

The Claremont City Council held a meeting on Monday, March 31, 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 I Councilor Carolyn Towle
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

Also present were:

Guy Santagate, City Manager
Jane Taylor, City Solicitor

Ward I Councilor Carolyn Towle was sworn in by Gwendolyn Melcher, City Clerk.

Mayor Neilsen said this is a workshop meeting with no public hearing scheduled, however if Councilors wanted to allow someone to speak they could make that request.

NEW BUSINESS

Goals and Objectives

Police Chief Alex Scott had worked with the City Manager to develop a strategic plan for the City of Claremont. It includes: Mission Statement, Core Values, Roles and Responsibilities, and Strategic Priorities. He said the Police Department has been using a strategic plan since 2004 and it has been successful. He talked about the difference between setting Goals and Objectives and Strategic Planning. He said strategic planning is defining the values, purpose, vision, mission, goals and objectives of an organization. The Charter and City Code provide a strong starting point for this process. A strategic plan provides a framework for making decisions; helps explain what the City is trying to accomplish to others; helps with performance monitoring; should be reviewed and revised yearly. Strategic planning can allow the City Manager and department heads to improve service by aligning individual goals and objectives with the City's strategic plan. Strategic planning will help identify roles and responsibilities. The Council establishes policies which are to be carried out by the City Manager. A policy is a guiding principle used to set direction in an organization. Procedures are the way of accomplishing policies. Strategic priorities: Fiscal Responsibility; Customer Service; Employee Development; and Public Health, Safety and Welfare. This list of strategic priorities was developed through

review the City council's goals and objectives meetings held over the last twelve months along with input from the City Manager.

Mayor Neilsen talked about strategic plan versus itemized directive of what you want improved/how you want it improved, etc. He was happy to see that how the process gets done is up to the City Manager unless he asks for suggestions from the Council. He thinks that helps explain the roles to citizens.

Mr. Raymond said this will streamline what the Council has to do. Also, he said he wants the public to know that the Council's responsibility is for City policy and management of the budget. This will streamline Council meetings and hopefully will help with economic development.

Council invited citizen comment.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, said in previous times Councils have not been clear with goals and objectives for the Council and administration and he was still unclear where this was going. In reference to the strategic plans, normally they arise from the Master Plan. He asked what the relationship is between the strategic vision in the Master Plan and the strategic vision for the Council. He thinks the administration has jumped in to try to steer the Council and he said the Police Commission is politically viewed in a certain way because of the appointments that are made.

Ms. Lovett had handed out a draft of her suggested strategic plan containing goals and objectives. Goals including Fiscal Responsibility: Budget Oversight and Economic Development; Service Oriented: Communication/Transparency and Environment; Workforce Recruitment/Retention: Compensation Packages and Annual Evaluation of City Manager; and Public Health, Safety and Welfare: Infrastructure, Police and Fire Departments, and Health Initiatives.

Mayor Neilsen had forwarded to the Councilors a list of Top Goals Submitted by Councilors that had been submitted by the previous Council. They were: Succession Plan for City Manager; Use or Sale of City-Owned Property; Regular Updating of the New City Website; Better Use of Visitor Center/Planning Office; Resolution of Collective Bargaining Issues; Make City Operations Smarter, More Efficient; Promotion of City as a Place for Business or Residence; Enforce Rules for Low Income Rental Properties; Support Economic Development to Increase Tax Base; Support Successful City Center Revitalization; Support Improvement of Blighted Neighborhoods; Support Successful Community Center; and Link Education to Economic Development/Work Force Training.

Ms. Messier had brought forth the goals that were adopted by the City Council in October 2001 and they were: 1) Implement strategies that will strengthen the financial condition of the City of Claremont; 2) Establish clear operating procedures regarding economic development which will position the City to expand its tax base and increase job opportunities; 3) Complete hiring process for key personnel and develop a professional management team; 4) Improve coordination between City departments and other government and community agencies; 5) Establish standard operating procedures for each department that will improve efficiencies; 6) Develop Citywide capital improvement program that will improve the infrastructure and protect

the capital assets of the City of Claremont; 7) Deliver the best possible City services to all residents and businesses at the lowest possible costs; and 8) Improve the image of our City by achieving documented accomplishments which will be recognized as professional and sustainable.

Council had a discussion about Ms. Lovett's suggestions, the previous Council's goals and the goals that were adopted in October 2001.

Mr. Bergeron asked where the Council wants to go and where the City Manager wants to go, because sometimes both entities are working against each other. Council is responsible for legislation and seeing that it is followed through on. He has heard that follow through is not there.

