

Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

WORK SESSION

City Hall Council Chambers
57 N. Liberty Street
Cumberland, MD 21502

Tuesday, July 5, 2022; 3:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Raymond M. Morriss, President; Council Members: Richard Cioni, Eugene Frazier, Joe George, and Laurie Marchini.

ALSO PRESENT: Jeffrey Silka, City Administrator; Sherri Nicol, Assistant to the City Clerk; Ken Tressler, Director of Administrative Services; Robert Smith, City Engineer; Chuck Ternent, Chief of Police; Allison Layton, Citizen Services Representative; Kevin Thacker, Code Compliance Manager; Lee Borrer, Senior Community Development Specialist

Media: Greg Larry, Cumberland Times-News

I. ENGINEERING & UTILITY DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Mr. Smith advised on the timeline for Baltimore Street, from federal aid amendments to getting bids. He said he won't speculate inflation affecting estimates coming back. He stated that they have some of their grants, and will wait to see what the number comes in at.

Mr. Smith advised that as far as the Baltimore Street Bridge, he expects to get those comments back this week, and advertise for bids in August. He added that he's not foreseeing a lot of comments.

Mr. Smith explained that this bridge will be a 6-month project, and said there will be no parking during any phase, with traffic shifting. He said there is also work to do on the Wills Creek flood walls, so actually it becomes an 18-month project. He also advised on the timeline for sending to State Highway, reviewal, comments, etc. He said that there is also a minority small business requirement, with certain percentages hoping to be attained, but not mandated, as long as it shows a good faith effort, and reviewed percentages for previous jobs. Mr. Smith also stated that regarding the timetable for the bridge, it depends on approval received, and added that all the partners at State Highway understand the necessity of this project.

Mr. Smith advised on the Decatur Street pipeline project, stated that laying the pipe has been done, but said he stopped 275 feet short of where they had planned. He explained that there was too much stuff in the intersection of Polk Street that was not identified during the engineering portion of the project. He stated that the ADA work will start in 2-3 weeks, followed by restoration efforts. Mr. Smith said the project has gone very well, and advised that paving will begin the end of July or early August.

On other paving projects, Mr. Smith stated that next week paving of Rt. 51 will begin, and will stop a couple hundred feet short of AirCon. He said the Virginia Avenue subway will be paved, followed by Winston Street, then in front of Wendy's. He added that the Fayette Street water line work should be finishing up in the next few weeks. Mr. Smith stated that

the paving of Fayette Street won't be until Fall, and said the area will be Braddock Road, as well as a good portion of Allegany Street.

Mr. Smith stated that next will be the elevators project, in City Hall and the Public Safety Building. He said they are waiting for a proposal, and will do the project through Sourcewell or another consortium. He also briefly went over work needing to be done at the prisoner processing area, and said that will be a Sourcewell job as well.

Mr. Smith talked about the South End water main replacement, which is another Harper project, and will replace the 12-inch lines going down Industrial. He also noted that for the 78" pipeline job, the revised proposal was submitted, and now they're waiting to hear back. He said the revision includes a construction monitoring proposal.

Regarding 19 Frederick Street, Mr. Smith said the assessment was awarded to EADS, with a 90-day contract to deliver a report and cost to the City.

Mr. Smith advised that he has the RFPs for the HVAC in City Hall and the Public Safety Building. He also advised that the paving of Prospect Square was going well, although there was a gas leak this morning. He said they've dug up all the asphalt and will be paving tomorrow. He added that as of now the road is closed, but should be open by Friday.

Mr. Smith moved on to Utilities, and advised on the WRF bar screen project, and explained what it does. He said construction should begin in Fall. He added that they are fully staffed there, minus a Coordinator, and said they are waiting for operators to get their Class 5 licenses. He described the qualifications needed to be Plant Tech 3.

Mr. Smith advised that the WFP is fully staffed, with one employee in training, who should be up to snuff in 6 months. He mentioned that AES is back on line this week, said the only project for the plant is replacing media filters, and described how it is done.

