



CITY COUNCIL

Strategic Planning Committee

Monday, July 7, 2015
Meeting Report

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

Others Attending: L. Kelleher, C. Younger, C. Snyder, G. Donly, G. Mann, T. Coleman

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

1. Update Penn Square Properties

Ms. Snyder explained that over the past months there have been internal and external inquiries about the status of the Penn Square properties, when construction would begin and concerns about the obvious lack of general maintenance of the exterior of the properties.

Mr. Donly, employee of Our City Reading (OCR), stated that Public Works and/or DID agreed to perform exterior maintenance (weed and snow/ice removal, etc) of these properties and OCR agreed to take responsibility for the interior and structural issues. He stated that OCR is currently moving the utility accounts out of the City's name and over to OCR. He stated that bids for the HVAC system to restore the chillers are due this week. Currently window units are being utilized in the existing businesses.

Mr. Donly stated that Building 1 (Archive building) and 2 (former Meridian building) currently have three (3) tenants and that OCR is speaking with a potential fourth tenant that would occupy 20K sq. ft. of office space. He stated that the tenant currently employs 125 people at another Reading office building and the company will add 75 employees if they relocate into this location. He stated that the tenant's current lease expires on December 31st of this year.

Mr. Donly stated that OCR is working to reestablish other services within Building 2, such as the elevator service. He stated that OCR is speaking with the owner of a national restaurant chain that currently operates in Philadelphia. He stated that the original plan was to have a bank occupy the first floor; however, banks are now using smaller models and footprints. He stated that OCR is shopping for a restaurant or brewery/pub that would retain the interior historic

features such as the teller windows and vaults. He explained that the drive-thru area will be eliminated, which will expand off-street parking availability.

Mr. Donly explained that Buildings 3, 4, and 5 are in poor condition. He stated that Building 3 has a collapsed roof and flooring and requires demolition. He stated that the facades will be incorporated into the design of the new building. He explained that while the rear of Building 4 is in bad condition, the front portion is in reasonably good condition. Small businesses are being considered at these locations. He stated that Buildings 3, 4 and 5 are considered phase two of the Penn Square project.

Mr. Daubert questioned if the planning for Buildings 3, 4 and 5 are contingent on the success of Buildings 1 and 2. Mr. Donly said the answer to that question is yes and no. He noted the importance of finding a restaurant or pub to occupy the first floor of the bank building (Building 2) and for that owner to utilize the existing interior bank features.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired if the agreement outlines responsibility for the maintenance of the exterior of the properties. Mr. Donly stated that he cannot recall but he does remember the topic being discussed in the past. His recollection is that the City Public Works or DID agreed to handle issues such as weed and snow/ice removal.

Mr. Reed and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stressed the need to remove weeds and snow/ice on a consistent basis as the bad appearance of the exterior generates negative perceptions of the entire downtown.

Mr. Waltman stated that the downtown has major problems and appearance and economic development is only a portion of the problem. He noted the need for the various large scale solutions from the federal, state and local governments. He expressed the belief that the poor and downtrodden have overtaken the downtown.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she learned from the Executive Director of the Homeless Coalition that area homeless shelters are only open during the evening hours; which explains why the homeless relocate into the downtown area during the day. She suggested working with the Homeless Coalition to offer daytime operating hours.

Mr. Waltman stated that conditions in the downtown will go unchanged until the root problems are addressed. He suggested focusing on the root problems.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the poor maintenance of the planters owned by the Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Mr. Donly left the meeting at this time.

2. UGI Meters

Mr. Waltman described the meeting last week with City officials and residents from historic districts.

Mr. Coleman explained that he is preparing amendments to the street cut ordinance and the HARB ordinance to create regulations around issues relating to the relocation of UGI meters. He stated that he hopes to have the ordinances ready for introduction on July 13th. He noted that the Solicitor sent a letter to UGI informing them that relocation permits would not be approved until UGI met with the Solicitor's Office about issues relating to historic districts.

Mr. Coleman stated that in the 1970s a study was conducted and eligible historic districts were identified on a map. He noted the need to provide UGI with the addresses within these areas, as these areas are covered in the new PUC ruling, adopted in September 2014.

Ms. Snyder stated that volunteers from Centre Park and Callowhill offered to assist with educating property owners about their rights and responsibilities relating to the relocation of meters within eligible historic areas.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired about liability if a person becomes injured due to the extension of a relocated meter into the public right of way. Mr. Younger stated that the property owner is liable; however, the property can attempt to draw UGI into the case.

3. Street Assessment

Ms. Snyder explained that this issue requires additional study and that the administration will need more time to gather information relating to the impact on properties. She noted that in some instances there will be a tradeoff between the assessment and the property tax reduction.

Mr. Acosta inquired why the assessment is under consideration.

Ms. Snyder stated that the issue was originally presented at a Finance Meeting in April and the Committee agreed to explore the implementation of Street Assessments to all properties (exempt included) to shift the cost for public improvements away from taxpayers and apply the costs to all who would benefit from the improvements.

Mr. Acosta stated that while he recognizes that all non-profits do not make PILOT contributions, we need to be mindful of the impact the Street Assessment will have on churches.

Ms. Snyder stated that exemptions will be explored.

4. Curbside Waste

Ms. Snyder stated that she met with Mr. Waltman, Ms. Kelleher and Mr. Kersley on June 25th to discuss some high level issues around curbside waste billing. Those present expressed the belief

that the City should not in-source curbside waste billing. Mr. Kersley called Republic (the City's trash collector) to discuss Republic's willingness to take over billing; however, Republic stated that they do not have the ability to take on the billing function.

Ms. Snyder stated that the cost estimate to in-source billing considered the use of a lockbox collection approach for monthly billing, the addition of at least one (1) employee and the purchase of a software program. The cost is estimated at \$1M.

Mr. Acosta stated that mayoral candidate Wally Scott has stated that he will in-source all billing functions. However, this populace message does not consider the reality of the situations involved.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted Mr. Mann's attendance at this meeting and she suggested that the Act 47 Implementation meetings usually held every other Thursday should be cancelled and the topics discussed at the Strategic Planning meetings. She noted the importance of shifting these discussions into a public forum. All present agreed.

5. Administrative Manual Review

Ms. Snyder stated that this afternoon, Mr. Lloyd requested that the review of the Administrative Manual be delayed until the committee has an additional meeting to review the draft as it stands before it is released.

6. Budget

Ms. Snyder stated that the administration intends to present the 2016 budget at the end of September. She explained that at next week's Department Director's meeting, the group will take a hard look at the expenses contained in the CDBG Action Plan.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested holding a pre-budget planning session on a Saturday with Council, which will allow the administration to hear Council's objectives before the preparation of the budget begins. She noted that these planning meetings were successful in the past.

7. Other

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that the group begin to review State legislation and to make amendment recommendations to our local representatives to avoid problems related to various international issues that are occurring.

Ms. Snyder stated that the lease agreement topic is listed on both the Finance and the Standards of Living agendas. She noted that the Standards of Living Committee has started to work on this issue and has prioritized some of the agreements and made assignments.

There was a discussion of late Black Top basketball games beyond the time a City park is open and beyond the time listed in the Curfew Ordinance and the problems and safety issues that creates.

As no other issues were brought forward, the Strategic Planning Committee meeting concluded at approximately 6:10 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk