



CITY COUNCIL

Standards of Living Committee

Monday, May 16, 2016
Meeting Report

Committee Members Attending: C. Daubert (Chair), S. Marmarou

Others Attending: S. Katzenmoyer, T. Coleman, T. Arentz, M. Ray, D. Pagan

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm by Mr. Daubert.

I. Quality of Life Ticketing Program Update

Mr. Daubert stated that he requested this update as there was time when there were no appeals. He questioned if this program would meet its budget revenue target. Mr. Arentz stated that he submitted the requested information in writing for Council's information. He stated that it seems that the program is on pace to meet budget targets. He stated that those who receive tickets have 90 days to pay so there is always a bit of a lag. He stated that if the program does not reach its budget it is a positive sign as property owners are more compliant.

Ms. Reed arrived at this time.

Mr. Daubert questioned if there was a period when tickets were not issued. Mr. Arentz stated that there was not but that there may have been a brief period when tickets were not appealed.

Mr. Marmarou questioned why fewer tickets have been issued. Mr. Arentz stated that to his knowledge the program has not slowed down. He stated that the 2016 revenue/billing is consistent with the same period of 2015.

Ms. Reed stated that it would seem odd for the number of tickets to be declining when violations are easily visible when driving in the neighborhoods.

Ms. Katzenmoyer reminded all that the QoL Tickets are appealed directly to Property Maintenance rather than to the District Justices. She stated that the dual appeal process may have had a role in the time period where there were no appeals to the District Justices.

Ms. Reed requested a report comparing 2016 data to 2015 data. Mr. Arentz stated that he will provide this report.

Mr. Marmarou stated that there has been a change in policy for the posting of properties. Mr. Arentz stated that properties receiving a QoL Ticket stopped being posted in 2015. He stated that the tickets are mailed and if they are returned from the post office, the property is posted.

Mr. Daubert cautioned against this practice. He stated that the recipient can receive the ticket, ignore it and claim that they never received it.

Mr. Marmarou questioned what happens if the ticket goes unpaid. Mr. Arentz stated that it is sent to the collection agency but that the property is not posted.

Ms. Reed noted a past situation in her neighborhood where many properties were ticketed and posted. She stated that if the property is not posted the neighbors do not see that the City is taking action. She questioned how to explain this to the neighbors. Mr. Arentz noted his understanding but stated that the policy remains.

Ms. Reed stated that the City cannot become lax in enforcing property issues. She stated that property values will continue to decrease and she is very concerned about this.

Mr. Johnson arrived at this time.

Mr. Daubert requested an additional update at the next meeting to review the comparative report.

II. Outdoor Display and Sale of Mattresses

Mr. Arentz stated that he was not familiar with these regulations until it was brought to his attention. He stated that having learned about it that enforcement will begin. He stated that businesses will be informed of the regulations before they receive notices of violation.

Mr. Marmarou stated that used mattresses cannot be sold unless they have been inspected and are tagged as such.

Ms. Reed suggested that letters be sent to these businesses before enforcement begins to allow them to make the necessary changes. She suggested that the letter be in both English and Spanish. Mr. Arentz agreed.

Ms. Reed stated that she has been receiving many complaints about this issue and that more vendors may begin using outdoor displays with the summer weather approaching.

III. Rental Housing Regulations Requirement for local property manager

Ms. Katzenmoyer questioned why this requirement was removed. Mr. Arentz stated that he did not know why it was removed.

Mr. Arentz left the meeting at this time.

IV. Reading Risk Reduction

Ms. Pagan stated that she was invited to make this presentation by Mr. Waltman. She stated that she works to reduce the opioid issues. She stated that she has brought materials that will be distributed to Council members.

Ms. Pagan explained that she began her work in 1999 and that Reading Risk Reduction is a treatment based program and helps provide clean syringes. She stated that Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Lancaster have syringe programs and that her organization is a bridge to drug treatment. She stated that she has been in recovery for 28 years and she uses herself as an example when speaking with addicts.

Ms. Pagan stated that if an emergency is declared about the opioid epidemic that more formal programs can be initiated. She stated that she is not looking for City funding as her organization already acquires funds by other means. She stated that she is seeking formal support. She stated that since her program went into effect the number of new cases of HIV and Hepatitis C in Berks County has been greatly reduced. She noted her hope that her program can continue and to get the program sanctioned by the City so that there are not issues with each Administrative transition.