Mayor Neilsen talked about the succession plan for the City Manager and Council had decided that when he decides to give notice, the current Council will look for a new City Manager and that there will be no Assistant City Manager. He feels that one is done. Mr. Koloski agreed.

Ms. Messier said the 2001 Goals have never been unadopted and in 2007 the Council commented on those goals, but they were never removed. She talked about some of the items from the 2007 Council minutes compared to today: 2) Still inching in that direction; 3) Since 2007 we still have a lot of the same team. She noted in 2000 that there were five successive City Managers in the City. Then there was some turnover of Public Works Directors; 6) We are working on our second Capital Improvements Program; 7) Since 2007 we have had a lot of downshifting (millions of dollars worth); 8) Since 2007, the mills renovations have happened, etc.

Mr. Koloski would like to keep the 2001 list. He said most of these are working well and his number 1 priority would be "Establish clear operating procedures regarding economic development which will position the City to expand its tax base and increase job opportunities." Decreasing taxes will not occur unless industry and business move into this community. Cutting people doesn't affect the tax bill that much. He has ideas to boost support of the Planning and Development office.

Ms. Messier said these are basic policies that the community should keep. Mr. Koloski agreed. Economic development is key for this community and to have economic development, we have to have the other goals working beautifully. We have to have an inviting community.

Ms. Lovett said Council needs to agree where to focus its energy to make economic development happen.

Mayor Neilsen said in reference to the tax rate that he doesn't like to pit the City against school. The Council can try to shave \$1 off the tax rate, but that would be inconsequential if the school adds to the tax rate. If the City wants to get on the path to growth and investment, we need to spend some money. The City has been holding at a yearly 2.5%-3% tax increase [some years the City had no tax rate increase].

Ms. Messier said in NH, with the current tax system, the only way to fix that is to grow the City. Ms. Towle said that takes us back to economic development.

Mr. Reed talked about developing a plan to address the vacant retail store fronts, develop an incentive to attract commercial, industrial, and residential developments in the City to bring the tax rate down. He suggested offering incentives for upkeep and repair, but Ms. Messier said the City has no legal authority to offer incentives.

Mayor Neilsen talked about a formula former City Manager Porter had come up with (i.e. giving a percentage of the purchase price back after some investment). Ms. Messier said that would apply only if the City owns the property.

Mr. Koloski talked a principle of the first seven steps (i.e. entrances of the community – paving and signs have been done). Downtown is the heart of the City and it is not the most appealing. There is a revolving door with businesses downtown. He said the Council needs to be involved with that. He talked about looking at dormant facilities and revitalization zones. He's worried about the Downtown TIFD.

Ms. Messier said that would come under the Support Successful City Center Revitalization goal.

Mr. Koloski said citizens have asked for a downtown clean up.

Mr. Reed asked, in reference to the church next to the fire station, why the application fee funds go right into the General Fund instead of being used to preserve Claremont.

Ms. Lovett said if economic development is the priority, the Council needs to pick two or three areas to focus on and make it happen.

Ms. Messier talked about improvement of blighted neighborhoods and that we would need to check for resources.

Ms. Lovett talked about having a taskforce/committee made up of business people from all over the City to give the City and the Council feedback about problems for businesses.

Mr. Raymond talked about the 2001 goals and the strategic plan presented by Ms. Lovett and that they are similar.

Mr. Bergeron said Council needs to develop a strategic plan before adopting goals. He thinks Council should be involved in more committees. The City Center Committee discussed sidewalks and the cost for some is very high. He suggested everyone review the information that was given tonight.

Ms. Towle talked about having a strategic plan with procedures underneath that. Short term goals need to be decided. Economic development is the priority for everyone. She suggested at each Council meeting to take a goal and discuss it.

A motion was made by Mr. Koloski and seconded by Mr. Raymond to adopt the document presented by Chief Scott along with the 2001 list of goals and to move the number 2 item to the number 1 priority.

Mr. Bergeron will vote no without being able to make changes. Mayor Neilsen said this is a working document.

Roll call vote: motion carried 7-2 with Messrs. Bergeron and Reed voting no.

Mr. Koloski talked about creating a taskforce/business input committee focused solely on attracting new industry and business. Councilors discussed the taskforce/business input committee. Mr. Raymond suggested businesses could talk with the CDA (Claremont Development Authority). Mr. Koloski said businesses are intimidated by the CDA. He knows people are willing to serve on the taskforce. Mayor Neilsen asked about meeting times. He is more flexible during the daytime. Ms. Lovett said composition would need to be determined and an assessment would need to be brought back to the Council.

Mr. Koloski said it would be set up the same as City Center Steering Committee and would consist of six people: two from industry, two from retail and two from dining. It would be run by them.

