 budget (June Finance agenda)

Ms. Snyder stated that Public Works initiatives also include the need to renegotiate the agreement with the Rec Commission and review/create agreements for others who use City property. She stated that the need to begin capital planning will also move forward this year through the Capital Planning Committee process adopted by Council approximately two years ago.

Council noted the need to prioritize the development of agreements that will include language outlining the required responsibilities and controls, for the use of the Baer Park field house, the Fire Tower, the Greenhouse and East Ends. The need to create a lease agreement with the Reading Redevelopment Authority was also noted.

Ms. Snyder stated that the Amended Recovery Plan requires the elimination of one staff person in the Mayor's Office.

Ms. Snyder explained that the administration has not yet started exploring the initiative regarding the monetization of assets. She noted that if the City enters receivership, the receiver will have the ability to sell City assets.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz and Ms. Reed both questioned the benefits of monetizing the City's assets as that could lead to privatization. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested looking at other cities in the Act 47 program to see what monetization efforts occurred.

There was a brief discussion on market based opportunities such as obtaining sponsors for various items.

Ms. Reed noted that the City attempted this initiative several years ago and it was unsuccessful. Ms. Kelleher agreed but noted that the difficulties associated with this endeavor corresponded with the beginning of the recession.

Mr. Daubert stated that Wilson School District successfully implemented market based opportunities over the past several years; however, they are starting to move away from this initiative.

4. Trash and Recycling Billing

Mr. Waltman noted the need to discuss this issue with RAWA. He stated that various Councilors expressed concern that delinquent trash/recycling bills are causing the disruption of water service.

Ms. Kelleher noted the need for Council to discuss this issue in advance of the discussion with RAWA.

Mr. Spatz explained the error in the newspaper article that originally reported that RAWA makes a \$1M profit from trash and recycling billing. He explained the cash v. accrual of this receivable.

Ms. Snyder stated that the mayor executed an MOU which moved trash and recycling billing and collection to RAWA. She questioned the validity of the MOU as Council approval was required.

Ms. Kelleher agreed and noted that Council must also approve all non-water related projects for RAWA. She stated that the City only had an 85% collection rate before this was out-sourced to RAWA. RAWA collects 95% of that billed. She stated that if the City ends the billing and collection relationship with RAWA, the City should prepare to outsource this function.

Ms. Snyder agreed and noted that PFM also agrees that the City should out-source billing and collection functions.

The group discussed removing trash and recycling from the water/sewer bills. Several Councilors expressed concern that tying these bills with the water/sewer bills makes it difficult for senior citizens and low income citizens to manage. However, some noted that paying monthly installments is easier than making quarterly or annual payments.

RAWA will be invited to a future COW meeting to further discuss this issue.

Mr. Coleman arrived at this time.

UGI Meters

Mr. Waltman stated that UGI gas meters were recently relocated to the exterior of the homes in the Schuylkill Avenue area. He stated that the meters now create a trip and fall hazard due to their projection into the public right of way. He stated that in some areas where the sidewalks are smaller than the standard width, the sidewalks no longer provide wheelchair access. He stated that while the regulators are required to be outside, UGI is installing the meters outside for their convenience.

Mr. Marmarou noted that this ongoing UGI meter relocation project continues to damage the City's street surfaces.

Mr. Coleman stated that he just finished meeting with Mr. Booth, HARB Chair, about this issue and the need to regulate the relocation of UGI meters but stay in compliance with the PUC Rule adopted and released in September 2014. He stated that prior to adopting an ordinance the City has to complete more internal work to clarify the exemptions for properties located within historic districts or eligible historic districts.

Mr. Coleman explained the new rule and the four key areas of the rule along with the operational responsibilities of the PUC, UGI and the City. He explained that property owners need to object to the relocation of their gas meter before the contractor appears to perform the work. He explained that UGI is required to provide 30 day written notice before a meter and regulator are relocated and the property owner should begin objecting as soon as they receive this written notification.

Several present noted that UGI does not always provide 30 days notice before performing the work and that objections are often ignored.

Mr. Coleman explained that the City can consider altering the street cut permitting process to require certain terms and that the City can provide information on the City's historic areas when UGI submits their street cut permit applications.

The group discussed the need to educate the public about the property owners options prior to the relocation of their gas meter. The increase in gas leaks caused by accidents after the meters

are relocated to the front facades of properties was discussed. Mr. Waltman suggested forming a subcommittee composed of staff, officials and citizens to further address this issue.

Council thanked Mr. Coleman for his extensive work on this complicated issue.

As no other issues were brought forward, the Strategic Planning Committee meeting concluded at approximately 7:05 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk