

The Claremont City Council held a meeting on Wednesday, November 19, 2014, 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:

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

Absent:

Ward I Councilor Carolyn Towle

Also present:

Mary Walter, Acting City Manager

CITIZEN'S FORUM

Mayor Neilsen explained that Citizen's Forum is to allow citizens to speak on non-agenda items for up to 5 minutes. Council Rules do not indicate that every item has to be opened for discussion. If citizens wish to speak on agenda or non-agenda items, they are to do it under Citizen's Forum. Not every agenda item will be opened for comment. He said he has the full support of the Council.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, said the NH Union Leader had an article about "bracing for a silver tsunami of baby boomers." NH will face challenges in the near future. This will require rethinking of what communities will look like. He talked about affordable urban housing.

Chuck Allen, Ward 3 resident and Arrowhead Recreation Club member, said a representative from NH DES (Department of Environmental Services) was at Arrowhead and he walked through the tubing area. According to Mr. Allen, the DES Representative said there was no wetland violation; a permit should be done to excavate the bank and upgrade the drainage area; the trees could come down and be stumped; and the DES Rep will send a report. He noted *Chronicle*, out of Boston, is doing a story featuring Claremont.

Mayor Neilsen noted under Council Rule 22 the Mayor may invite citizens to speak under individual items; Council has to invite citizens to speak.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, said when this Council started, there was a practice of inviting people to speak during each agenda item. He thinks Council needs maximum input to make decisions.

OLD BUSINESS

Communication/Public Information Officer

John Hall, Ward 3; Scott Magnuson, Ward 1; and Nicole Sorenson, Ward 3, showed a PowerPoint presentation from Citizens for Claremont (A collective for collaboration – improving the image and positioning for Economic Development).

Mr. Hall spoke:

- Areas of Opportunity
 - Ordinance training & enforcement
 - Clear & direct signage
 - Beautification of City Center
- Ordinance training & enforcement
 - Met with Police Chief Scott to discuss loitering, vandalism
- Ordinance Enforcement and Security in the City Center
 - Noticed significant increase of police presence downtown & lot less loitering
- Clear and Direct Signage
 - Hope for signage pointing drivers to the downtown area
 - Need clear parking signage
- Beautification of City Center
 - Showed Woodstock, Vermont, as an example
 - Claremont – fix unattractive nuisances such as missing bricks, etc.
- Public Works
 - Parking needs
 - Clear signage
 - Light poles – adding permanent rope lighting
- Beautification
 - Implementation supported by Claremont Development Authority
 - \$5,000 loan for facelift costs
 - Downtown Line Budget Item
 - \$10,000 to support Public Works

Ms. Sorenson spoke:

- Communication
 - They did a survey (strictly online) to see how people receive information
- Communication Plan
 - Two-way flow of information
 - Provide information to target audience

- Public Information Officer (the focus is to support the idea of an Information Officer)
 - Will improve City image
- Survey Results (317 respondents)
 - Age: 79% 30-59
 - Female: 66%
 - Live in Claremont: 81%
- Ways to Communicate that are Being Used
 - Facebook, City website, Eagle Times, Valley News, radio, CCTV, WMUR, E-ticker News
 - Facebook 93%
 - City website 73%
- Communication
 - Community bulletin board
 - Is it only for nonprofit organizations
- Relocate Community Bulletin Board
 - In front of City Hall 35%
- Would Like to See Action on Public Relations Campaign 61%
- People Want to Get Involved
 - Out of 317 responses, 65 left contact information

Scott Magnuson spoke:

- List of Accomplishments to Date
 - Sep 24 – organized and presented Communications Policy to City Council
 - Sep 28 – clean up Rail Trail
 - Oct 9 – started a Facebook page, now over 1,800 followers
 - Oct 12 – second cleanup event of Rail Trail
 - Oct 16 – hosted DRED presentation
 - Oct 17 – started survey
 - Oct 19 – assisted Dave Messier with “bullpen” flowers
 - Oct 22 – assisted in CDA 3rd Annual Holiday Stamp Card
 - Oct 25 – downtown Halloween painting
 - Oct 26 – 2nd cleanup of downtown
 - Nov 2 – light check for Christmas decorations
 - Nov 15-16 – decorated Broad St., Opera House Sq. and Pleasant St.
 - Nov 19 – rope lights installed
 - Nov 22 – they will continue to decorate downtown
- Promoted – all open seats for various boards and Claremont City web page
- Full of Pride and Community

There was a discussion about using the City’s newsletter “blast” to get information out to the community. Currently there are 551 e-mail addresses signed up. Sign up can be done from the front page of the City’s website.

