

**City Council Workshop Meeting  
April 21, 2020  
Meeting Conducted Remotely  
7:03 PM**

**COUNCILORS PRESENT**

Councilor Abbott  
Councilor Belken  
Councilor Bogan  
Councilor Gray  
Councilor Hainey  
Councilor Hamman  
Councilor Hutchinson  
Councilor Lachance  
Councilor Lachapelle  
Councilor Rice  
Councilor Walker  
Deputy Mayor Lauterborn  
Mayor McCarley

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Blaine Cox, City Manager  
Katie Ambrose, Deputy City Manager  
Terence O'Rourke, City Attorney  
Mike Scala, Director of Economic  
Development

**Minutes**

**1. Call to Order**

Mayor McCarley called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM. The preamble, which she read prior to the Public Hearing immediately preceding this meeting, is as follows:

Good Evening, as Chairperson of the City Council, I am declaring that an emergency exists and I am invoking the provisions of RSA 91-A:2, III (b). Federal, state, and local officials have determined that gatherings of 10 or more people pose a substantial risk to our community in its continuing efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19. In concurring with their determination, I also find that this meeting is imperative to the continued operation of City government and services, which are vital to public safety and confidence during this emergency. As such, this meeting will be conducted without a quorum of this body physically present in the same location.

At this time, I also welcome members of the public accessing this meeting remotely. Even though this meeting is being conducted in a unique manner under unusual circumstances, the usual rules of conduct and decorum apply. Any person found to be disrupting this meeting will be asked to cease the disruption. Should the disruptive behavior continue thereafter, that person will be removed from this meeting.

Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by Roll Call vote.

Let's start the meeting by taking a Roll Call attendance. When each member states their name and ward, also please state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-to-Know law.

Cassie Givara, Deputy City Clerk, called the roll. All Councilors were present. In addition, all Councilors indicated that they were alone in the location from which they were connecting remotely.

## **2. Public Input**

Mayor McCarley indicated that there had not been any public comment received for the workshop meeting. It was later discovered that Ray Barnett, resident, had submitted email comments for the Workshop meeting prior to the deadline. These comments are included as an addendum to the workshop packet.

## **3. Communications from the City Manager**

City Manager Blaine Cox reminded all councilors that the meeting is being live streamed both to the city website as well as the government channel and advised all present that they would be visible on screen when they speak.

City Manager Cox also spoke about the ongoing discussions he has been having with department heads in regards to altering work methods and schedules in order to allow staff to work and carry out their jobs while remaining safe and practicing social distancing; including the increased use of technology to allow City staff to work remotely. City Manager Cox stated that he has asked department heads for input on their thoughts on how to transition back to a "normal" work environment once the incremental, 3-phase approach to reopening begins.

## **4. Communications from the Mayor**

Mayor McCarley spoke about the information which had been gathered in

the summary of the survey issued by the Municipal Association. Mayor McCarley said that she had listened in on a meeting of the Governor's Committee in regards to how to utilize potential relief funds coming into the State. She emphasized the large amount of lost revenue suffered on a monthly basis by local businesses and organizations which has a serious fiscal impact for the community. Mayor McCarley stated that when the restrictions start lifting, life is not instantly going back to normal and it would take time for the economy and community to get back on its feet. She thanked residents and city staff on how serious the situation has been taken as a community to ensure everyone remains safe.

## **5. City Manager's Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2021**

City Manager Cox presented his proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2021 to the City Council. He indicated that the budget was built prior to COVID-19 and although the pandemic has caused impacts on expenditures, the primary concern is on revenues. Because of this, there were some significant last minute adjustments to the budget. City Manager Cox stated that the City would continue to monitor the situation as it evolves and make adjustments as needed.

City Manager Cox stated that due to COVID-19 and the budget restrictions it caused, he has excluded 25 of the 30 "Issues and Options" proposals submitted, totaling over \$1,336,259. He also stated that cash CIP requests were reduced significantly.

City Manager Cox outlined the schedule for budget presentations, public hearing and adoption.

Councilor Lachapelle inquired about the Waste Management host fees and the projected reduction in revenues of \$80,000. City Manager Cox indicated that this is based on information from other waste services which have seen reductions on the commercial side of their business. He also stated that in the past, host fees have been impacted upon by down economies.

