

**CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
November 18, 2014
COUNCIL CHAMBERS
7:00 PM**

COUNCILORS PRESENT

Councilor Bogan
Councilor Collins
Councilor Gates
Councilor Gray
Councilor Hamann
Councilor Keans
Councilor Lachapelle
Councilor Larochelle
Councilor Lauterborn
Councilor Torr
Councilor Varney
Councilor Walker
Mayor Jean

OTHERS PRESENT

City Manager Daniel Fitzpatrick
Deputy City Manager Blaine Cox
Kenneth Weston, Architect
Peter Bruckner, Resident
Warren Groen, NH State Representative
Thomas Kaczynski, Resident
Gregg DeNobile, Resident
Irene Creteau, Resident

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Mayor Jean called the City Council Workshop meeting to order at 7:05 PM. Deputy City Clerk Marcia Roddy took a silent roll call. All members were present.

2. Public Input

Mayor Jean invited members of the public to come forward to speak on relevant City matters.

Peter Bruckner, resident and member of the Historic District Commission, spoke on the City Hall Annex. He offered his opinion on why the so-called Annex building should be preserved and repurposed.

Warren Groen, resident and State Representative from District 10, addressed his recent issue with political signs that were displayed during the recent election. He said some of his signs had been removed. He has contacted the Secretary of State's office, the Attorney General's office, and the Rochester Building, Zoning, and Licensing Services Department. There appear to be differing views on where political signs can be posted. This is an ongoing investigation.

Thomas Kaczynski, resident, said that approximately a year ago he had asked the City Council what the plans were for the City Hall Annex. He cited a 2007 newspaper article with similar concerns about spending on the proposed project. He said the population growth in Rochester does not warrant the need for additional office space.

Irene Creteau, resident and retired real estate agent, said she believes that the old police station is a solid building with a good location that should be seriously considered for use in the future.

Gregg DeNobile, resident, said he has not heard a strong argument for the need of additional space. He said it is a lot of money for Rochester to spend on a project that has not been proven as necessary, particularly with the current economy.

Mayor Jean closed Public Input at 7:30 PM.

Mayor Jean clarified a statement he had made approximately a year ago regarding the City Hall Annex. The City Council discussed the project of gutting the building and the fact that any work on the building was included in the budget process in the spring. He added that any action taken on the building has been completely transparent and above board.

Councilor Gates asked if anyone from the Building, Zoning, and Licensing Services Department could clarify the issue regarding the political signs. Jim Grant, Director of the BZLS, explained what the City Ordinance is regarding signs. He said that the Attorney General's office has a different view and there will be an investigation on the matter. Mr. Grant said that, in his opinion, this is something that should be ruled on at the State level.

3. Presentation: Spaulding Turnpike Speed Study

William Lambert, State Traffic Engineer/Administrator, gave a PowerPoint presentation on studies that have been done on the recently upgraded section of the Spaulding Turnpike. It is currently a 55 mph speed limit and, now that it is a four-lane roadway, the speed limit will be raised to 65 mph in the section from Exit 9 through Exit 16. Mr. Lambert showed several examples of various parts of the study.

4. Communications from the Mayor

Mayor Jean said that the holiday tree lighting will take place on Friday evening, December 5, 2014. He said that the Christmas parade will be on Sunday, December 7, 2014, starting at 3:00 PM at Spaulding High School. He invited the Council members to attend.

Mayor Jean asked if any member of the City Council would be interested in serving as a representative to the Veterans Council. He said that Kelly Walters,

although not a member of the Council, would be willing to serve as the representative. Councilor Gray pointed out that the Veterans Council meets on the same night as the Public Works Committee and there are several Council members who like to attend those meetings.

5. Communications from the City Manager

There was no discussion.

6. Discussion: City Hall Annex

Mayor Jean opened the discussion regarding the City Hall Annex by outlining what some of the issues are. He pointed out that the last time the Council discussed the matter the possibility of utilizing space at the Community Center was brought up.

Mayor Jean asked Ken Weston, representative from Oak Point Architects, if he had any information to share regarding the Community Center space. Mr. Weston said he had done a "walk through" and had some informal information for the Council.

