

The Claremont City Council held a meeting on Wednesday, September 23, 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:

At-Large Councilor Keith Raymond
Ward III Councilor Nicholas Koloski
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
Assistant Mayor Victor Bergeron

Also present were:

Guy Santagate, City Manager

MAYOR'S NOTES

Mayor Neilsen said that Councilor Towle's 4-H equestrian group made it into the Eastern State Finals.

Ms. Lovett said October 9, there will be a ribbon cutting at the train station and October 10 there will be a Tire Tracks event. Amtrak is promoting its capability to transport bikes on the train.

Mayor Neilsen read from a newsletter saying the federal highway trust fund will be bankrupt by the end of summer because it is paying out more than it is receiving in gas taxes and it encouraged people to contact Congressman Guinta and Congresswoman Kuster to support the transportation funding bill.

Mr. Santagate asked what the deadline is to submit as we could draw up a proclamation or letter. Mayor Neilsen said October 29, 2015. Mr. Santagate said if it is okay with the Council, he'll bring something forward, to support the highway funding, at the October 14th meeting.

CITIZEN'S FORUM

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, talked about the filing period for Council seats and as of today four candidates had applied for Mayor: Mayor James Neilsen, Councilor Charlene Lovett, Councilor Kyle Messier and AJ Maranville. He said the City Center Initiative Committee had been informed about a neighborhood project, the Walnut/Spruce Project, i.e. Habitat for Humanity. He said he is in favor of improvement to neighborhoods, however he is concerned about an outside entity coming in. He said the City's interim planner said this was supposed to be a model for other City neighborhoods. He thinks this should be overseen by a Council committee of Councilors and citizens.

OLD BUSINESS

Welcome 2015/2016 AmeriCorps VISTAs

There are three AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers (Bella, Alexis and Hannah) who started a year of service in Claremont in August. The focus of the VISTA program is to combat poverty and enhance economic opportunity for all. Organizations that are sponsoring these VISTAs are Habitat for Humanity, rethink Health and Granite State College.

Mr. Santagate thanked the AmeriCorps VISTAs and the sponsoring organizations. They will be focusing on improving housing stock, gaining access to healthy food and improving educational outcomes. He introduced the volunteers: Alexis Foote, Bella Starsky and Hannah Putnam. He also introduced Kate O'Neil from Granite State College and Margaret Brown, ReThink Health.

Alexis Foote talked about neighborhood revitalization and bringing in elevated raised garden beds to the area. Everything is included such as seeds and gardening classes.

Hannah Putnam is working to improve educational attainment. She talked about setting up a Little Free Library Project (www.littlefreelibrary.org) around town. She's looking for volunteers to build more boxes. She can be reached at Hannah.putnam@granite.edu.

Margaret Brown, ReThink Health, said a survey showed there was a need for access to fresh fruits and vegetables on a yearly basis and the Farmers Market is not being used to its full capacity. There is a higher than state average of obesity here. She said Bella is working on a nutrition education program at the schools, with the hospital and the community center. They are looking for space for a robust garden (in the downtown area) that is ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessible. Valley Regional Hospital has offered support and space. Dartmouth Organic Farm has sponsored a cooking class at the soup kitchen.

Kate O'Neil, Director of Student Affairs at Granite State College, works with Literacy Partnership and said they are working on having tutors for adult education.

Alexis Foote said that Habitat for Humanity is accepting applications for basic home repairs to be done in the spring.

Mr. Santagate said we can put them on a future agenda for an update and they could put something on CCTV with more information.

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, suggested putting the information in the City's newsletter. He said the locally grown produce at the Farmers Market is expensive and Claremont is a low income town, so people can't afford it. He said some of the owners of the multi-family housing units in the Walnut Street neighborhood are not Claremont residents, so there may be less incentives for the improvements.

Department Update – Planning and Development

Nancy Merrill, Planning and Development Director, showed a PowerPoint presentation, Economic Development, September 2015.