City Manager Cox indicated that the proposed budget would be available electronically within the next couple days.

## **6. Update: Rochester Business Assistance Microloan Program**

Mike Scala, Director of Economic Development, reported that upon introducing this program two weeks ago they had received 13 applications for the microloans. The Microloan Committee then met to review the applications and their financials, and subsequently approved all of the applications which had been received. The 13 approved applications total of \$59,000. Currently, the applicants are being set up as vendors with the City so they can close on the loans next week.

and receive the checks. Mr. Scala stated that the terms of the loan will be 24-months at 0% interest with the first payments due September 1, 2020.

Councilor Lachance asked if there would be a request for a supplemental appropriation in the amount of \$9,000 because the original fund had been \$50,000. Mr. Scala stated that there would be no request for supplemental appropriation because the Finance Department found additional funds within the Economic Development budget. Councilor Lachance asked if there could there be a need for additional funding and for reopening the microloan program for new applicants. Mr. Scala confirmed that there is an additional \$60,000 in the Economic Development fund if they saw the need for a second round of microloans.

## **7. Department Reports**

Councilor Rice asked if the fire department had a report available as there had not been a report submitted in the past couple months. Chief Klose indicated this could be due to the fact that he is currently in the Emergency Operations Center, but he would ensure that the reports are submitted to Council.

## **8. Other**

Mayor McCarley said she had received a proposal from three Councilors which she had distributed in regard to a housing assistance program. Mayor McCarley stated that the proposal had been reviewed and discussed by City staff, and she recommended one of the Councilors give a summary of the request.

Councilor Hutchinson addressed Council regarding the proposal. He read the proposal summary stating that due to COVID-19, there is a high degree of economic and financial uncertainty. Residents face potential unemployment and in some situations, homelessness. Councilor Hutchinson stated that while there has been an increase in unemployment benefits and federal assistance being offered, this relief is slow to be administered. For those currently being given extensions on their rent, they may be subject to repaying all back fees immediately once the restrictions are lifted.

Councilor Hutchinson went over the details of the proposal; the program would be similar to the business microloan program, but it would be for residents to pay for rent, mortgage, or mobile home lot rent fees. In order to apply, residents would need verification of Rochester domicile. The proposed loan would be at 0% interest with one application per household per month with a household maximum loan of \$2000. He stated that repayments would be proposed to begin as soon as possible for the applicants. Councilor Hutchinson stated that the recommendation is that funding for this loan program come from unassigned fund balance, starting with an allocation of \$500,000. There could be an option for potentially expanding the program in the future depending on how long the pandemic continues.

Councilor Walker asked for clarification if the loan would allow for \$2000 per month for applicants, or \$2000 total. Councilor Walker also asked what would occur if applicants defaulted on the loans. It was clarified that there would be a maximum of \$2000 total. Councilor Hutchinson stated that the terms would likely be similar to the small business microloan and it could be decide if there would be any penalty for non-payment; although he mentioned he would like a provision put into place where an applicants could appeal for extensions if needed.

Councilor Lachapelle stated that he agreed this type of assistance is necessary, but suggested that the proposal be vetted more thoroughly. With the City under a budget freeze, the \$500,000 allocation should be considered carefully.

Mayor McCarley summarized the options for how Council could handle this proposal, depending on the level of support and how expeditiously it needs to be passed. The proposal would need to go to a public hearing due to the funding coming from fund balance, and it may or may not need to go before the Finance Committee. She stated that this program would be an extension of the assistance already offered by the City Welfare Department.

Councilor Lachapelle asked if the proposal was reviewed by the City welfare department and whether or not City welfare was prepared to handle this additional work. Councilor Hutchinson stated that it would be up to Todd Marsh, Director of City Welfare, to determine if it would be feasible for the Welfare Department to take on this additional workload.

Councilor Hainey asked if the proposal was strictly to help with housing costs or if it could be used for utilities as well. Councilor Hutchinson indicated that City Welfare and organizations such as CAP which already offer utilities assistance.

Mayor McCarley stated that Todd Marsh requested time to review and think about the proposal; per Mr. Marsh there has not been an increased request for assistance in Rochester or surrounding areas, although local Welfare anticipates it may be coming in the future.