Mayor Jean emphasized that this would be a discussion only and that it was an opportunity for the Council to work on a decision of where the proposed office space could be, whether it would be renovating the City Hall Annex, the Community Center, or building a new facility altogether. It is the intent to get a "sense of Council" on what direction to be going in.

Councilor Gates asked what is driving this matter forward; why is it being considered.

Mayor Jean said that ever since the Economic Development Department was located at the Community Center several years ago, as well as the fact that the Planning Department is located in an area of City Hall that is not handicap accessible, it became apparent that a new location for those departments, as well as Building, Zoning, and Licensing Services, should be looked at. Those three departments work closely together and it would make sense to have them all located in the same facility.

City Manager Fitzpatrick pointed out that the budget for FY 2015 has provided for a full time City Attorney and legal department and, at this time, there is no office space planned for that addition.

Councilor Walker said that although there has been no increase in staffing recently, it is important that certain departments be in close proximity to each other in order to keep running efficiently.

Councilor Keans said she has had five phone calls in recent days from people who are concerned about the money that would be needed for renovation in the existing City Hall building.

Councilor Gates said he understands the need for the three aforementioned departments to be located in close proximity. He asked if the new software the City is evaluating for Building, Licensing, and Zoning Services is established would it help mitigate the issue of having to travel from one place to another, and would it help each department in tracking the development of a project by utilizing the software. He added that there is ample floor space at the Community Center that could be used to house all three of these departments and it is a facility that is on one floor and is ADA compliant.

Councilor Varney said in order to go forward with any project it is important to establish a budget. He had asked Deputy City Manager Cox to look at the City's debt service for the next few years. Mr. Cox had prepared a Debt Service Forecast which he handed out to the Councilors [*a copy is attached hereto as **Attachment A***]. It provided debt service figures through the year 2022. He said it shows the level of debt service increase of the next few years.

Councilor Walker asked Mr. Cox if the figures on the spreadsheet were based on a \$5 million project. Mr. Cox said yes. Councilor Walker asked Mr. Cox if he had taken into consideration the fact that the Council had already approved \$3 million, so it would only be adding \$2 million potentially to what had already been approved. Mr. Cox said the \$3 million was included in the figures.

Councilor Varney said he had worked out some figures showing how much the debt service would increase each year.

Mayor Jean pointed out that the cost of funds is low at this time and will probably go up in the future.

Councilor Varney asked where with the revenue be coming from to service this debt. This would be a high priority in considering any project.

Mayor Jean asked the Council of obtaining new property for off-site construction is something that can be taken "off the table" at this time and removed from consideration. He invited Ken Weston of Oak Point to provide feedback from his walk-through at the Community Center.

Mr. Weston's overview of the space now used as a "community room" was that several aspects of modification for office suites would involve work on heating, electrical, and many other areas to bring the space up to code and fully functional.

Mayor Jean asked Mr. Weston what would be the ballpark cost for renovating the space. Mr. Weston said it would be approximately \$1 million.

Councilor Varney asked why so much space is needed for the three departments. Mr. Weston compared the amount of space to that of the City Hall Annex and determined what would be needed for those departments.

Mayor Jean said he does not feel that renovating space at the Community Center is a good idea. He said that he has always had issues with the building itself, saying that it was poorly designed and he is not in favor of expending any money on that building. He would like to see a more detailed plan for renovation.

Councilor Varney said he does not want to hear complaints about air quality at the Community Center. He said that any time a project is proposed there is always the issue of air quality and he would like to know exactly what that is and has anyone ever done an actual study on it. City Manager Fitzpatrick said not to be concerned with air quality. He said that whenever there have been complaints the City has looked into it and the Council should not be concerned with it.

Councilor Gates said he likes the idea of using the Community Center as an interim "fix" and consider a bigger project when TIF funds become available.

Councilor Lachapelle disagreed with any money spent on the Community Center and that the City should fix up what already exists. He does not like the idea of relocating the Council Chambers and that what is in City Hall serves that purpose adequately.

Mayor Jean asked Councilor Gates what amount he would be comfortable with for an "interim fix." Councilor Gates said a half million dollars (\$500,000).

Councilor Bogan said her concern with the Community Center is the parking. She said that any time she goes to that building it is usually hard to find a parking space. This could be an issue if the City relocates offices to that building.

