

The Claremont City Council held a meeting on Wednesday, February 25, 2015, in the Council Chambers of City Hall.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Neilsen at 6:30 p.m.

Members of the Council present were:

Ward III Councilor Nicholas Koloski
Assistant Mayor Victor Bergeron
Mayor James Neilsen, IV
At-Large Councilor James Reed
At-Large Councilor Kyle Messier
At-Large Councilor John Simonds

Absent:

At-Large Councilor Keith Raymond (excused)
Ward I Councilor Carolyn Towle (excused)
Ward II Councilor Charlene Lovett (excused)

Also present were:

Guy Santagate, City Manager
Jane Taylor, City Solicitor

CITIZEN'S FORUM

None

Mayor Neilsen said there are one regular and several alternate vacant seats on the Planning Board. He asked for people to volunteer.

OLD BUSINESS

Department Update

Suzanne Carr, Welfare Director, showed a PowerPoint presentation updating the Council on the Welfare Department. Welfare offers emergency/interim assistance with food, rent, utilities, etc.; referrals; and case management. We do it because RSA 165:1 Who Entitled; Local Responsibility; tells us that whenever a person in any town is poor and unable to support himself, he shall be relieved and maintained by the overseers of public welfare of such town, whether or not he has residence there. Ms. Carr explained the process starting with the application. The number of households assisted has declined from 382 in 2011 to 251 in 2014. Housing assistance is the largest expense. They are seeing more underemployed and more disabled

people. The number of new applicants has decreased from 198 in 2011 to 140 in 2014. Sometimes rent payments have to be held by the City until rental units are inspected and/or come into code compliance. When possible, clients complete workfare hours. Ms. Carr noted that because of the success of Claremont's housing inspection program, other communities are starting their own similar programs for welfare recipients.

There was some discussion about state welfare and that NH is one of the few states that does not have a state welfare program. It all falls to the local level.

Ms. Messier noted her concern that the state has no residency requirement and puts the burden on local communities.

Mr. Santagate said the state's lack of participation is alarming. Over the last 3-4 years, there has been a downward trend in the Welfare budget. Ms. Carr said expanded Medicaid helps.

Mr. Simonds asked about fraud reporting and repeat clients. Ms. Carr said they do report possible fraud and she has a few repeat clients, especially among the disabled.

Ms. Taylor said state law works against us with property liens; a welfare lien is the last in line to be paid. Ms. Carr said we lost an estimated \$70,000 to \$80,000 in eight years due to foreclosures (we don't collect unless there is a sale and money is left over).

Mr. Reed asked about receiving donations, Ms. Carr said she refers people to other service organizations, so she prefers if donations get made there. The City has a food pantry but she doesn't accept donations due to strict accounting; she refers those donations to the Soup Kitchen, etc. Mr. Reed thanked her for her dedication to the clients and the people of the community.

Mr. Koloski said his restaurant will serve a free Easter dinner at 5 p.m. on Easter Sunday for anyone who needs a meal.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, talked about options for transportation for out-of-town residents who are stranded here. He talked about the creeping of higher standards (i.e. wireless phones and cable TV).

Ms. Carr said Welfare doesn't pay for cable, they do allow \$50 a month for phone and part of the case management is to discuss wants versus needs.

Transfer Station Update/Decal

Joe Osgood, Transfer Station Ad Hoc Committee member, said the Committee's recommendation is to require a decal to be placed on vehicles that use the Transfer Station (TS); have a maximum of two decals per household; and charge a fee of \$5 for either the first or the second decal. The decals will be used to determine data for the Committee to use for cost analysis and future recommendations. They want to see how many people are using the TS and they want to be sure only Claremont residents use the facility.

He showed sample decals and the estimated cost for 500 2-inch decals is \$185. He said the Hooksett transfer station purchased decals from the state prison (\$180 for 1,000 decals).

There was a discussion about the fee to be charged and where to purchase the decals.

Ms. Messier would like to wait until we have a comprehensive plan for the TS before spending tax dollars on this. She has not seen proof that out-of-towners are using the facility and without proof, she would like to proceed slowly. Council appointed this Committee to come up with a comprehensive report of the TS issues. If the Committee needs more data, she likes the idea of using a clipboard to record answers to questions. She is not in favor of spending taxpayer dollars to create a new system before having a comprehensive plan. She is in favor of posting a sign that the facility is for Claremont residents only.