- Unemployment
 - Claremont area (including Claremont, Unity, Sunapee and Goshen) unemployment rate has dropped
- Largest Employers
 - Claremont School District
 - Valley Regional Health Care
 - Wal-Mart
 - National Field Representatives
 - Pathways
 - City of Claremont
 - CANAM Group
 - Claremont Savings Bank
 - Crown Point Cabinetry
 - Red River
- City Center Initiative 2014-15
 - End of June committee ended
 - Updated signage ordinance
 - Parking audit; utilization
 - Energy – energy efficiency & solarize
 - New LED lighting and banners City Center
- Projects
 - Main street Road & Sidewalk Project
 - North & Main Streets intersection
 - East St. sidewalk and Bobby Woodman Trail
 - Gas Works site environmental remediation
 - \$4 million brownfield cleanup
 - Safe Routes to Schools
 - CDBG-Pleasant Valley Estates
 - Water
 - Washington and Bowen Streets intersection

- State will fund 80% to make this a 4-way intersection instead of 3-way intersection
- Verizon and AutoZone will enter/exit at the intersection instead of at individual driveways to make it safer
- Belding Street Existing Conditions
 - Part of Safe Routes to Schools
- Sawtooth building to TwinState MakerSpaces
 - Hope to be at the Planning Board for subdivision of the property in October
- New Construction, Expansions or Business – 2015
 - CANAM looking for employees
- Syd Clarke Park
 - Jewell Transportation started site work
 - North Country Smokehouse (40,000 sf building)
- 13 Water St. Rehab

Mayor Neilsen asked about the status of the HotZero project. Ms. Merrill said the falling gas and oil prices are affecting it, so the company is taking a step back to take a look at it.

Mr. Koloski asked about staffing at the Planning and Development Department. Ms. Merrill said the additional inspector has made a huge difference and they have been catching up.

Ms. Lovett said a barrier to biking is having a safe place to bike. She asked when repaving or doing road work if bike lanes are being put in. Ms. Merrill said it depends on the area. If we get funding, we can put in bike paths and sidewalks. Ms. Lovett asked about the plan for sidewalk materials (asphalt versus concrete).

Scott Sweet, Interim Public Works Director, said the main roads will have granite curb and asphalt sidewalk and the side streets will have asphalt curb and sidewalk.

Ms. Messier asked if this is in the Master Plan. Ms. Merrill said it is referenced in the Transportation chapter, but not as strongly as other communities.

Ms. Messier asked about website updates. Ms. Merrill said there have been a lot of updates and she hasn't heard any complaints in several months. If someone wants to suggest updates, she can be contacted at nmerrill@claremontnh.com.

Mr. Koloski asked about a timeline to be able to pay for services at the Planning office. Ms. Merrill said the bid is ready to go out for new software for Fire and the inspectors, and part of the package is the ability to use cards. Mr. Koloski said shrubs are obstructing the sign at the Planning office. Ms. Merrill will take a look at that.

NEW BUSINESS

Resolution 2016-19 Expend Funds for Veterans Park Bill Baril Memorial Infield Project – Public Hearing

Withdrawn

Transfer Station Ad Hoc Committee Update

Joe Osgood, Ward 2 resident and Transfer Station Ad Hoc Committee member, said the Committee is aware that an RFP (Request for Proposal) was sent out for a 3-year contract and the Committee would like to request the City not enter into a contract for continued rentals of compactors and waste removal for longer than one year while the Committee puts its plan together. He said the compactor containers don't appear to be compacted to the degree that other transfer stations are. Research indicated the containers are leaving weighing half of what they could. They would like future contract(s) to indicate that containers weigh 10-13 tons. The contractors are paid by the ton and the trip. A formal presentation will be made to the Council on October 14.

Scott Sweet, Interim Public Works Director, said it is a continuity issue and that is why they went with a three-year contract. The contractors have to contact DES (Department of Environmental Services) for landfill contaminants. Bids are due by the end of October and the contract can be changed at that time, if needed.

