

**City Council Workshop
March 15, 2022
Council Chambers
6:02 PM**

COUNCILORS PRESENT

Councilor Berlin
Councilor Desrochers
Councilor Fontneau
Councilor Gilman
Councilor Gray
Councilor Hainey
Councilor Hamann
Councilor Hunt-Hawkins
Councilor Hutchinson
Councilor Lachapelle
Councilor Rice
Deputy Mayor Lachapelle
Mayor Callaghan

Councilors Excused

Councilor Beaudoin

OTHERS PRESENT

Blaine Cox, City Manager
Katie Ambrose, Deputy City Manager
Terence O'Rourke, City Attorney
Jay Lucas, Sunshine Initiative
Amanda Vachon, Family Justice C
Scott McIntire, Melanson
Police Chief Gary Boudreau
David Stevens, Police Commissioner

Minutes

1. Call to Order

Mayor Callaghan called the City Council Workshop to order at 6:02 PM. Deputy City Clerk Cassie Givara had taken a roll call at the Special Meeting prior to the Workshop; all Councilors were present except for Councilor Beaudoin, who was excused.

2. Public Input

There was no one present to speak at public input.

3. Communications from the City Manager

City Manager Cox announced that the Library had received grant funding in order to conduct a survey to determine how they can better serve the needs

of the community. He advised those interested in participating to visit www.library-survey.com.

City Manager Cox reported that the new Department of Public Works building on Chestnut Hill Road had officially opened and he encouraged the public to visit for any DPW-related needs. He indicated that the Household Hazardous Waste Day will be held on May 21, 2022 at this location.

City Manager Cox announced that the AARP tax aide volunteers are available, by appointment only, at the Rochester Public Library on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings through April 15.

Councilor Rice inquired about the position posting which had just been released in the search for a new Rochester Fire Chief. He asked if there was a plan for interim Chief Plummer and if he would work until his contracted end date, or if there would need to be an extension. City Manager Cox reported that he was meeting with Interim Chief Plummer the following day to discuss this. Councilor Rice requested that Council be kept up to date on this discussion as well as any financial implications contained therein.

Councilor Desrochers asked if there was a way she could assist in promoting the library survey referenced earlier in order to share and make it more accessible to the public. City Manager Cox suggested visiting the library page of the City website for shareable information.

Councilor Gray stated that a constituent had reported to him that, due to short staffing of volunteers, he had been scheduled at the Dover Public Library for the AARP tax assistance. Councilor Gray said that calling 211 is the method to schedule these appointments, but advised residents that they may be scheduled at a location outside of Rochester depending on availability.

4. Communications from the Mayor

Mayor Callaghan read a Proclamation declaring the month of April Sexual Assault Awareness month and urged citizens to actively participate in the scheduled activities and programs sponsored by the Strafford County Family Justice Center to work toward the end of sexual violence in our community.

4.1 Sunshine Initiative: Riverwalk Assistance – Jay Lucas

Mayor Callaghan introduced Jay Lucas, founder of the Sunshine Initiative, and gave background information on his experience and mission here in Rochester.

Mr. Lucas said that the sunshine Initiative is a volunteer organization started in his hometown of Newport in an effort to bring economic revitalization to their downtown area. Following the success of their work in Newport, communities have been reaching out to the Sunshine Initiative for guidance in undertaking the same type of revitalization in other towns. The Sunshine Initiative has chosen three areas of the state where they felt they could assist, one of them being the Rochester Riverwalk. Mr. Lucas stated that he had met with Mayor Callaghan, Riverwalk Chair Dave Walker, and Assistant Director of Economic Development Jenn Marsh to determine the needs of the Riverwalk and a plan moving forward. There will be more formal, regular meetings beginning later in the month. He gave details on areas of focus that the group would be looking into.

Councilor Desrochers thanked both Mr. Lucas and Chair Walker of the Riverwalk for the work they are doing, and she offered her support and assistance as needed. Mr. Lucas acknowledged Dave Walker for being an enthusiastic leader for the Riverwalk and for using his passion to spearhead the efforts to further develop and improve the Riverwalk.