It was suggested that Facebook can be used and that it can be limited to outgoing messages only.

Ms. Lovett asked who is responsible for posting minutes on the website. Nancy Merrill, Planning and Development Director, said the Planning Department does it, when minutes are received.

City Council items are posted by the Council Clerk.

The Citizens group will meet again December 4th, 6 p.m., above the Simply Comfort Restaurant on Pleasant Street. The Public Information piece is the main focus and they are also working on the beautification piece.

It was suggested to make the sign up for e-mail more visible on the website.

Michelle Pierce, Ward 1, talked about Facebook and that it can be limited to outgoing information only. Mr. Koloski said he asked Mr. Hall if a demonstration of how that works could be part of a presentation to the Council. Mayor Nielsen suggested having a demonstration during a workshop for City Staff and the Council. Mr. Hall said his group will work on a presentation for the Council.

Ms. Messier said there is a lot of information available from the City and she asked the group to come back to the Council with a list of what information the community would like to know. Mr. Hall said they will put together a survey and submit the results to the Council.

Patrick Adrian, Ward 1, said one part of having an Information Officer is information retrieval. People have questions about navigating the City's website and about how to get things done.

Ms. Walter asked if a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page would help. Mr. Adrian said he likes seeing a variety of ways to communicate (i.e. Facebook, public flyers) and a FAQ page would be excellent.

Amtrak Update

Ms. Lovett worked with Public Works on the locations for the Amtrak signs and they were installed last week. Bus transportation to and from the train stop is in service Monday through Friday. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be for December 1, 2014 through November 30, 2015. The Amtrak Ad Hoc Committee is working on a plan for bus service for the 6 p.m. train. Weekend service options: public/private partnership or shuttle service from resorts in the area has been suggested. Businesses in Claremont are willing to donate materials for the shelter at the train stop. The Committee is working with Amtrak on the criteria for the shelter and for placement. The Committee attended the NNEIRI (Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative) public hearing where they discussed alternative options. Ms. Lovett said that Vermont is working with Canada to extend their line from St. Albans to Montreal with a sealed station which would allow them to do Customs right there at the station. It is possible that three years from now the Vermonter line (Claremont is a stop on that line) could go to Montreal.

Mayor Neilsen said that he has appointed Joe Osgood to the Transfer Station Ad Hoc Committee and that Robert Picard and Councilor Lovett have also been appointed. He asked the public to apply to be on the Transfer Station Ad Hoc Committee. The purpose of the committee is to look at the waste stream in Claremont and what Claremont can do to dispose of its waste.

Review City Code Chap 11, Article III, Nuisances on Private Property

Ms. Taylor sent a letter to the Council explaining that City Code Chap 11, Article III, Nuisances on Private Property is in compliance with state statutes. Ms. Lovett had questions about the process and barriers to having a more effective outcome in the community. Mayor Neilsen said one barrier was a lack of a code enforcement officer and the other is the process (i.e. notification and then follow-up which goes through the City Solicitor). He asked if code enforcement is just enforcing the ordinance or are they doing the process.

Ms. Merrill clarified the City has building codes, fire codes, nuisance ordinance and Chapter 5 of the City Code which is the property maintenance code. A new code enforcement officer started a month ago. They have recently had a lot of issues with abandoned properties and they can't find the owners. This year there were 150 complaints; 102 were abated, 12 are with the police and the remainder are still in process. The nuisance code is fine with them, it works closely with the property maintenance code.

Ms. Lovett said in reference to sections 11-57 and 11-60 that she would like to clarify who pays the fine and she would like to know why no fines have been given out in 4-5 years. Ms. Merrill said her department is not authorized to write citations or take these to court; it all goes to City Hall to do.

Ms. Merrill said state statute authorizes, and Ms. Taylor's letter states, that land use citations may be issued by code enforcement officials, but Claremont's Code does not authorize it. Ms. Lovett said that would be an update. Ms. Merrill said that would be fine with her department; if a fine is recommended when a property owner is not compliant, the building inspector could take it to court with a citation.