Councilwoman Marchini questioned Mr. Brown about the specs for the Baltimore Street Access Project being updated every July, and wanted to know if he foresees any problems. Mr. Smith advised that it doesn't affect the plans, just affects standard specifications. He said items that were specifically listed in the plans get pulled into overall specifications.

Councilman George offered congratulations to Mr. Smith on the fully staffed plants. Mr. Smith stated that the new agreements are good, and said it makes them think. He added that the people seem happy.

II. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Mr. Tressler turned it over to Kevin Thacker and Allison Layton from Community Development. Mr. Thacker advised on the Code Enforcement Update, and provided a PowerPoint presentation. He explained that he had tasked officers to take on more of a role this year, such as handling intake of miscellaneous permits, which gives him more time on revitalization and property sales.

Mr. Thacker reviewed the FY21 and FY22 case comparisons. He advised that yard and weed violations take up the most percentage. He stated that Ms. Layton has been pro-active in

trying to catch unlicensed rentals by sending out notices and letters, and said that she's done a great job – it's been a great year. Mr. Thacker also advised that they are working on a procedure that will cut down on the process time for repeat offenders.

Ms. Layton discussed how surplus sales began in 2020, and said there have been 4 rounds so far, with the hope to have the 5th this month. She added that there have been 68 properties identified in the 4 sales, with 29 selling, for a total of \$102,213.50. Ms. Layton explained that some properties remain on the website that won't sell, and said the ongoing property sale has sold 13 additional properties, totaling \$5,400. She said they are excited for the next round, which will be all rehabs, and provided photos of the properties. She advised that they will be up on the website as soon as possible, and said when driving around looking for properties to put on the sales, neighbors would stop them and let them know how happy they were about the revitalization plans. Mr. Thacker added that there's a positive vibe now in the neighborhoods.

Mayor Morriss said this is 42 properties in 2 years, back on the tax rolls. He said people will see that the work being done is a step in the right direction.

There was discussion about vacant lots and bidders wanting to build. It was mentioned that some purchasing and fixing up will be by developers, some by individuals, with the grant program helping also.

Mr. Thacker advised that last FY they tore down 11 blighted properties, and said they've seen a lot of improvement in the last 2 years. He added that people are looking to buy properties on Goethe Street, and said all were sold except 1, and said the City needs to continue to improve all neighborhoods.

Mr. Thacker discussed the Virginia Avenue Demolition project, and said the unsafe and blighted properties were demolished in June, which turned the corner of Virginia Avenue and Oldtown Road into a much more appealing intersection.

Mr. Thacker discussed future planned demolitions on Maryland Avenue, Arch Street and Columbia Street.

Ms. Layton discussed the grant programs. The Home Rehabilitation Grant provides matching rehab grants to the homeowner up to \$25,000, if the property is currently uninhabitable. She explained that grantees have up to one year to complete the rehabilitation project. She said three of those grants have been awarded thus far. The Property Improvement Program Grant is for owner-occupied properties within the City that are deteriorating and in need of repairs, and is an income-based grant. She added that 2 applications for this grant have been received so far. Mr. Thacker advised that Requests for Interest have been put out for contractors, and said they will be vetted by the City, with 5 contractors to choose from.

In summary, Ms. Layton advised that there will be a lot of activity coming up in Community Development, and said FY23 promises to shift the City even further towards the goal of neighborhood revitalization.

III. CITY COMMUNICATION DISCUSSION

Mr. Silka advised that the City needs to do a better job of communicating. There was discussion about citizens complaining about lack of communication, yet they don't read the paper, listen to radio, or do social media. Mr. Silka said he's throwing it out there for any suggestions or ideas for improvement. He also stated that in his opinion, the City of Cumberland is one of the most transparent organizations he's worked for, with media coverage, social media, the website, City Hall phones, etc., and yet there's always someone who complains. He added that the only way he can see to get information out to everyone is posting the agenda on every door.

Mayor Morriss explained that the individual needs to actively look for certain information, like the radio, newspaper, or the website, but said they still need to make sure they're communicating with people

There was discussion about periodically advising folks what all is out there - all the different Facebook pages – and tell people about them and other social media; talk about and brag about the website. It was noted that there is a lot of information on the Facebook page, and what Mayor and Council can do is share events and information that is on other City pages to their individual pages, to help spread news to the community.