Councilor Lachapelle asked if representatives from the Sunshine Initiative would be attending future Riverwalk Committee meetings. Mr. Lucas confirmed that they would be attending meetings from this time going forward.

4.2 Family Justice Center 10 Year Anniversary – Amanda Vachon

Mayor Callaghan introduced Amanda Vachon, Director of the Strafford County Family Justice Center. Ms. Vachon gave some background on the 10-year history of the Family Justice Center, which is a County-based project bringing together services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, human trafficking, and elder abuse. She clarified that the Family Justice Center, at its core, is a public safety initiative for both the community and law enforcement. She spoke about the correlation between history of domestic violence and the proclivity to inflict violence on law enforcement personnel during response calls. She gave statistics on this and spoke about the risk involved for police men and women. Ms. Vachon spoke about the Center affording a partnership with advocates who provide crisis intervention and can assist in a support role with law enforcement in potentially volatile situations. Ms. Vachon spoke about the role of these partners and the services provided to survivors through both these partners and the Family Justice Center. Ms. Vachon gave details of a civil legal clinic that the center hopes to have up and running within the next month. She reported that legal services are the most requested services at the Family Justice Center.

Ms. Vachon advocated for the creation of more centers such as this and emphasized the importance of the services provided. She reported that the Strafford County Family Justice Center is the only of its kind in the State of NH.

Ms. Vachon said that in celebration of the Center's 10-year anniversary, they will be hosting an open house on April 14 from 9 AM to 4 PM. There may also be a small reception at 6 PM that evening.

Councilor Malone thanked Ms. Vachon and the Family Justice Center for being a welcoming and accessible space for at-risk and homeless youth who do not necessarily feel that they have a place receiving victim's services.

Councilor Desrochers thanked the Family Justice Center for the work they do and acknowledged that this center offers services and an environment unique within the State.

5. FY21 Annual Audit Presentation – Melanson

Scott McIntire, Melanson Partner, presented to Council and gave an overview of the financial audit completed for FY21. He reported that there was no management letter issued for this fiscal year; the books and records were found to be in good working order with accounts and documents reconciled regularly and thoroughly. Due to the state of the accounts, there were no significant audit entries proposed. Mr. McIntire detailed the process taken during the audit of the accounts and walked Council through the independent auditor's report. He summarized some upcoming changes, which the City needs to take into consideration regarding tracking of leases.

Councilor Hainey inquired if the referenced requirement to track leases would include leased equipment such as copiers. Mr. McIntire stated that that type of equipment could be included; along with items such as leased land which could generate revenue.

City Manager Cox thanked Finance Director Ambrose and Deputy Finance Director Sullivan for a job well done and another clean audit.

6. Police Commission Sign-On Bonus Proposal

Police Chief Gary Boudreau addressed Council and stated that this proposal to offer sign-on bonuses to new certified officers has been in discussion for quite some time. One of the primary concerns with offering this bonus was how it would affect the existing staff. He stated he had approached the union, and the union had agreed that there was value in offering such a program in order to attract and recruit certified officers. Chief Boudreau stated that when

a new officer is hired, there is a minimum of 34-weeks of training prior to that officer being able to go on calls solo. When a certified officer is hired, that period is greatly reduced. The Chief spoke of other communities offering similar sign on bonuses ranging from \$5,000 - \$15,000, and acknowledged that although offering these bonuses would not solve the staffing issues in their entirety, it was worthwhile to try it and see how it works. The Police Commission will then assess on a yearly basis to determine whether to continue the program.

Councilor Rice asked if there was a SOP or policy that would be generated prior to these bonuses being issued. Chief Boudreau confirmed that he had worked with the City legal department on this policy and he gave further details on what it entailed. He stated that the proposed \$10,000 per bonus would be paid in one lump sum and there would be a 3-year commitment to Rochester required following the receipt of said bonus. Councilor Rice asked if this proposal was intended for the following year's budget or if it was going to be offered sooner if approved. He also asked where the money would be covered within the police department budget. Chief Boudreau indicated that, if approved, the department would start offering these bonuses immediately and they would be covered through the salary line in the budget; with the short-staffing, there is currently over \$500,000 available in this salary line. Chief Boudreau briefly outlined the open positions currently in the department. Councilor Rice asked if this sign-on bonus proposal would be a budget line item moving forward and suggested that would be preferable. Chief Boudreau stated that the funding would come from the salary line for the foreseeable future, but would be evaluated going forward.