Mr. Koloski asked how this relates to the Fire Department and if it is the same process, then Fire could be added to the ordinance. Fire Chief Bergeron said it is the same process, but it seldom comes to that point.

There was a discussion about repeated visits and no shows for building and fire inspections. Fines were placed in the City's Fee Schedule which has helped reduce that number.

Mr. Bergeron said he has been asking for a fee for landlords who have code enforcement or police visits at their buildings due to failure to maintain them.

Ms. Messier asked about the consequences for not paying the fine. Chief Bergeron said the City Treasurer takes the property owner to small claims court.

There was a question about improving the process because there are a lot of properties out of compliance and there is an assumption that complaints have not been made. Ms. Merrill said they have received 150 complaints this year and 140 were citizen-complaint driven. It is a citizen-complaint driven process. Complaint forms are available in the City Manager's office and the Planning and Development Department. There are some properties that clean up and then six months later there is another complaint on the same property and that cycle continues. Ms. Lovett said the point is to encourage citizens to take action.

Ms. Messier said when a property is not in compliance with Historic District requirements, that information is placed in the property file. She asked what the penalty is for non-compliance. There was a discussion about giving the code enforcement officer the power to cite property owners. Mr. Koloski would like to see a fine for Police Department responses to multi-family properties added to this ordinance and add the Fire Department nuisance alarm response to this. Mayor Neilsen suggested referring to the appropriate fee schedule in the ordinance instead of using dollar amounts in the ordinance.

Mr. Koloski would like to add to the ordinance that each location that uses shopping carts, would file a yearly shopping cart management plan with the City (Planning and Development Department), pay a yearly fee of maybe \$100, include contact information for retrieving carts and there would be a fine for allowing the carts to leave the property. Mayor Neilsen liked the plan. Mr. Reed agreed with the shopping carts suggestion; he works for Big Lots and sometimes has to go to retrieve the carts. Ms. Messier liked the idea of a shopping cart management plan and fee.

Ms. Lovett talked about complaints for dumpsters that are sometimes overflowing and not shielded. Mayor Neilsen said there might be a site plan requirement to be shielded. Ms. Merrill said they may be in neighborhoods that are grandfathered. Overflowing trash can be reviewed, but location and shielding have to be done on a case by case basis.

Ms. Lovett said some property owners live outside the community and may not be aware of what's going on on the property. She asked if a letter can be enclosed with the tax bill to educate them on the City's objective to ensure properties are well maintained with a list of items that the City is focusing on.

Ms. Walter said the letter would go with every tax bill and Council needs to approve inserting the letter.

Mayor Neilsen asked where we go from here. Ms. Lovett suggested to ask City Council for approval to insert a letter in the next tax bill. Mayor Neilsen asked about the nuisance discussions. Ms. Lovett said Council could send them to the City Solicitor then she would draft an updated one for Council's consideration. Ms. Walter thought the main focus was to allow other departments to write citations. Ms. Lovett said the first step would be that the City Solicitor receive the notes and draft the ordinance with the changes. Ms. Messier said the process would be to send the notes to the acting City Manager and she would forward them to the Solicitor.

Ms. Walter said approval of the City Fee Schedule is coming up in January, so it's important to know what Council wants, so the changes can be incorporated in there. Mr. Raymond wants to be sure the code enforcement officer can write citations.

Ms. Walter asked to give Assessing the authority to write citations for addresses that are not in compliance with 911.

Mayor Neilsen said this may be on the second meeting in December or January depending upon available time and whether or not the Solicitor has enough time to put it in proper form.

NEW BUSINESS

Motion to Authorize Multi-Year Vehicle Lease – Planning and Development

Withdrawn

Legislators to Discuss Legislative Service Requests

Mayor Neilsen said the Legislators were invited to discuss with Council possible Legislative Service Requests (LSR).

John Cloutier, Ward 1 resident and State Representative for Sullivan County District 10, introduced himself, Representative-Elect Larry Converse, Ward 2, and Joe Osgood, current (outgoing) Ward 2 Representative.