Mr. Bergeron said he has heard from people that they see no reason for not using a decal system. He said it is a good way to start. He believes people recording information on a clipboard is a waste of time.

Mr. Koloski said he was told by someone from Newport that he'd been using the TS for years and didn't know it was only for Claremont residents.

There was a discussion about how the decal process should work.

Mr. Santagate said the Committee has the authority to recommend something to the Council and the Council can set the policy, but it's up to the administration to review how this will be administered and to recommend fees to the Council for its approval. He said the charge of the Committee was to look at the \$160,000 deficit, but that he has not heard how the Committee plans to address that. He said if there is "wholesale bleeding" at the TS, he wants to see the Committee's information.

Mayor Nielsen pointed out that for a couple of budget cycles, the Administration and Council have both acknowledged the TS has been running a deficit. Council said it wanted an ad hoc committee to look at the situation and see how to solve it.

Mr. Osgood talked about other things that are in the TS budget that may belong elsewhere such as full-time salaries for two employees, but they only work at the TS two days a week; landfill monitoring and reporting; and mowing the lawn at the landfill.

Mr. Bergeron said if the Council wants stickers on vehicles going to the TS, then it's Council's prerogative.

Ms. Messier said she is interested in the data, but stickers won't tell us who recycles.

Bob Picard, Transfer Station Ad Hoc Committee member, said this is a recommendation, not an order. He also said there are no other municipalities in Sullivan County without transfer station

stickers. He challenged any Councilor to look at the cars using the TS and follow them back to Newport.

Mr. Osgood said the Committee is looking at the cost of a scale to weigh trash.

Mr. Reed thinks the decal idea should be implemented, but didn't think we should charge for the decal.

Mr. Simonds supports the decal idea and that the Council's job is to create policy and it's up to the City Manager to implement.

Mr. Picard said the City pays to get rid of the recycling.

A motion was made by Mr. Bergeron and seconded by Mr. Simonds to implement a sticker program for Claremont property owners and residents only for use of the Transfer Station for both trash and recycling.

Tom Woodley, Public Works Director, said it doesn't matter which method is used. It's up to the Council. He said the Transfer Station workers don't knowingly accept trash from anyone other than Claremont residents.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, suggested since three Councilors were absent that this should be tabled until the next regular meeting in March. Mr. Folta disagreed with Mr. Santagate's opinion of the City Manager's authority and Mr. Folta said the Council has the right to say how it is to be done.

Mayor Neilsen said the Council has found Mr. Santagate to be a man of integrity and that Mr. Santagate correctly brought the roles for the City Manager and Council forward. Mayor Neilsen expects that whatever decision Council makes, Mr. Santagate will carry out.

Ms. Taylor read portions of the Charter where it discusses powers and duties of the manager; and non-interference.

Mr. Koloski said he is not comfortable moving forward on this as the amounts for decals and fees are unknown. Ms. Taylor said fees would come back to the Council. Any expenditure outside what is budgeted would come back to Council. Mr. Koloski would like to know how long a sticker would be good for.

Mayor Neilsen said the vote would be for implementation of the decals and questions about the timeline could be asked about under Future Agenda Items.

Mr. Santagate said the Committee should button down the deficit and then work on the comprehensive study. To create a mini program without answers on the other question is flawed.

Peg Hall, Ward 1, suggested withdrawing the motion and breaking it into pieces. Establish a policy that effective immediately the TS is for Claremont property owners and residents only and

then in one month have the administration come back with how to enforce that. The next thing you want is data and she said February and March are the slowest months. She pointed out to the Committee that City departments and public facilities also dispose of trash at the TS and that should be considered.

Mr. Picard said you can't get an accurate number until you cut out Newport residents.

Ms. Taylor said Chapter 14 of the City Code said use of the Transfer Station is limited to residents who own real property and persons who reside in Claremont. Anyone who uses it otherwise could be charged with criminal trespass.

A motion was made by Mr. Bergeron to move the question.

Roll call vote: motion failed 3-3 with Mr. Koloski, Ms. Messier and Mr. Simonds voting no.