Mr. Silka suggested having a Twitter feed, but it would have to be kept up and current, and said the momentum is tough.

There was more discussion on transparency. Mr. Silka advised that there are a lot of places in PA that don't get a lot of coverage, and said here in Cumberland the local press is at every meeting, which is transparent. He added that there are 4 public meetings a month that could be attended if people were truly interested, but it's always easier to say there is a problem than to ask what can be done as a solution. He stated accessibility is here, coverage is here, and the information is out there. He said they are willing to do what needs to be done, but said he doesn't have the answer.

There was more discussion on getting information to the public. There were suggestions of Facebook Live updates, and the Mayor talked about his weekly Covid updates. Ms. Layton stated that the City can add other social media, like Instagram, and asked for Council and Staff to send her things to post. She added that the City may already have a Twitter account started. She suggested doing a mailer to reach people; maybe a postcard to each address regarding public meetings. Mr. Silka advised that in his experience, that rarely works and is very expensive, and suggested an ad in the newspaper being more effective.

There was discussion on having a subscription service for City information, like Nixle, to let folks know what's happening. Ms. Layton recalled a person that was upset when the water was turned off on Decatur Street, who said she had no advance notice.

Chief Ternent discussed Reverse 911, that he advised is in place, and said there are lots of levels for Nixle, and talked about City/County Nixle accounts. Mr. Silka said he would look into it.

Councilman George thanked Mr. Silka for reviewing this issue, said the points are valid, and added it's worth having the discussion and periodically reminding people how to access City information.

IV. AGENDA REVIEW 7/5/22

Mr. Silka asked Council if they had any questions about anything particular on the agenda. There was some discussion on the Vehicle Use Policy. Councilwoman Marchini asked about the zoning hearing, and Mr. Silka reviewed it. He advised that it's a long process to do a map change.

Mr. Smith discussed the grid at the plant, and Optimal Renewals, and company that does studies for entities to use renewable energy. He added that the City is checking into solar panels or methane to support existing operations, and explained it more in detail.

There was discussion on a grant program to utilize top floors of parking garages to capture solar energy, and also about the City getting more charging stations for EVs. Mr. Smith discussed the infrastructure involved, said Canal Place is visible, and stated they can do a study. There was also discussion on the time it takes to fully charge an EV, with Mr. Smith noting that the 2 chargers in the parking lot across from Curtis's Wieners are not getting much use. There was a suggestion of working with a vendor, and asking how much to pay the City to put their chargers in.

Councilwoman Marchini advised that she will be recusing herself from Order No. 27,036.

V. MAYOR & CITY COUNCIL UPDATES

Mayor Morriss discussed the City's Fourth of July events; he said they were very good and people enjoyed them. He said there was a good crowd and a lot of dancing. He also mentioned that the Old Allegany Exhibit is opening at the museum. He stated that it's an excellent event and encouraged people to attend. The Mayor discussed other upcoming events:

Fade to Blue; Friday After Five with QC Funk & Soul; art museum opening; Campers reunion at Canal Place; Ice Cream Trains at the WMSR; Almost Indigo downtown on the bricks

Councilman Cioni discussed the naming of sports fields, and asked if there was a policy in place. Mayor Morriss mentioned that a policy had been worked up, and said he will talk to Ms. Woodring. The Councilman also discussed refurbishing the outside pickleball courts at the YMCA, saying they are damaged with only a couple of courts not having lots of cracks, out of the 4-5 courts they have. Bower Fund monies was discussed.

Councilwoman Marchini advised that the Baltimore Street Redevelopment Group met last Wednesday, and the security camera grant for downtown.

Councilman George advised that the Planning and Zoning meeting for this month has been cancelled. He also discussed emails about Burgmeier's Hauling and garbage days. He stated

that a citizen told him about a brochure that Burgmeier's puts out, and said it would be worthwhile to see that it gets distributed. Getting dumpsters was also a topic of discussion.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business at hand, the work session adjourned at 5:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Marjorie A. Woodring
City Clerk

Minutes approved on October 20, 2022