



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES
February 16, 2016
5:00 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

S. Marmarou, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, B. Twyman, J. Slifko, J. Waltman

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, S. Katzenmoyer, C. Younger, B. Rivera, C. Zale, D. Cituk, R. Johnson, G. Mann

The Committee of the Whole meeting was called to order at 5:03 pm by Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz. Council began the committee meetings as a Committee of the Whole since several Council members were interested in items on each individual committee agenda.

I. 2015 Preliminary Year End Results

Mr. Mann stated that the 2015 preliminary year end results are positive. He stated that half of the \$4 million ending balance was the unused contingency fund. He stated that EIT revenue was up 5% in 2015 and that the increase is attributed to the resident portion of the tax. He stated that he will be studying this trend.

Ms. Kelleher suggested that perhaps Berks EIT is continuing to find residents who did not pay EIT taxes in the past. Mr. Mann stated that this is possible.

Mr. Mann stated that the Real Estate Transfer Tax must also be studied. He stated that a loophole was recently closed by State law to capture more transactions. He stated that the City's cost of healthcare also needs further review.

Mr. Waltman stated that Council uses the recovery plan when preparing its budget. He suggested that the recovery plan be reviewed in early 2016 for progress and to update the projections. Mr. Mann agreed. He stated that after he looks at the issues above in greater detail he will plug the updated figures into the recovery plan to update the projections and to note progress the City has made.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that Council receive quarterly reviews of the budget in relation to the recovery plan.

Mr. Waltman stated that it is also very important for the public to understand that the budgets are based on the recovery plan.

Mr. Mann congratulated the City for its positive fund balance as it works to exit Act 47.

Mr. Waltman stated that it is critical that the City is healthy as it exits Act 47 to avoid receivership. He noted the need to rebuild the local economy.

Mr. Marmarou stated that a news story today reported that another PA employer is moving operations to Mexico to reduce labor costs.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted how federal legislation affects local communities. She stated that not all members of Council can attend the Act 47 meetings held on Thursday afternoons. She questioned the need to continue these meetings. Mr. Mann stated that initially these meetings were set up to keep communication open and to build trust. He stated that he is willing to provide updates directly to Council and he is open to revising the meeting schedule.

Mr. Pottiger joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Waltman agreed that meetings should include all of Council and suggested a monthly update.

Ms. Kelleher suggested that the update occur at the Strategic Planning Committee meeting since all members of Council attend. Council agreed. This agenda topic will be added for the April Committee meeting.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for the Mayor to be informed of this change. Mr. Waltman requested Ms. Kelleher inform the Mayor's office.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the Mayor's ideas regarding finances will also impact the City's financial recovery. She noted the need for the public to understand what Act 47 is and what it means to the City.

Mr. Waltman stated that the City must try to avoid receivership. He stated that if the City exits Act 47 and is not solvent there will still be problems.

II. Update Fire Tower and East Ends Agreements

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that there has been an attempt to review all lease agreements. She stated that the Mayor is currently reviewing the East Ends agreement but that there is no written agreement with Pagoda Skyline for the Fire Tower.

Mr. Marmarou stated that the Standards of Living Committee and the law office have begun reviewing the agreements.

Mr. Waltman questioned if the Mayor was reviewing both of these locations. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she is only aware that he is reviewing East Ends.

Mr. Johnson stated that he does not have any additional information on these locations. Mr. Younger stated that they are under review by a legal specialist. He stated that the East Ends lease agreement has expired.

Mr. Waltman requested a more detailed update in the near future.

Mr. Twyman questioned if there was a specific concern about the Fire Tower. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that there is not. However, the Fire Tower is being opened to the public and there are risks involved.

Mr. Twyman noted the need for consistency with agreements and to keep people involved. Council voiced its agreement. Mr. Waltman stated that liability to the City can be problematic without written agreements.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz praised Pagoda Skyline for their efforts to preserve Skyline Dr.

III. Pagoda Wall

Mr. Johnson stated that he is working with the construction manager who performed work on the wall in the past. He stated that the proposal is being reviewed by law and the consultant will try to determine why this issue keeps recurring. He stated that the wall is dry laid and that the entire wall may be sagging. He noted the need to find the cause of the issue before further construction occurs.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned public safety in the area. Mr. Johnson stated that this will be accessed and the area cordoned off as necessary.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that in historic photos of the area there were three retaining walls but that two are now totally gone.

Mr. Johnson stated that the City has many locations where it has deferred maintenance and is working on a plan to address the items.

IV. UGI Meters

Mr. Johnson stated that his staff reviews the street cut permits.

Mr. Younger stated that this issue is being litigated and further updates would require an executive session.

V. Agreements with Playground Associations & Other Organizations

Ms. Katzenmoyer explained that the Standards of Living Committee has been routinely reviewing lease agreements.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that Ms. Katzenmoyer prepare a list of the agreements that have already been reviewed and the agreements requiring review for all members of Council.

VI. Other Matters

Mr. Waltman noted the need for Council to revisit codes issues, litter, trash, the Penn Street properties and street paving.

Mr. Marmarou expressed the belief that the 300 block of N 5th St is one of the worst in the City with litter and trash. Mr. Waltman agreed and noted the need for the City's gateways to sparkle. He stated that he picks up trash where he is able and that there is litter everywhere throughout the City. He noted the need to hold residents accountable for their environment.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that this issue be placed on the Strategic Planning agenda. She noted the need for Council to tie issues to legislation to move the City forward.

Mr. Waltman suggested that instead of inspectors issuing tickets that they function as resource officers and assist and engage the community.

Mr. Marmarou stated that these issues tend to be worse where there is a concentration of rental properties.

Mr. Waltman stated that codes issues are still big issues and that the City overall should not look this dirty.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that Mineral Spring Rd near the Lindberg Viaduct looks filthy. She noted the need for a reality check when it comes to some feeling that visitors are less important to the City than its residents.

Mr. Twyman expressed the belief that clean-ups should be done by City employees earning a minimum wage. He also noted the need to utilize the City's Clean City Coordinator.

Mr. Waltman stated that this issue must be driven by the Administration with Council support.

Mr. Twyman stated that the Can-It model also worked well. He stated that during his travels to Washington DC, Philadelphia, and New York City he compares them to Reading and that Reading is not bad.

Mr. Waltman expressed the belief that government cannot solve this issue but that it must be through an engaged and accountable population.

Mr. Slifko expressed the belief that gateway beautification is important and suggested forming a task force to study the issue. He stated that the City can make policy changes as necessary based on their findings. Council agreed with this approach.

Mr. Waltman suggested that after the gateways are addressed that the program expand into the neighborhoods.

The Committee of the Whole disbanded to begin the Finance Committee at 5:50 pm.

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