



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES
July 11, 2016
5:00 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

S. Marmarou, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, D. Reed, J. Slifko, C. Daubert, B. Twyman

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, S. Katzenmoyer, D. Cituk, A. Palacios, G. Steckman, C. Younger, P. Vasquez, R. Johnson

The Committee of the Whole meeting was called to order at 5:05 pm by Ms. Reed. She stated that Mr. Waltman is excused from this evening's meetings.

I. Citizens' Initiative Committee

No report.

Ms. Katzenmoyer questioned if this topic should be removed from the agenda at this time. Mr. Twyman stated that it should.

II. RAWA Dissolution

Mr. Steckman stated that Mr. Murray has been keeping the Administration up to date on progress. He stated that the labor contract has been approved by the RAWA membership and will be before Council for their consent shortly. He stated that the Board is moving forward with a forensic audit. He stated that he attended the last Board meeting.

Mr. Johnson stated that the new Board is taking citizen concerns very seriously. He stated that the Board faces many issues and that they have been prioritized. He stated that a meeting with officials will be scheduled shortly. He stated that there is an increased commitment to users.

Mr. Daubert questioned when the RFP for the forensic audit will be issued. Mr. Johnson stated that the Board meets tomorrow and that he will provide an update at the next meeting. He

noted his hope that the process be expedited. Mr. Steckman stated that the Board has been provided with an RFP template to assist.

Mr. Steckman stated that the Board is also examining ways to reduce the penalty fees. Mr. Johnson agreed and stated that the fees and enforcement are being examined. He stated that the Board currently has five of seven members.

Mr. Marmarou stated that he has been approached by several people about their water bills. The residents stated that they would no longer pay their bills since the water would not be turned off. He noted the need to educate the public that they must continue to pay their bills. Mr. Steckman requested that the press present at the meeting include the need to pay water bills in its meeting coverage. He stated that customers must continue to pay their bills. He stated that the penalties may be reduced but that there will still be penalties. He reminded all that water bills also include sewer, trash and recycling fees.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that a resident of District 2 has been billed for City trash for many months but he has a private trash hauler. She questioned how this is addressed. Mr. Johnson suggested that he appeal to RAWA. Mr. Steckman stated that the resident must show proof of payment of several months' bills and a contract with a private hauler.

Ms. Encarnacion arrived at this time.

Mr. Johnson stated that the Board held its most recent meeting in Council Chambers. He stated that this change was well received and will continue. He stated that workshops will continue to be held at the RAWA building.

Ms. Reed questioned if there is public access at the RAWA building. She stated that she has had difficulty accessing RAWA meetings in the RAWA building in the past. Mr. Johnson stated that this has been addressed. He stated that the RAWA building does not accommodate the public comfortably.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the creation of the Reading Regional Water Authority remains as pending legislation. She stated that the City must soon determine the direction it is going. Ms. Kelleher stated that Council must also consider repealing the RAWA dissolution depending on its decision.

Mr. Slifko questioned when action needed to be taken. Mr. Steckman suggested leaving the legislation pending for another 60 – 90 days. He stated that the dissolution is not effective until December 31, 2016 and that there is time to make the final determination. He stated that this discussion will be a focus of budget reviews this fall.

Ms. Reed questioned if that would be enough time. Mr. Younger stated that it would. Ms. Kelleher stated that establishing a new authority takes approximately eight weeks.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that there are still two vacancies on the RAWA Board.

Mr. Johnson stated that the five current members are working hard.

Mr. Twyman noted the need for the Administration to keep Council updated. He noted the need for a realistic timeline. Mr. Steckman stated that he is happy to keep Council updated. He stated that Mr. Murray is assisting with day to day operations. He stated that the Administration has taken a go slowly approach but that forward movement has begun. He stated that the Board is asking many questions and that finding a new solicitor is a priority.

Mr. Daubert questioned the status of legal services to RAWA. Mr. Johnson stated that Mr. Setley's resignation is effective at the end of 2016. He stated that the Board is assessing both short-term and long-term options.

Mr. Daubert questioned if legal services would be bid out. Mr. Johnson stated that the Municipal Authorities Act does not require bidding so the Board may not bid the short-term services.

Mr. Slifko questioned the date of the next meeting. Mr. Johnson stated that it is a workshop so it is tomorrow at 4:30 pm at the RAWA building. He stated that next business meeting is July 28 at 4:30 pm in Council Chambers.

Mr. Daubert noted his hope that RAWA bid out the long-term legal services. He expressed the belief that this is in the best interest of the rate payers. Mr. Steckman stated that the City is evaluating using the City's legal team to cover this role. He stated that the Administration believes legal services is a top priority followed by the forensic audit. He stated that this will increase transparency and find the facts. He stated that he believes the Board is also moving in this direction.

Ms. Reed questioned if shared legal services would be a conflict. Mr. Steckman stated that it would not be if the agreement is very clear. He stated that the only time it would become problematic was if the Board and the City were at odds.

Ms. Reed expressed the belief that sharing legal services could create future problems. Mr. Steckman expressed the belief that legal advice should be the same regardless of who issues it. Mr. Younger stated that he is currently researching this issue.