Councilor Gray questioned the constitutionality of the proposal and suggested it be reviewed by the City Attorney. Councilor Gray also indicate this proposal should go before the Finance Committee due to the size of the allocation being requested. Councilor Hutchinson stated that he understood the need for the proposal to be properly vetted and was not suggesting cutting corners, but emphasized the need for immediate action. Mayor McCarley indicated that Attorney O'Rourke had reviewed the constitutionality of the proposal and found there was no concern.

Councilor Gray reported that there are already measures in place to prevent evictions during Covid-19. He suggested that the City could look into this proposal as an additional appropriation to Welfare instead of a loan, but that it should be reviewed by the Finance Committee first.

Councilor Rice acknowledged that there were measures in place to prevent evictions and prevent utilities from being discontinued for non-payment; but he stated that the concern is that when the restrictions are lifted and residents return to work, the landlords may want all back payments at once. This proposal would assist in these situations.

Councilor Lachance agreed that re-payment issues need to be considered. He stated that landlords are not eager to evict tenants and are well aware of the situation. Councilor Lachance stated that with this proposal, the residents would either be negotiating with their landlords for repayment or dealing with the City for loan repayment; the loan may add another level of indebtedness to those already struggling. Councilor Lachance reported that he had not had any constituents express a need for this type of relief and suggested this may be creating an issue where one doesn't exist.

Councilor Belken stated that if, as Councilor Lachance speculates, this program is not needed, then the money can be returned to the general fund; it is better to have the program in place as a preventative measure and not need it.

Councilor Hainey asked City Manager Cox about the budgetary implications of this proposal. City Manager Cox stated that there are currently cash flow concerns and this would be another liability against cash flow if there proved to be a large demand for this program. There are concerns if non property tax revenues decrease, there will be further struggles with cash.

Councilor Bogan suggested hearing from Todd Marsh about the need for the program and the maintenance required of this program; Mr. Marsh would be the best expert to determine the need and feasibility for this proposal. Councilor Bogan stated that she would be open to scaling down the funding for the program as well as receiving input from the Welfare department.

Mayor McCarley asked that any other comments or suggestions regarding the proposal be submitted to the City Manager and Mr. Marsh for review. The proposal will be brought back on the May 5, 2020 agenda and it will be determined how to move forward at that time.

Councilor Gray stated for the records that his preference would be that the proposal go to the Finance Committee prior to any other action.

## **9. Non-Public/Non-Meeting**

### **9.1 Non-Public Session – Land, RSA 91-A:3, II (d)**

Councilor Lachance **MOVED** to enter into a non-public session at 8:06 PM under RSA 91-A:3, II (d). Councilor Lachapelle seconded the motion. The **MOTION CARRIED** by a unanimous roll call vote with Councilors Rice, Walker, Belken, Bogan, Lachapelle, Hamann, Lauterborn, Hainey, Abbott, Gray, Hutchinson, Lachance and Mayor McCarley all voting in favor.

Councilor Lachance **MOVED** to exit the non-public session at 8:32 PM. Councilor Bogan seconded the motion. The **MOTION CARRIED** by a majority roll call vote with Councilors Hainey, Abbott, Hutchinson, Rice, Lachapelle, Walker, Bogan, Hamann, Belken, Lachance and Mayor McCarley voting in favor. Councilors Lauterborn and Gray were not connected to the meeting at the time of the vote.

Councilor Walker **MOVED** to seal the minutes of the non-public session because disclosure would render the proposed action ineffective. Councilor Bogan seconded the motion. The **MOTION CARRIED** by a unanimous roll call vote with Councilors Hamann, Walker, Hutchinson, Belken, Lachance, Abbott, Gray, Rice, Bogan, Hainey, Lachapelle and Mayor McCarley all voting in favor. Councilor Lauterborn was not connected to the meeting at the time of the vote.

Mayor McCarley mentioned that she and City Manager Cox would be participating in "City Chat" which is a forum in which City issues are discussed and residents can phone in or submit questions and comments. She said that it is another method of reaching out to residents and keeping them up to date on what is going on with the City.

## **10. Adjournment**

Mayor McCarley **ADJOURNED** the meeting at 8:34 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cassie Givara  
Deputy City Clerk