

**City Council Workshop
April 16, 2024
Council Chambers
6:08 PM**

COUNCILORS PRESENT

Councilor Creteau
Councilor de Geofroy
Councilor Fitzpatrick
Councilor Fontneau
Councilor Herman
Councilor Lawrence
Councilor Richardson
Councilor Sullivan
Councilor Walker
Deputy Mayor Hamann
Mayor Callaghan

OTHERS PRESENT

Katie Ambrose, City Manager
Mark Sullivan, Finance Director
Lauren Krans, Director of Recreation
and Arena
Steve Trepanier, Assistant Director of
Recreation and Arena
Tom Kaczynski, Resident
human, Resident
Susan Rice, Resident

COUNCILORS ABSENT

Councilor Karolian
Councilor Turner

Minutes

1. Call to Order

Mayor Callaghan called the City Council Workshop to order at 6:08 PM.

Kelly Walters, City Clerk, took a silent roll call. All Council members were present except for Councilors Karolian and Turner who had been excused.

2. Public Input

Tom Kaczynski, resident, and State Representative of Strafford County/District 5, addressed the City Council regarding the Riverside Rest Home and the proposal to construct a new nursing facility. He spoke about the proposal to convert the existing property into a transitional home for the homeless community, as well as details about the funding involved to establish a new nursing home for Strafford County.

human, resident, spoke about the vacancy of the Ward 6 Ward Clerk position. He spoke about the validity of the administration of the

City's Oath of Office taken at the City's Inauguration. He questioned the election of the Deputy City Clerk.

Susan Rice, resident, addressed the City Council about the decorum and actions of the City Council prior to the start of the meetings and throughout the duration of the meetings. She announced that Rochester Main Street is hosting Rochester Cares Clean Up Day April 20, 2024, which gathers at Central Square (9:00 AM until 12:00 PM).

City Manager Ambrose announced that the City received an online Public Input submission from Nikki Cloud, resident, pertaining to the warming shelter and opioid money.

3. Communications from the City Manager

3.1. City Manager's Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2025

City Manager Ambrose distributed the budget materials and gave a detailed PowerPoint presentation, which can all be found on the City of Rochester's website: [Rochesternh.gov/Business-Finance Department/City Budgets/FY 25](https://rochesternh.gov/Business-Finance/Department/City%20Budgets/FY%2025).

City Manager Ambrose announced that the City would once again hold a Budget Retreat with Department Heads. The event will take place in the City Council Chambers on May 10, 2024. She said the Public Hearing is scheduled for May 21, 2024, with a proposed adoption date of June 4, 2024; however, other meeting dates have been reserved if it becomes necessary to conduct more budget deliberations.

City Manager Ambrose closed by stating that the City of Rochester continues to present budgets which maintains its sound fiscal health without loss of services or significant increase to property taxes. She stated that she is looking forward to the budget deliberations and adoption of the FY 25 budget.

4. Communications from the Mayor

Mayor Callaghan read a report from Fire Chief Dube pertaining to the recent spring storm, which caused the closure of seven roads and a large amount of power outages. He gave details of the volume of incidents and the quick response from emergency personnel as well

as the Department of Public Works and Eversource, who was notably prepared to handle the storm. Mayor Callaghan thanked the first responders who minimized the impact to local residents.

Mayor Callaghan stated that approximately twenty-five public input participants at the March Workshop questioned how the City of Rochester was assisting the homeless community and requested that the City Council support a year-round homeless shelter. Mayor Callaghan stated that the City of Rochester supports efforts to combat homelessness and asked the Finance Director to research any financial obligations directly supporting those without homes as well as any programs designed to assist prevention of homelessness. Mayor Callaghan concluded by identifying over \$3.7 million dollars allocated in recent years that the City has contributed for this effort. He highlighted a few of those efforts: Welfare Assistance Program, Coast Bus contribution, Opioid Prevention Grant Funding, funding of a Community Outreach Facilitator position, contribution to the Willard Warming Center, financial support to various social service agencies, the Easterseals Grant (Elderly Housing Initiative) along with the Gafney Home, and many other affordable housing efforts and employment initiatives in the City. He spoke specifically about the Economic Development Department's efforts supporting such initiatives.

Mayor Callaghan reported that unfortunately, there are many elderly folks on the cusp of becoming homeless and students at Spaulding High School working jobs to support their families.

Mayor Callaghan mentioned that Rochester hosted the first warming shelter in Strafford County. He spoke highly of Todd Marsh, Welfare Director for Rochester, who serves as the President of the State's Welfare Board. Mayor Callaghan said that he himself has been assigned by the Governor to serve on the State's Housing Stability Committee. He said there are efforts to expand affordable housing through legislation. He asserted that this is a complex issue; however, he is proud of the reputation that the City of Rochester has established at the State level in combating homelessness.

5. Update & Discussion: Former Nancy Loud School

City Manager Ambrose gave a brief history of the situation being encountered at the Nancy Loud School and reasons for the City taking custody of the property; a historic structure in disrepair at this time. She described efforts made to secure the building and property for

safety reasons. She reported that the City hosted Listening Sessions to hear from the residents of East Rochester regarding next steps for the building.

City Manager Ambrose stated that the City Council packet materials include a thorough report and key findings of the building/property assessment. She said it was determined that the site/soil could in fact support the existing structure or future development; however, the initial estimate is \$280,000, which only covers costs to secure the building enough to permit engineers to safely enter in order to review and generate quotes for the total project

City Manager Ambrose stated that based on input obtained at the City Listening Session last fall, it was clear that a majority of participants were interested in utilizing the property for recreational purposes as opposed to housing initiatives. She said considering the input from residents within the area and taking into consideration the financial commitment the City would face just to be able to safely enter the property to obtain estimates on restoration, it is unfortunately her recommendation to move forward with demolition of the existing structure. She indicated that there has been a list of recommendations made for potential uses of the property based on resident input.