Mr. Osgood thinks more communication between Public Works and the Committee would be advantageous.

Ms. Lovett requested Transfer Station Update be placed on the October 14th agenda.

Mayor Nielsen thanked the Committee members for taking the time to serve almost a year on this committee.

Ms. Lovett requested Mr. Santagate and a Public Works representative to be present at the October 6th, 5 p.m., Transfer Station Ad Hoc Committee meeting.

Mayor Nielsen read from a Sullivan County letter regarding a supplemental appropriation of \$650,000 to be used to lower the Sullivan County tax rate.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS AND DIRECTIVES

Mr. Simonds talked about the new City Hall sign and the dilapidated Opera House sign. Mr. Santagate said we are working to make the Opera House more visible from the outside, so their entrance will be moved to the side of the building. He'll follow-up with the Opera House about the sign.

Ms. Messier asked about a drop box for bill payments. Mr. Santagate said there is no safe spot in front of City Hall. Ms. Messier said that people don't want to have to get out of the car to make the payment. Mr. Santagate said we are willing to accept suggestions.

Ms. Lovett said the change to Ordinance 544 has already been mentioned. Last time it was mentioned to look into the senior tax credit. Mr. Santagate said it was reviewed in 2008 and it decided not to make the changes because the cost would shift to other tax payers. Mr. Santagate said he will get more information and bring it forward to the Council.

Ms. Lovett asked about an ordinance regarding livestock in residential areas. Mayor Neilsen said at the last meeting he asked City Attorney Taylor to provide a draft ordinance and to have a public hearing or if there was no time to make a draft ordinance, to have a public hearing to get public input in October. Ms. Lovett is concerned that an increasing number of ordinances have been requested, but they are not getting presented.

Ms. Lovett asked about tax deeded properties. Mayor Neilsen asked to have a list of tax lien/deeded properties at the second meeting in October.

Mr. Koloski would like to have a discussion about a stopping/standing/loitering ordinance as there is an issue around Opera House Square. A person "holding down" a trash can for 9 hours a day is not acceptable. He would like something done. He asked if the bike rack in front of City Hall can be updated. He would like an update on other avenues of disposal of City-owned buildings. Mr. Santagate said that can be put on an agenda.

Mr. Santagate responded to a previous request regarding the Moody Park gate closure. The date has been extended to be open Saturdays and Sunday until October 11. The part-time help is gone, so the hours had to be cut. He talked about the Comcast franchise agreement and that there is a clause in it that would allow Comcast to extend the agreement for three years. There are no material defaults, so they offered to extend the present contract to 2020. He referenced a request that Mr. Koloski made to have a cable drop at the Claremont Savings Bank Community Center (CSBCC) and there would be a charge of 3 cents per prescriber, per month which would be 36 cents per year (\$1.08 over the 3-year contract per household or \$4,100 city-wide for the 3-year contract). Council does not need to vote on that. If there is no objection, we'll get it signed.

Mr. Koloski said there is a \$1 fee on the bill for local sports and he would like to know what that is. He is concerned that a lot of people are still not serviced by Comcast in the area. He asked what the deadline is for filing the agreement. Mr. Santagate said it has not been signed and we can hold it if needed. Mr. Koloski would like to see if City departments can get cable access for free.

Mayor Neilsen asked to find out if they have a plan over the next three years on how to reach the rural areas.

Mr. Koloski said he was offended that taxpayers have to pay to drop a live hookup at a City facility (CSBCC).

Bernie Folta, Ward 3, said when on Comcast, you can see Council and other meetings, but when you switch to satellite, you lose that capability. He suggested CCTV (Claremont Community Television) could start streaming directly to the web.

Mayor Neilsen said aside from streaming, people can go to CCTV's website and view the meetings.

CONSULTATION WITH LEGAL COUNSEL

None

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

None

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:10 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Raymond and seconded by Ms. Messier to adjourn.

Voice vote: motion carried 7-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dorée M. Russell
Clerk to the Council