Chief Boudreau clarified that this bonus would be offered for full-time certification; so if an officer arrives in Rochester with a part-time certification and completes the academy, they will not be eligible for the bonus.

Councilor Desrochers asked if there was evidence that this type of sign on bonus program was beneficial to attracting and retaining officers, based on similar programs throughout the State. Chief Boudreau said that some communities have just enacted their programs, others have had them in place for several years with varying success; it is not a solution, but rather another recruitment tool.

There was a brief discussion on the 3-year commitment and the payback requirement that would be necessary if a hire were to leave before that term was completed.

Councilor Berlin asked, given the information from similar programs around the state, if Chief Boudreau felt that \$10,000 would be an adequate sign on bonus or if would be more competitive to offer a higher sign on bonus.

Chief Boudreau said the average seemed to be \$10,000 throughout the State.

Councilor Hainey asked for confirmation that the union was comfortable with this proposal. Chief Boudreau reiterated that he had met with the union presidents who conferred with the union body, and all parties involved were supportive of the proposal.

Councilor Rice asked if there was a provision in place to prevent current employees from quitting and then immediately reapplying in order to receive the bonus. Chief Boudreau stated it would be up to the Police Commission to write the policy and include such a stipulation if they saw fit; however, he stated this scenario was not one he was aware had happened in other communities and it was not an immediate concern.

Mayor Callaghan asked if this bonus would be available to both in-state and out-of-state certified officers. Chief Boudreau confirmed it was for both in and out of state certified officers and summarized the trainings that out-of-state officers would receive relevant to NH State law.

Police Commissioner Stevens stated that offering the bonuses was a sound investment because it would save a great deal of money on training; additionally, it will bring in already experienced officers who are of more immediate benefit to the department.

7. Department Reports

Mayor Callaghan praised the new department report format and thanked the department heads and City staff who compile the reports.

Councilor Rice reported that a constituent had reached out to him in regards to tax deeded properties and when the next auction would take place. The tax office had indicated to the constituent that, due to workload, they had been unable to get to this item. City Manager Cox stated he would look into this matter and report to Council.

Mayor Callaghan asked Assistant Fire Chief Tim Wilder for more information on "intelligent hydrants" as referenced in the department reports. Councilor Hamann clarified that this item had been included in the Department of Public Works Utilities Division report and was a project of the water department. Mayor Callaghan briefly explained how the technology could perform. Assistant Chief Wilder confirmed that the water department has been keeping up to date with latest technology, although from a Fire Department perspective they are more concerned with the proper function of the hydrants they are utilizing.

8. Non-Meeting/Non-Public

Councilor Lachapelle **MOVED** at 7:07 PM to enter into non-public session under RSA 91-1A:3, II (d) land. Councilor Hamann seconded the motion. The **MOTION CARRIED** by a unanimous roll call vote with Councilors Hainey, Gray, Malone, Gilman, Fontneau, Larochelle, Rice, Desrochers, Berlin, Hamann, Lachapelle, and Mayor Callaghan all voting in favor.

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

Councilor Rice **MOVED** to exit non-public session at 7:52 PM. Councilor Lachapelle seconded the motion. The **MOTION CARRIED** by a unanimous voice vote.

Councilor Rice **MOVED** to seal the minutes of the non-public session as disclosure could render the proposed action ineffective. Councilor Lachapelle seconded the motion. The **MOTION CARRIED** by a unanimous roll call vote with Councilors Hamann, Desrochers, Gilman, Malone, Fontneau, Larochelle, Gray, Rice, Berlin, Hainey, Lachapelle, and Mayor Callaghan all voting in favor.

9. Adjournment

Mayor Callaghan **ADJOURNED** the City Council Workshop meeting at 7:53 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cassie Givara
Deputy City Clerk