Mr. Daubert questioned how abusers get access to this program. Ms. Pagan stated that program volunteers attend soup kitchens and walk the streets. She stated that it is a very grass roots organization and it is one on one talking to begin.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if the organization had a location. Ms. Pagan stated that it does not. She stated that she keeps her materials in an SUV that she uses to visit

locations known for drug use. She stated that she does not approach users under the age of 16 without an adult present or approach people when small children are in the vicinity.

Mr. Daubert suggested that Ms. Pagan speak with Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz. Ms. Pagan stated that they have known each other for years. She explained that clean syringes no longer qualify as drug paraphernalia.

Mr. Daubert questioned how the dirty syringes are disposed of. Ms. Pagan stated that she works with the program in Philadelphia and that they are taken to Philadelphia and their program disposes of them. She stated that her organization has the support of the County Commissioners and the District Attorney. She noted her hope to also have the support of the Mayor and City Council. She stated that she is investigating distributing Naloxone in the future.

Mr. Daubert stated that school districts are starting to stock Naloxone.

Mr. Daubert expressed the belief that this program should have City support. Ms. Reed questioned the next step and stated that the Mayor should be kept updated.

Mr. Marmarou suggested that the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh process be followed. Ms. Pagan stated that they passed ordinances and she provided this information. Mr. Coleman stated that he would review the ordinances.

Ms. Reed suggested that Ms. Pagan and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz meet with the Mayor about this program.

The Committee voiced its support of the program.

Ms. Pagan thanked the Committee for allowing her to make this presentation. She left the meeting at this time.

V. Lease Agreement Updates

- Fire Tower

Mr. Ray stated that he is an active member of Pagoda Skyline. He stated that they began maintaining the fire tower in 1999 and all improvements made have been funded by Pagoda Skyline through private fundraising and grants. He stated that they have also installed security cameras to assist with vandalism and theft issues. He explained that Mike Reinert is the current president of Pagoda Skyline and that he is also active with the Pagoda Foundation. He stated that Mr. Reinert supports a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the City while a lease agreement is drafted. He

stated that the fire tower is open to the public two times per month. He stated that without a formal agreement, Pagoda Skyline has no rights.

Ms. Reed stated that this is what is concerning Council. Mr. Ray stated that Pagoda Skyline does carry its own insurance.

Mr. Daubert questioned the process to move a formal agreement forward. Mr. Ray stated that Mr. Reinert is currently working with Mr. Johnson and Mr. Coleman. Mr. Coleman agreed and stated that they had their first meeting last week.

Mr. Ray explained that Pagoda Skyline does have access to the bathrooms and the water tank. He stated that the sewer system is functional.

Mr. Coleman questioned if Pagoda Skyline wanted to pursue a Memorandum of Understanding or a lease agreement. Ms. Reed suggested that it be a lease agreement but that there be a Memorandum of Understanding in the meantime. Mr. Johnson agreed with this approach and stated that it will give both sides additional time to discuss the lease.

The Committee agreed to this approach.

Ms. Reed questioned the number of members of Pagoda Skyline. Mr. Ray stated that there are 15 - 20 active members and 150 members overall.

Mr. Johnson questioned who cleaned and maintained the sewer system. Mr. Ray stated that he is unsure. He stated that there is a manhole directly behind the tower. Mr. Johnson stated that he will ask Public Works to check the system.

The Committee thanked Mr. Ray for attending to open discussions on a formal agreement.

Mr. Ray left the meeting at this time.

- East Ends

Mr. Coleman stated that he has heard from their legal representative and that they plan to contest the eviction.

Mr. Marmarou stated that he has an organization interested in occupying the facility. Mr. Johnson stated that they should contact the Mayor as he is directly involved.

Mr. Marmarou stated that it is another private club. Mr. Daubert stated that this goes against the Mayor's wishes that the facility be open to the public. Mr. Johnson again stated that the organization should contact the Mayor directly.

- Baer Park

Mr. Coleman stated that the boxing club has vacated the building and turned in their keys.

- Suggestions for next batch to review

Mr. Daubert and Ms. Reed stated that they agree with the staff suggestion to review the agreement with the Redevelopment Authority.

Mr. Coleman suggested that the agreement with the County regarding their space in City Hall for emergency services be reviewed. He also suggested that a formal agreement be put in place for Blacktop Basketball. He stated that he will begin review and speak with the Administration on their position on agreements with these organizations.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:58 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Shelly Katzenmoyer, CMC
Deputy City Clerk