



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES
November 23, 2015
5:00 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, S. Katzenmoyer, D. Cituk, R. Johnson, C. Younger, V. Spencer, C. Snyder, D. Pottiger

The Committee of the Whole meeting was called to order at 5:06 pm by Ms. Reed.

I. Budget Review

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that the remaining items be reviewed from this evening's agenda.

- Ordinance setting the Non-Resident EIT at 1.3%

Ms. Snyder stated that this is the current rate and that no change is proposed. She stated that beginning in 2016, .1% of both resident and non-resident EIT will be set aside to fund capital projects.

- Ordinance setting the Property Tax rate

Mr. Cituk stated that the number listed in the agenda heading is incorrect if .2 mils will be set aside for the library. Ms. Kelleher stated that the amount in the legislation is correct at 17.689 mils. Ms. Reed stated that she will be sure to read the correct amount in the meeting.

Mr. Slifko questioned the procedure for enactment of the tax and budget ordinances and questioned when comments are made. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz explained that items are commented on individually as they are placed on the table.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted her hope that there would be no tie votes this evening as that would mean the legislation is defeated.

- Ordinance approving the 2016 General Fund budget

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that all changes have been incorporated into the final document.

Ms. Snyder stated that Mr. Pottiger is prepared to make a brief presentation at the meeting this evening to explain the proposed changes to the public.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz explained that Mr. Waltman proposed additional options this afternoon but that they would not be discussed or considered this evening.

- Ordinance approving the 2016 positions

Mr. Slifko requested clarification on the positions in the Mayor's office in 2016. Ms. Snyder stated that it would be the Mayor, one full time executive assistant, two full time special assistants, and one part time receptionist.

II. Quiet Zone MOU

Mr. Johnson stated that the hotel intends to apply for a quiet zone so that trains do not disturb guests. He stated that trains are required to blow their horns at all crossings unless there is a designated quiet zone. He explained that only the municipality can apply for the quiet zone and that Reading Hospitality will be responsible for all costs associated with the quiet zone. He stated that the MOU documents the financial responsibilities and accountability.

Ms. Reed questioned if public safety would be impacted. Mr. Johnson stated that the Railroad Administration will make that determination. He expressed the belief that some improvements would need to be made but that Reading Hospitality would be responsible per the MOU.

Ms. Reed questioned if quiet zones were used elsewhere. Mr. Johnson stated that they are.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the timeline. Mr. Johnson stated that it will be after the hotel opens.

Ms. Snyder questioned if the City caused the delay. Mr. Johnson stated that it did not. He stated that the review of the MOU was done quickly and it was signed immediately.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if approval was on the agenda this evening. Ms. Reed explained that MOU's do not always need Council approval.

Mr. Marmarou questioned the painting of curbs in his district. Mr. Johnson stated that this is the assessment of the City's ADA ramp project.

III. Agenda Review

Council reviewed this evening's agenda including:

- Resolution regarding 247 Washington St

Ms. Snyder questioned the zoning of the property. Ms. Kelleher stated that the zoning permit has been issued. She explained that this property is being deconverted from a two unit to a one unit rental. She stated that Zoning provided a copy of the permit.

- Ordinance increasing the salary of the Solicitor

Ms. Snyder stated that this salary was reviewed and that she did not believe that Council needed to take action on the increase as it was less than 3%. However, as the Solicitor is at the Department Director level, Council approval is needed. She explained that when the salaries of the legal specialists were increased, the salaries were brought very close to the Solicitor salary.

- Ordinance increasing the fee for curbside waste collection

Mr. Slifko questioned if the increase was due to an increase in the cost of the contract. Ms. Snyder explained that the fee is reviewed annually to determine if fees are covering costs. Mr. Johnson stated that the trash contract does have an escalator clause so the cost of collection increases annually.

Ms. Snyder noted the need to revisit the billing issue with RAWA.

- Ordinance authorizing payment of the balance of the Honeywell loan

Ms. Snyder stated that the City's work to reduce its debt expense allows an additional debt to be paid in full. She stated that in addition, funds will be added to the contingency account.

Mr. Sterner questioned if Honeywell was still performing work under this contract. Ms. Snyder stated that the cost of the evaluation is not worth bringing them back. She stated that the work is complete. She stated that much of the work was done in the parking garages and that the City did not see a drastic reduction in utility expenses.

Mr. Daubert questioned when this contract began. Ms. Snyder stated that it was before 2008.

- Ordinance creating a Land Bank Board

Ms. Snyder stated that she has several concerns and requested this be tabled this evening.

Wes Stefanick from Reading Berks Association of Realtors (RBAR) explained that RBAR supports the Land Bank and that it looks forward to working with the Land Bank.

Ms. Snyder stated that she is concerned that there is no administrative representative on the Board and that this could pave the way for favoritism and shut out some developers.

Ms. Reed stated that there is no administrative representative to address the favoritism issue. Ms. Snyder stated that anyone can "play favorites". Ms. Kelleher explained that there is an application form for developers to complete to be considered for projects.

Ms. Reed questioned how the program worked elsewhere. Mr. Stefanick suggested that Mr. Kromer answer this question as he is more knowledgeable. He stated that the Land Bank program in Dauphin County is very successful.