Mr. Koloski asked when a final presentation would be made. Mr. Osgood said it would not be until they have accurate numbers.

Roll call vote: motion carried 5-1 with Ms. Messier voting no.

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion of Standing Committees

Mayor Neilsen said that one standing committee that has been talked about is finance. The City Manager presents the budget to the Council no later than May 2nd and the Council has until June 1 to approve it. For the budget, he suggested having four Wednesday night meetings and to open each budget up to public input. Because of the timeline, he doesn't know if there is enough time to have a finance committee look at the numbers and make recommendations to the Council.

Ms. Messier said she gets input from citizens all year round; people can contact their Councilors all year long. She said that Councilors were elected to work on and approve the budget.

After discussion, the budget meetings were set for May 7, 14, 21 and 28 with a regular meeting on May 13. Meetings will start at 6:30 p.m. The budget meetings will be opened to public input and a public hearing will be scheduled for the last budget meeting on May 28.

Mr. Bergeron said that during the Charter Commission, there were discussions about bringing back standing committees. He said when he was employed by the City, he worked with standing committees during negotiations and they worked well. He talked about standing committees for public works, public safety and traffic safety. He said traffic safety is now the Traffic Advisory Committee. He said some people would like to see public works and public safety committees and he asked about looking into that.

Mr. Santagate said that public safety is the Police Department and they have a Police Commission. Mayor Nielsen said that the Traffic Advisory Committee and the Police Commission meetings are open to the public.

Ms. Taylor said in reference to the past standing committees Mr. Bergeron mentioned that she had done some research and those committees were not authorized by any ordinance or rule.

Ms. Messier said that we have 50-60 board and commission vacancies. She talked about knowing what the boards and commissions are and what their functions are. She suggested learning more about what the City currently has before creating more committees. She has heard from boards and commission members that they're not being recognized for what they do and that Councilors don't know what they do. At some point, Council had talked about having boards and commissions doing updates to explain what they do. It is important to make sure those boards and commissions are running properly

Previously department heads were on the standing committees, but Mr. Santagate did not agree with and doesn't think City employees should be in on those standing committees as it would have a chilling effect on their job performance. However, Council can create its own committees.

Mayor Nielsen said he can't commit to more committees.

Mr. Koloski would like to see a citizen added to the Traffic Advisory Committee.

Ms. Taylor said the Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC) was set up as an ad hoc committee by the City Manager. She said standing committees may have Council members, but no employees or members of the public. Ad hoc committees are for very specific topics and you could have citizens on those committees. Since the TAC was set up by the City Manager, it would be up to him to decide whether or not to have a citizen on that committee.

Mr. Bergeron wants to find out about standing committees in other communities and he will do that research.

Mayor Nielsen asked to have a copy of all the boards and commissions roster sheets in the Council packet no later than the meeting in April.

Mr. Koloski said it is important that the Council keep highlighting vacancies.

Joe Osgood, Ward 2, suggested looking at the Charter Commission minutes to see that people would like to have standing committees.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, agreed with Mr. Osgood about the standing committee discussions during the Charter Commission meetings. He said Council can initiate a Charter change, either a Charter revision or a Charter amendment, in order to put standing committees in the Charter. He

feels it is unclear who the City Solicitor works for so a Charter change could make it clear. He suggested starting now to get it on the November ballot.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS AND DIRECTIVES

Mr. Bergeron asked to have a report on the fees, cost of the decals and the process for implementing the decals at the Transfer Station on the March 25th meeting.

Mr. Koloski talked about people camping out under the slab foundation at the Sullivan smoke stack and that it is a safety concern. Mr. Santagate said we will follow up.

Mayor Neilsen asked to have the water/sewer service line ordinance sent to Council and he requested a discussion at the April Council meeting.

Mayor Neilsen said unless a request is made by the Council, he's not looking to do a Charter amendment.

Ms. Messier said if there were no pressing items for the March 25th meeting, she would like to work toward not having a second meeting in March and she suggested having only 18 meetings a year unless more is needed.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:41 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Simonds and seconded by Mr. Koloski to adjourn.

Voice vote: motion carried 6-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dorée M. Russell
Clerk to the Council