City Manager Ambrose requested a sense of Council to determine if the City should move forward with the demolition of the building and pursue other options for use of the property. If demolition is approved, once the final cost is determined, the demolition will come back before City council for approval of funding. She detailed considerations which need to be made during the demotion, including lead paint, asbestos, and other hazards as well as potential retention of items and structures contained in the building which may be of historic interest. For the time being, there will be construction fencing placed surrounding the property, although the pool will still be operational during the summer season.

Lauren Krans, Director of Recreation and Arena, and Steve Trepanier, Assistant Director of Recreation and Arena, presented several options for use of the property, the ideology behind these suggestions, and essential recreational components which the department recommends maintaining on the property. Director Krans presented three potential projects which could be established on site; a structure built for use as a satellite Community Center/Senior Center, open space developed as a park, recreation, and community space, or

finally a seasonal structure (open pavilion(s) and play structures). Director Krans requested a sense of Council on which project with which they would like to move forward.

Councilor de Geofroy asked for additional information on the first option presented, a satellite community center, and asked what services and programming could be provided if this was developed. He stated that it is difficult to give a preference on any of the options not knowing the associated costs for each one and how they vary. Director Krans explained that with the development of a permanent structure on the property, the Recreations department would be able to expand their current programming, allow for additional programs in the future, and offer space for meetings, gatherings, and other community activities.

Councilor Lawrence acknowledged that, due to the unsafe conditions of the school, it is difficult to determine the cost of renovating the property, but she asked if there was a rough estimate of potential costs if demolition is were avoided. City Manager Ambrose summarize the work which is known to be needed, including repair of the entire foundation, and explained that it could be \$1 million or potentially multiple millions; however, this cost is impossible to quantify without the initial \$280,000 being spent to make the property safe to enter.

Councilor Sullivan asked if the input received from the public indicated that they did not want a new structure built on the property but rather they specifically wanted the Nancy Loud School renovated and preserved. Mayor Callaghan reported that his understanding of the public input received had been that there was acknowledgement of the unsafe conditions and understanding that the structure would likely be razed. He stated that the consensus seemed to be favoring open space and recreational areas rather than construction of a new structure on the site. Councilor Fontneau agreed that the comments received seemed to favor recreational space if the building was not able to be saved.

Councilor Fontneau spoke about the disparity in costs between public and private sector projects and speculated that if the property were privately owned it would likely be repaired and reutilized at a significantly lower cost. He gave reasoning why he supported the demolition of the property, although he recalled that residents may have had concerns about a landscaped park potentially attracting undesirable activities if there is no supervision or oversight. He

surmised that it was premature to choose a specific project to replace the school, but suggested maintaining the pool, playground, and the future use of the space for Recreation Department use.

Councilor Fitzpatrick stated that he supported the demolition of the building and agreed that the property should be utilized for either passive or active recreational use.

Councilor Hamann stated that it was not a good financial decision to spend nearly \$300,000 just to be able to safely enter the property to determine the actual project costs. He said he would support the development of a community building with a senior center and spoke of the aging population of the City and how such a building could serve them. Councilor Sullivan posited that if a community center were built on this site, it would involve additional costs for staffing, maintenance, and upkeep and stated that there would need to be more information presented on costs of each project to help determine which option should be chosen.

Councilor Lawrence spoke about how engagement in community activities and access to community spaces for youth activities can potentially assist in harm reduction, and in turn can potentially reduce the costs to the City associated with substance misuse.

Councilor Creteau referenced correspondence received at the end of the prior fiscal year from an individual interested in purchasing the property. He asked if there had been any follow up with this party on their interest. City Manager Ambrose stated that she had spoken to this individual and that he was interested in offering his expertise if the City opted to save the property and/or/relocate the building. She explained that if there was opposition to demolition, she would consider reaching out to this individual for guidance. There was further discussion on the potential of the referenced individual's involvement.

Councilor Walker spoke about the potential of a teen center being constructed on the site and speculated that there was adequate space for multiple uses on the property.

Mayor Callaghan acknowledged the historic and sentimental value of the building, but agreed that the costs to save it far outweighed the need and suggested that the building be demolished as soon as possible to avoid any interruptions with the pool operations and to allow the playground to be utilized once again. City Manager Ambrose anticipated quotes for demolition would be received by May

and demolition would be completed fairly quickly to reduce liability issues associated with the unsafe structure. She clarified that due to lead and asbestos within the structure, demolition would be undertaken carefully, especially due to the proximity to the pool and play areas. Mayor Callaghan requested that the approval for demolition be placed on the City Council agenda for May.

6. Department Reports

Councilor de Geofroy inquired about the Fire Department report which indicated that 84% of March shifts were one member short but simultaneously indicated that all positions are currently filled. He inquired why there was a discrepancy in these numbers. Chief Dube responded that the Fire Department has a maximum staffing of 10 and a minimum staffing of 9 on duty; if there is one firefighter out, the department will not seek to fill that position. The staff shortage indicates shifts in which there were firefighters out for vacation, illness, etc. Chief Dube confirmed that there are no current vacancies in the department.

Mayor Callaghan referenced the statistic in the City Clerk's report that there were no marriages within the City of Rochester in March. City Clerk Kelly Walters stated she would review the data.

Councilor Sullivan praised Paul and Dave from the basketball program, as referenced in the "staff kudos" portion of the Recreation report, and spoke about the fantastic work they carry out.

7. Non-public/non-meeting

No discussion.

8. Adjournment

Mayor Callaghan adjourned the City Council Workshop at 7:41 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kelly Walters, CMC
City Clerk