Councilor Torr gave his opinion on the proposed plan to renovate the City Hall Annex or the Community Center. He said he is not in favor of doing either, nor is he in favor of razing the Annex building and constructing a new building. He said that the downtown area is not at all attractive. He is against spending money on any new project. He added that a lot of thought was put into the Library renovation and it turned out to be a nice building. This is what should be done here.

Mayor Jean asked Mr. Cox if there was any more money in the budget to do a more detailed study of the Community Center. Mr. Cox said no.

Mayor Jean asked for a "sense of Council" regarding work on the Community Center. Councilor Varney said there should be more study done on the building. Mayor Jean asked Mr. Weston if he had a rough idea of how much that would cost. Mr. Weston said it could be approximately \$2,500.

Councilor Varney said if this project is put off for 5 or 6 years then it would mean the legal department would be located in the basement of the Revenue Building. Mayor Jean said yes, that would be the plan.

Councilor Lachapelle said if the three departments are relocated somewhere then the legal department can move in to the Building, Licensing, and Zoning Services space (with some renovation). He added that he does not want any vacant offices to go to the Opera House.

Mayor Jean asked the Council if they want to proceed in considering the Community Center for office space or to focus energy on the City Hall campus.

Councilor Varney cautioned the Council to consider the cost and see that the City cannot do either project. He mentioned that there are other projects that the City needs to do, such as a new Public Works building.

Councilor Gray said that if nothing is done at the Community Center then the building will just sit year after year being underutilized. The Annex has been gutted; will that just sit from year to year without being used? He said one of the buildings needs to be used. Why not move the Council Chambers to the Community Center and utilize the current space for other purposes.

Councilor Collins said he thinks we should be careful using public credit for any projects. He said there are many talented people in the city who could look at the facility and come up with some good ideas on how to better utilize the space, many of whom would do it for a low cost or no cost. He would like to see the city make do with less.

Councilor Keans asked Mr. Weston questions about the proposed office space in the Annex. She wanted to know if there are more closed offices than needed. He explained that there are some closed offices, but there is shared administrative office space and small conference rooms.

Councilor Keans asked if it was necessary to discuss an addition to the Annex building. Mayor Jean said not at this time; that would be for discussion only if the Annex was being considered for renovated office space.

Councilor Varney said he thought the Council should be discussing the proposed design of the Annex building. Mayor Jean said that would depend on whether or not the Community Center was still being considered for office space use.

Councilor Bogan asked if it would be possible to renovate the Community Center in phases over a period of 5-7 years. Mayor Jean said that could be done if that is what is agreed on by the Council.

Councilor Larochelle said the Council should define what they are looking at in terms of building or renovation and expense and what further study will reveal. He agreed with a previous suggestion of moving Council Chambers to the Community Center in order to free up its present space for offices.

City Manager Fitzpatrick said the Council Chambers are used quite frequently. He said that the Council should be looking for more than just office space. What the City Hall lacks is conference room space and the Chambers are used for that purpose almost on a daily basis.

Councilor Collins suggested using Director James Grant's brother for assistance in finding proper utilization of space, calling him a "genius." He complemented Mr. Grant on his acceptance for responsibility of the new software use.

Councilor Walker said that spending money to renovate a building that no one likes and that will in all likelihood need more renovation in 5-10 years is a waste to time and money. He supports keeping everything in the present City Hall campus and urged the City Council to take a stand on what to do going forward.

Councilors Larochelle and Gates discussed what can be afforded and looking at the debt load of the taxpayers.

Mayor Jean asked for a "sense of Council" regarding the Community Center. A "yes" vote would be to proceed with further study of the Community Center space, and a "no" vote would be to not proceed.

The **SENSE OF COUNCIL** was six votes in favor of continuing with the Community Center study, and seven votes against further study.

The discussion regarding the City Hall Annex began with Mayor Jean summarizing what needs to be done with the building. He said that in looking at what the options are for the building that he coming up with a new "footprint" would probably be the best way to go.