Mayor Neilsen said Claremont's tax rate is high, so he asked his employees what the one-year cost difference is to live in Claremont versus Charlestown or Newport and was told \$400. Claremont is a full-service community, so \$400 is not such a big difference. The only way to move off property tax reliance, is to work with other communities that have the same struggles as Claremont has. Rep. Cloutier said a lot of communities in Sullivan County have high property taxes. He has proposed some ideas (i.e. casino), but people don't like them. He talked about other states using broadbased taxes to help reduce property taxes. He will support another attempt for casino gambling. He will look at ways to cut the state budget if there is any fat in it (he doesn't think there is much) and put that toward revenue sharing. The state needs more revenue such as casinos, new tax, etc.

Ms. Messier agreed with Rep. Cloutier's concept. Loss of Shared Revenues appears to be permanent. She talked about changing legislation that would glean us a little bit of revenue: NH Motor Vehicle Mill Rate. Ms. Walter said that would be to drop off the 6th year of the Mill Rate.

Rep. Osgood said the biggest problem is the triangle at the southern part of the state; they have a big population down there. There are formulas used to determine where the money goes, but then the term "donor town" comes up. He talked about Revenue Sharing that is owed to communities. It was given to cities and towns when the poll tax was taken away. It needs to

come back. He talked about gaming machines in businesses that serve alcohol and that it could be up and running in six months.

Ms. Walter asked how citizens can get something on the ballot. Rep. Cloutier said we are not a referendum state and to become one would require passing a Constitutional amendment. Revenue Sharing needs to be restored and it is something that could be done in the state budget. He suggested the Reps. should brief the Council every other month on the situation. He would urge the Finance Committee to come to Claremont to do a public hearing to hear from citizens and to be sure the message of property tax relief, including getting back Revenue Sharing, is heard.

Mr. Bergeron said the state used to contribute to the retirement system, but now it doesn't; he would like help with that. He said we need help with welfare. He asked if we can establish a residency requirement of six months.

Ms. Messier said welfare costs should be shared with the state because there is no residency requirement.

Mr. Bergeron said he is not against helping people, but the City is getting stuck paying these costs.

Ms. Messier asked to consider next year land that is in Current Use and how it is taxed. Ms. Walter said she is working with the Assessor to make a presentation to the Council. Claremont has 50% of its land in Current Use. She would like to see the community have discretion to have no more than 10% of its land in Current Use.

Mr. Koloski asked to look at whatever Nashua is doing for its downtown redevelopment initiative. Ms. Messier said the city taxes those properties and the betterment money goes into that area (i.e. betterment assessment).

Rep. Osgood suggested if Revenue Sharing comes up in the form of an amendment to the budget, everyone should go to Concord to speak about it.

Mayor Neilsen asked to put the Representatives on the January agenda.

Ms. Walter talked about education funding and donor versus receiver towns. The biggest expense that most of the schools have is special education costs and they tend to be higher in poorer communities. She asked if the special education costs can go to the state and then be divvied up by the state. Rep. Cloutier said a Bill was recommended for passage by the Education Committee, but then the Finance Committee killed the Bill. He said it is a federal issue; they mandated it and pay only 20%.

Rep. Osgood said the Gaming Bill would be run through the lottery system and the money would benefit the education system. He said he would rather take away the enterprise tax and have an income tax, so that everyone pays.

Ms. Lovett asked about tax incentives for economic development. Rep. Osgood said it is against the state Constitution. Ms. Lovett asked if there is any type of incentive. Mayor Neilsen suggested CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) grants. Rep. Cloutier mentioned research & development breaks.

Mr. Koloski asked about CROP zones. Rep. Cloutier said outgoing Senator Bob Odell was the supporter for that. Ms. Walter said it is very targeted and we haven't found the right fit.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS AND DIRECTIVES

Mayor Neilsen said at the January meeting he would like to see if there was anything the Charter Commission looked at that the Council would like to consider (i.e. reinstate standing committees).

Mr. Simonds liked the idea of the Legislative body coming every couple of months and he asked that it be during the special meetings.

Mayor Neilsen asked Councilors to e-mail their suggestions to him. The letter will go out with the tax bill no later than the 26th.

A motion was made by Mr. Bergeron and seconded by Ms. Lovett to allow the Finance Director to put an insert in with the next tax bill.

Voice vote: motion carried 8-0.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:37 p.m., a motion was made by Ms. Messier and seconded by Mr. Simonds to adjourn.

Voice vote: motion carried 8-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dorée M. Russell
Clerk to the Council