Ms. Messier said it would need a beginning, middle and an end and would need to be facilitated by professionals to help keep it moving.

Mr. Koloski said this would be an input committee such as the Claremont 250th Anniversary Committee. Mayor Neilsen suggested Mr. Koloski gather the information and report back to the Council. Mr. Koloski doesn't want to steer the ship. He suggested another way would be to have an open roundtable at the CSB Community Center.

Mr. Bergeron suggested Mr. Koloski set up a meeting where a couple of the Councilors could meet with all the business owners.

Mayor Neilsen asked what the next step is. He suggested setting up a future workshop meeting to formulate subgoals or pathways.

Ms. Messier said economic development is a big topic. She talked about industrial economic development. She asked if the Council wants to go toward city center economic development. There would be questions about how to fund this. The downtown needs help, but those buildings are owned by private businesses. The City can only support the infrastructure. The downtown looks better than it did 10 years ago. HotZero heating will help the downtown.

Mr. Raymond said that HotZero will tear up the sidewalks to put the pipes in the ground and then they will put new ones down. It's a good place to start and maybe the City could piggyback off that. Mayor Neilsen said there will be work done on the Main Street infrastructure soon. Mr. Raymond suggested asking the Public Works Director for an update on the Main Street Project at the next Council meeting. There are some things happening in the City; at the last meeting

Council approved Planning and Development Director Nancy Merrill to advertise the Sawtooth building and the lawsuit has been settled for the Mill buildings.

Mr. Koloski agreed with what was being said, but the sidewalk between where the Corner Bookstore used to be and RiteAid was not being addressed. He would rather not depend on HotZero, he would rather the City have its own plan.

Ms. Messier said the zoning changes in the center of the City will make development easier. She would like to know the cost of sidewalks in the City center. Mr. Santagate said we would need to know where and what materials they want to use. We have Safe Routes to School funding for sidewalks around the schools.

Mr. Koloski said the immediate need area is from Bank of NH on Sullivan Street to Opera House Square to the end of the block at the RiteAid parking lot and then back around to the Brown Block. That may be phase one. He's not looking for tax dollars. He doesn't know the cost.

Ms. Messier asked for a consensus to know the cost. Ms. Merrill said it is on April's agenda.

Councilors agreed to read over the documents they were given tonight. Mayor Neilsen said at its next meeting, Council will set a workshop meeting to establish a couple more goal priorities and to flush out what Council wants information on.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, liked the economic development discussion. He suggested having a line item for citizen committees in the next budget. He said people have to feel part of process. He feels the CDA is ineffective.

There was discussion about scheduling budget sessions. Mayor Neilsen said he has heard that some citizens would like to make comment before the final budget day. He would like to see some time for public comment at each section of the budget process.

Mr. Koloski agreed with that. He would like citizens to get questions answered the night the department heads are present.

Mr. Santagate said in the past there was one full Saturday and two other nights. Mayor Neilsen said they used to have a meeting each week for one month. Mr. Koloski would prefer four-hour blocks.

Ms. Lovett asked for a timeline. Mr. Santagate said the budget will go to the Council May 2nd. The budget has to be completed by May 31st.

Mr. Bergeron said with the schedule for the all day session, there isn't time for people speak; you'll need more than one Saturday.

Mr. Koloski said if it spread out over four weeks, department heads can schedule their time better. Mr. Bergeron said we need to set a time limit and stick to it. Mayor Neilsen agreed; Council can set an allotted amount of time for citizen questions.

NON-PUBLIC SESSION PURSUANT TO RSA 91-A:3,II(a) – PERSONNEL

A motion was made by Mr. Bergeron and seconded by Ms. Towle to go into Non-Public Session Pursuant to RSA 91-A:3,II(a) – Personnel and to invite Mr. Santagate into the session.

Roll Call vote: motion carried 9-0.

A motion was made by Mr. Bergeron and seconded by Mr. Simonds to seal the minutes until such time as the City Manager determines to release them.

Roll call vote: motion carried 9-0.

A motion was made by Mr. Raymond and seconded by Mr. Reed to leave non-public session and return to public session.

Roll call vote: motion carried 9-0.

Public session reconvened at 10:51 p.m.

City Council, by consensus, decided to have the City Manager's evaluation timeline coincide with the calendar year. The previous evaluation timeline was October 12, 2012 – December 31, 2013. Current evaluation will be January 1, 2014 – December 31, 2014.

CONSULTATION WITH LEGAL COUNSEL

None

ADJOURNMENT

At 10:56 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Bergeron and seconded by Ms. Messier to adjourn.

Voice vote: motion carried 9-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dorée M. Russell
Clerk to the Council