Ms. Reed questioned next steps. Ms. Snyder stated that she will meet with Ms. Kelleher and Mr. Kromer about her concerns.

Ms. Reed questioned when the ordinance would be back for Council consideration. Ms. Snyder stated that it will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

- Ordinance amending Street Cuts

Mr. Slifko stated that this amendment clarifies language. Ms. Kelleher stated that it also adds a special exception allowing the Public Works Director to approve street cuts during the blackout period under certain conditions.

Mr. Sterner questioned if this was related to the legal issues. Mr. Slifko stated that it is not.

Mr. Johnson explained that there is also language extending the time period that steel plates may be on the streets before penalties are incurred and language stating that exterior meters cannot violate ADA accessibility regulations.

Mr. Sterner stated that the regulations state that no work is to be done in November but that UGI's work continues. Mr. Johnson stated that emergency work and new services are allowed during this time. He stated that the regulations only apply to City streets and not PennDOT streets.

Mr. Daubert stated that the condition of S 4th St is awful. Mr. Johnson stated that S 4th St is PennDOT controlled.

Mr. Slifko stated that many property owners are switching to gas heat and require new services.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if the conditions of PennDOT controlled streets are reported to PennDOT. Mr. Johnson stated that he does make reports to PennDOT and to UGI.

Mr. Slifko questioned if the repaving portion of the regulations were being enforced. Mr. Johnson stated that the engineering staff is monitoring the streets. He stated that two areas are in need of repaving – N 6th St and S 9th St. He stated that these projects will be treated similarly to Cotton St in that UGI will pay half and the City will pay half to repave the entire street. He expressed the belief that the projects would begin in early spring of 2016. He requested that anyone seeing questionable repairs notify himself or Council staff.

Mr. Marmarou questioned the dimensions for having to repave rather than patch. Mr. Johnson stated that he would need to review the details of the regulations. He explained that only the lane that is disturbed must be repaved rather than from midway to the curb line. He noted that UGI has defined "lane" into two portions of the street – the parking lane and the driving lane. He stated that although the work is disruptive it is better than it was in the past when streets were closed for extended lengths of time when trenches were needed.

- Ordinance amending the Housing chapter of the Code of Ordinances

Ms. Snyder stated that the current regulations include office procedures which are being removed. She stated that the amendment changes the term "Housing Permit" to "Housing Registration" and allows permits and licenses to be revoked if there are delinquent fees. She explained that the goal is not to evict residents and that this will be done only if there are no other options. She stated that Property Maintenance is working very closely with the Human Relations Commission and moving slowly. She stated that word is spreading that the City is taking this approach and some delinquent owners are already making payments and payment arrangements.

Mr. Marmarou noted his frustration that it is always the same people who are not paying their fair share. Ms. Snyder stated that when these owners are researched it is discovered that they also owe others.

- Ordinances regarding the sale of City-owned real property

Ms. Snyder stated that this is the process to sell real property. She stated that leases will be added at a later date. She stated that the process includes a review of property that the City no longer needs, an appraisal, and Council action.

- Resolution appointing Ralph Johnson to the Water Authority

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she supports appointing Mr. Johnson to the Water Authority. She noted the need to be conscience of any potential conflicts of interest.

Mr. Daubert stated that potential conflicts of interest are a natural product of those willing to get involved when they are involved in multiple organizations.

Ms. Reed agreed and stated that Mr. Johnson must be vigilant.

- Resolution approving the conditional use of 922A Franklin St

Mr. Slifko expressed the belief that this is a reasonable use of this property. He stated that the owner has corrected past flaws to move this project forward.

IV. Other Matters

- December meeting schedule

Ms. Kelleher questioned if Council wished to have the second meeting in December on the 21st or the 28th. Council preferred keeping the meeting as scheduled on December 28.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if Council would be having a holiday party. Ms. Reed suggested it take place on December 21. She suggested that Ms. Katzenmoyer order platters from Salino's as done in the past and that all members of Council contribute.

- Inauguration

Mr. Cituk questioned plans for the Inauguration.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that Mr. Scott suggested using Council Chambers. Ms. Snyder stated that he also suggested the front steps of City Hall. Ms. Reed stated that outdoor locations run the risk of bad weather and that Council Chambers will not be large enough.

Ms. Kelleher stated that she has made several other location suggestions to Mr. Scott and reminded him that he shares the event with other elected officials. She stated that PennDOT approval is also needed to close Washington St in order to hold the event on the front steps of City Hall.

- Lehigh Valley Business

Mr. Spencer stated that there was an article in the Lehigh Valley Business alleging there was a private contract for the Penn St properties. He stated that Mr. Agudo has provided a response to the article. He distributed the response to the members of Council.

V. Executive Session

Ms. Reed noted the need for Council to enter an executive session to discuss potential litigation on contracts for the Penn Square properties.

Council entered executive session at 6:18 pm and exited at 6:29 pm.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she has received complaints about large trucks parking in the Mary's Shelter parking lot. Mr. Younger stated that he will research this issue as there may be a zoning violation.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she has learned that the plots at Amanda's Garden will not be available beginning in 2016 and that she believes the owner of the land will be paving it for truck parking.

The meeting adjourned at 6:32 pm.

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