Mr. Twyman voiced agreement with Ms. Reed and noted the need for shared services to not create future problems. Mr. Steckman stated that there would be a large cost savings that could be passed on to rate payers.

Mr. Daubert cautioned that the cost savings from shared services would be far less than the costs of another lengthy legal battle.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that the agreement include language addressing conflict protocols. She stated that this could also create conflicts with other municipalities within the RAWA system area.

Mr. Slifko stated that RAWA has had blatant conflicts in the past. He stated that he is looking forward to Mr. Younger's research.

III. Angelica Park and DCNR

Mr. Johnson stated that the appraisal has been received and that it included a timber assessment. He stated that the information has been submitted to DCNR for their review and comment. He stated that depending on comment from DCNR the next step is to have an appraisal completed on the replacement land.

Mr. Slifko questioned if there were specific deadlines. Mr. Johnson expressed the belief that as long as progress is made there are no specific deadlines.

Ms. Reed suggested that there is an easy fix to the Angelica Park entrance sign if Alvernia is open to it. She suggested adding "Angelica Creek Park owned by the City of Reading" to the current signage on both sides. Mr. Steckman stated that he will contact Alvernia to discuss this.

Mr. Marmarou stated that a signage change was suggested several years ago. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that signage was added but that it is different.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed with Ms. Reed and stated that this would help people understand the partnership between the City and Alvernia.

Mr. Marmarou stated that the ball field agreement with Alvernia does not allow enough public access to the fields. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the Recreation Commission is addressing this as they also want access to the fields.

Mr. Marmarou noted the need for City leagues to have access to these fields. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she will address this at the next Rec Commission meeting. She suggested that Mr. Marmarou refer teams that contact him to Ms. Klahr.

Mr. Marmarou stated that there are several tournaments that need multiple fields. Mr. Younger stated that access is subject to the terms of the agreement. He stated that he will research the issue.

Ms. Reed suggested that this issue be discussed at the next Standards of Living Committee and that Ms. Klahr be invited.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz reminded all that when these agreements were signed the City could no longer perform the property maintenance. She noted the need to move on.

Ms. Reed requested that the agreement be reviewed and there be a formal update.

Mr. Twyman noted the need for the City to learn from its past. He suggested that the agreement assisted the City but the City needs to be better prepared to negotiate agreements in the future that do not restrict resident access. He noted the need to use all City properties in the best ways possible.

IV. Other Matters

- Shade Trees

Mr. Slifko stated that an email circulated this afternoon about a policy change regarding shade trees which would no longer give adopt-a-trees to commercial properties. He stated that the adopt-a-tree program pays \$100 per tree and the property owner agrees to maintain it. He urged the expansion of this program to increase greenery. He stated that there is much tree mortality and it is a never ending battle.

Mr. Johnson stated that there has been no policy change. He stated that he spoke with the City's arborist who explained that the adopt-a-tree program cannot meet the developer's timeline. He suggested that this may have led to a misunderstanding. He stated that he will be contacting the developer directly to follow up.

Mr. Slifko stated that trees should never be planted during the summer months. Mr. Johnson agreed.

Mr. Johnson stated that the developer's landscaper was encouraged to purchase the trees at the City's discounted rate. He stated that some of the trees were also to be placed in a courtyard and not on the street so they do not qualify for adopt-a-tree.

Mr. Steckman also noted the need to address street trees that have been removed and not replaced. He stated that the City is managing an urban forest. He stated that he will continue to discuss this issue with Public Works and that there is funding specific for shade trees.

Mr. Slifko stated that the net result must be additional trees and that when trees are removed they must be replaced. Mr. Steckman agreed and stated that residents must be educated.

Mr. Slifko stated that the Shade Tree Commission has been addressing these issues. He stated that they recommend an eight year maintenance cycle and that the City continue to own and maintain the trees.

Mr. Steckman stated that his goal is more greening. He stated that Public Works is understaffed but that there are many projects which need to be completed. Mr. Johnson agreed and stated that Mr. Steckman is very interested in enhancing the urban forest.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the City is surrounded by forest and some trees appear by nature. She noted the need to ensure that trees do not interfere with wires and do not damage streets and sidewalks. Mr. Johnson agreed and stated that they should also not interfere with street lights and traffic signals. He noted the need to plan their location more efficiently.

Mr. Slifko stated that there is much to consider. He stated that underground utilities must also be taken into consideration.

Mr. Johnson stated that the solar lighting project on Summit Chase Drive cannot move forward as not enough residents have permitted the removal of trees. He stated that the project must now be reassessed.

Mr. Johnson stated that he will be attending the Shade Tree Commission meeting this evening. He stated that he would like the Commission to change its meeting schedule to another day of the week to allow him and Mr. Steckman to attend future meetings.

- Traffic Signals on N. 5th St

Mr. Slifko requested an update on the results of the study to install traffic signals on N. 5th St at Oley and Douglass.