Councilor Keans asked how old is the fire station in Gonic. Mayor Jean said [it was built in] 2002. Councilor Keans asked how many times the roof has needed to be repaired. Mayor Jean said a couple of years ago. Councilor Keans asked how many school buildings in the City have had their roofs replaced in the last 20 years. Mayor Jean said almost all of them. Councilor Keans asked how many times the roof has been replaced in the building next door (the City Hall Annex), adding that buildings do not have roofs like that anymore. She argued that too many buildings in town have needed repairs and too much money has been spent on so-called "newer" buildings.

Councilor Walker said that space is needed in the city and he is not in favor of spending money on refurbishing old buildings and supports razing the building and constructing a new one.

Councilor Torr said that he would be in favor of tearing down the building next door to City Hall, but putting another building up in the same area would not fit in the

current footprint. He said putting up a new building elsewhere where the only difference in the cost would be the purchase of the land and more space would be available.

Councilor Hamann said his problem with the Annex is that there is no growth potential with the building. He feels that the City Hall campus is already filled to capacity and the parking lot is too small. It does not offer a good plan for the future.

Councilor Lauterborn remarked that the discussion has been very professional in that there have been so many good ideas given. She would like to see all departments stay in one area and thinks there are such strong arguments for either plan. She said that these type of discussions are productive and should continue to find the right plan in the long run.

Councilor Collins asked if anyone has looked at the former Ben Franklin store site. Mayor Jean said no, but his understanding is that the owners of the property are not ready to sell. City Manager Fitzpatrick said that the Economic Development Department, although not shopping for new properties to purchase, is constantly looking at properties for development and it has been determined that the property is not for sale.

Councilor Collins supports razing the building and construct a new one. He agrees with Councilors Torr and Bogan that it could be done in phases.

Councilor Larochelle said it is important to look to the future with regard to any new plans; that any new construction should be something that is going to last. He mentioned some ideas, including adding a story or two to the Revenue Building or raising the roof of the Annex to add another story.

Councilor Gates said a building can be built that will last a long time; the only thing to make that happen is the quality of the materials used and the quality of the trades people who build it.

Councilor Lauterborn asked if anyone can design a renovation of the building that would actually offer more office space. Mayor Jean asked Mr. Weston if that is possible. Mr. Weston said the synergy of combining all of the three departments in the building is the primary concern. He said it is a tight plan and there does not seem to be a way to have all of the departments on the first floor.

Councilor Varney said that it is obvious that more space is needed, but there are also many other city projects that need to be accomplished. He asked how will all of this be paid for.

Councilor Bogan asked if any consideration had been give to using modular units. Mayor Jean said that the School Department has used them and it is an option. Most councilors commented that they are an unpopular solution.

Councilor Larochelle said that there is vacant space on the third floor of the Police Department that might be an option for the Legal Department. It was an option that was worth considering. City Manager Fitzpatrick agreed that it was an option that he had considered, as well.

Councilor Lauterborn asked if the three departments were at least near each other and not necessarily in the same building.

Councilor Larochelle brought up the issue of storing files, either electronically or paper. More thought is being given to storing files digitally. Councilor Hamann said he read a recent article stating that files that are stored electronically will have to be converted back to paper after 10 years because of the technology. The councilors discussed this briefly.

Mayor Jean asked for a non-binding **SENSE OF COUNCIL** on the issue of what to do with the City Hall Annex building. The votes were as follows:

- Raze the building: 9 in favor
- Maintaining the building: 4 in favor
- Build a new building:
 - on-site: 8 in favor
 - build elsewhere: 5 in favor

Mayor Jean said the discussion will continue at the December Workshop.

Councilor Torr brought up the Public Works building and consideration for what needs to be done there.

Councilor Lauterborn said that the Council has a responsibility to plan for the future. Plans should be lined up and presented for the future of the city.

Councilor Varney added that it would be important to look carefully at the CIP plan.

7. Department Reports

Councilor Larochelle asked what the acronym "RAS" in the Public Works Department report on packet page 158 stands for. Commissioner Nourse said it is "Return Activated Sludge."

8. Other

9. Non-Public Session

Cancelled.

19. Adjournment

Councilor Walker **MOVED** to adjourn the Workshop meeting at 10:00 PM. Councilor Lachapelle seconded the motion. The **MOTION CARRIED** by unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Deputy City Clerk