Mr. Johnson stated that the study does not meet PennDOT warrants in either location. He stated that they also do not qualify for four way stop signs. He stated that he is currently researching blinking warning signals.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that overall drivers are becoming more aggressive and pedestrians are not crossing safely. She predicted an increase in casualties.

Mr. Slifko stated that 5th and Oley almost met the requirements. He suggested that if problems continue that this intersection be studied again in the future.

- Kenhorst Blvd

Mr. Daubert questioned how much longer UGI would be digging on Kenhorst Blvd. Mr. Johnson suggested that it would be several more weeks. He stated that while UGI is performing their work Public Works is assessing the full conditions of the road. He expressed the belief that rather than milling and repaving the street would need to be reconstructed.

Mr. Daubert stated that the condition of Kenhorst Blvd is the top complaint of District 1 residents.

Mr. Johnson stated that UGI has started several paving projects and they are doing nice work. He stated that PennDOT will be repaving Washington, Walnut, Chestnut and Bingaman Sts along with Perkiomen Ave.

Mr. Slifko questioned if Kenhorst Blvd would be repaved by PennDOT. Mr. Johnson stated that this is a City street.

V. Agenda Review

Ms. Reed stated that there are six additional ordinances for introduction to be added to the agenda this evening. Ms. Kelleher stated that the agenda had been published before the Council office received the items. She distributed the six additional ordinances for Council's review.

Mr. Steckman reviewed the additions:

1. Ordinance – authorizing the transfer of funds from the Shade Tree budget to the Minor Capital budget for the purchase of a bucket truck, authorized in the 2015 budget – Council passed a budget amendment in 2015 but the truck was not purchased until 2016.
2. Ordinance – authorizing the amendment of the 2016 Budget to add a PennDOT Reimbursement Grant for the Downtown Lighting Project – Grants will now be administered as part of the budgeting process and a new line item must be added.
3. Ordinance – authorizing the addition of a budget item for the receipt of a grant from the State Fire Commissioners for the replacement of the Fire Department's nozzle and hoses
4. Ordinance – amending City Code Chapter 496 Solid Waste, Part 1 Dumpster by amending the definitions of Trash Can, Dumpster and Trash Can and deleting the definition of Container – These amendments address trash set-out packaging.
5. Ordinance – amending City Code Chapter 496, Part 2 Solid Waste, Section 206 Storage of Municipal Waste requiring storage in containers and defining the type of trash bag that may be used for set out
6. Ordinance – authorizing the use of the General Fund Reserve to pay off the balance of the 2010 unfunded debt bond in the amount of \$6,570,000

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the Berks EIT collection ordinance is being re-introduced this evening. Mr. Steckman advised moving this ordinance forward.

Mr. Steckman stated that the Administration will also be moving forward to decriminalize parking tickets at the July 25 meeting. He stated that an appeals board must be created to hear appeals along with an appeal process.

Mr. Marmarou expressed the belief that appeals should continue through the court system. Mr. Steckman stated that the decriminalized system worked well in Easton. He stated that the process is fairer and allows payment plans. He stated that the court process can be unfair, intimidating, and expensive.

Mr. Marmarou stated that this will decrease police overtime. Mr. Steckman stated that he estimates that it will only decrease police overtime by \$10,000. He stated that many municipalities are adopting the decriminalized system. He stated that police will still issue the tickets. He stated that the new appeal process will be clearly stated on the tickets.

Mr. Marmarou reviewed the current appeal process. Mr. Steckman stated that the current process also includes the payment of court fees. He stated that the court fees are paid even if the tickets are excused. He stated that this does not bring revenue to the City.

Ms. Reed questioned if there were statistics regarding decriminalizing tickets. She questioned if residents would take the tickets less seriously without the threat of court. Mr. Steckman stated that residents will respond when their car is booted. He stated that payment plans can be entered for repeat offenders. He stated that the Parking Authority is devising a way to track when warnings are issued.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the parking app works very well. She noted the need for further discussion on this issue after the legislation is received by Council.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that many cases are currently pursued by constables. She stated that Council should be prepared for them to lobby against decriminalizing parking tickets as it will reduce their income. Ms. Kelleher stated that this was considered in 2006 and both the constables and magisterial district justices lobbied and blocked the legislation. Mr. Steckman stated that the Mayor is in discussion with Mr. Adams on this issue. He stated that parking ticket revenue increased in Easton.

Ms. Reed noted the need for the appeals board to not be political.

Mr. Steckman stated that the Parking Authority is also looking at new technology.

Council reviewed this evening's agenda. There is no legislation for action.

Ms. Katzenmoyer stated that the Environmental Advisory Council will be making its annual report this evening.

V. Other Matters (Continued)

- Handicapped Parking

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that many residents need handicapped parking spaces and that there are not enough street spaces to accommodate them all.

Mr. Johnson stated that the two handicapped spaces per block limit was removed as it was in violation of ADA regulations.

Ms. Kelleher expressed the belief that there may be a time in the future where there are so many handicapped spaces that other residents will have no place to park.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that those with handicapped spaces still feel ownership of the space even though it can be used by anyone with a handicapped license plate or permit.

The meeting adjourned at 6:16 pm.

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