

**City Council Workshop
November 19, 2019
Council Chambers
7:01 PM**

COUNCILORS PRESENT

Councilor Abbott
Councilor Bogan
Councilor Gates
Councilor Gray
Councilor Hamann
Councilor Hutchinson
Councilor Keans
Councilor Lachapelle
Councilor Lauterborn
Councilor Torr
Councilor Walker
Deputy Mayor Varney
Mayor McCarley

OTHERS PRESENT

Blaine Cox, City Manager
Terence O'Rourke, City Attorney
Tom Kaczynski, Resident

Minutes

1. Call to Order

Mayor McCarley called the City Council Workshop meeting to order at 7:01 PM. Deputy City Clerk Cassie Givara took a silent roll call. All Councilors were present.

2. Public Input

Tom Kaczynski, resident, addressed the Council regarding the City of Rochester's loan to LDI Solutions, 79-E Tax exemptions, and use of the undesignated Fund Balance.

3. Communications from the City Manager

Councilor Gray inquired about a recent communication which had come to the City Manager from the School Department.

City Manager Cox confirmed that he had received communication that the School Board had voted to approve a request for a supplemental appropriation related to unforeseen expenditures for special education.

4. Communications from the Mayor

Mayor McCarley gave a brief overview of the reasoning behind the agenda item related to the warming shelter. The Mayor recounted that she had spoken to Betsey Andrews Parker, CEO of Community Action Partnership, regarding CDBG Funds which are available for funding infrastructure related to a seasonal shelter. Ms. Andrews Parker indicated that although the funding is available, the Dover/Somersworth/Rochester will need to identify a location to use for such a facility. Mayor McCarley clarified the difference between a seasonal shelter and an emergency cold weather shelter. It was stated that this funding would not assist in establishing or funding a shelter for the current winter, but rather the next fiscal year or thereafter.

5. Discussion: Location and funding for Warming Shelter FY 21

Mayor McCarley referenced a shelter in Concord, NH which has been running for the past several years; it is run by a non-profit organization which operates and manages the shelter year-round with assistance in part from \$30,000 from the City of Concord operating budget.

Councilor Walker inquired about the homeless shelter which is set to be opened in Rochester on Washington Street. Mayor McCarley confirmed that the homeless shelter Councilor Walker referenced will be established, but it is not similar to what is being proposed on the agenda. The shelter Ms. Andrews Parker is asking the municipalities to discuss would be a low barrier shelter which is open to all demographics and would allow homeless residents to come and go as needed year round.

Councilor Lauterborn stated she supports the establishment of a shelter, but felt it should be an emergency shelter and that the Cities should involve non-profits who are willing to assist. Councilor Lauterborn referenced a statement made by County Commissioner George Maglaras asserting that the Cities have the authority to waive or loosen zoning and code restrictions in order to open such a temporary shelter.

City Manager Cox stated that Attorney O'Rourke had reported that the City does not have authority from the State to waive zoning or code regulations; however the City has reached out to the County Commissioners to determine if they have counter information.

Councilor Varney asserted that if a shelter is opened in Rochester, it will attract clientele from many neighboring communities and the City will end up footing a large bill with no funding assistance from the surrounding Cities and

towns. Councilor Varney suggested the funding be done on a County level to avoid one municipality covering the cost alone.

Mayor McCarley spoke about the shelter which the County has committed to opening for cold weather emergencies. Mayor McCarley spoke about the lack of criteria or a specific temperature/weather trigger for such a shelter to open during the cold months. She stated that although the County did not open their emergency shelter during the recent cold snap, it does not lessen their commitment to open as needed.

Mayor McCarley spoke to Council about the non-profit organizations in the area which have expressed interest in assisting and those resources which offer space to those needing shelter. She expressed that the City of Rochester may be able to work something out with these non-profits to be able to house homeless residents overnight if and when the need arises.

The Mayor touched on some issues with homelessness and sheltering which need to be addressed when taking this discussion into consideration, such as the difficulty in sheltering single homeless individuals with no dependents and the operational ins and outs of a shelter and who would be responsible for these items.

Councilor Hutchinson inquired if there was a target date for the opening of a local emergency shelter and asked if the Council could discuss what could be done this year for the homeless residents; the temperatures are already very cold and many shelters are at capacity and unable to take in more individuals.

Councilor Gray stated that he did not believe the City Welfare Department has turned any residents away and stated that they are meeting their statutory obligation to care for homeless residents. Councilor Hutchinson clarified that the Welfare Department is not at issue, but rather the local shelters and non-profit organizations which are already full and unable to take in more residents. Councilor Hutchinson stated that the local shelter to which Rochester offers funding is turning those away who do not meet certain criteria.

Mayor McCarley confirmed that City Welfare has reported that it is becoming more and more difficult to shelter those in need, with most area shelters being at capacity and unable to take on any more homeless residents. The concern is that it is still very early in the season before the first snowfall and the situation is only going to worsen.

Councilor Gates asked if there were statistics to support a growing increase in individuals needing shelter or a growing decrease in organizations providing services to these individuals. Councilor Hutchinson indicated that there are relevant statistics in the Master Plan on Homelessness which the Council accepted

in May. Councilor Gates asked if these shelters offers continued support services or if the goal is just to feed and house the residents until the weather improves and they can leave the shelter. Mayor McCarley stated that this answer is dependent on the individual organization offering the services; some shelters have staff in house for ongoing support services and assistance while others may just refer the resident to other organizations which can provide the services needed.

Councilor Gates asked why there is an increasing number of individuals needing shelter and if there was a correlation between homelessness and substance misuse. Councilor Hutchinson stated that there is no single reason for the increase, but rather many factors; mental health issues, substance misuse, and lack of affordable housing, amongst others. Mayor McCarley confirmed that the opioid crisis over the past several years has driven up the numbers of homeless individuals.

Councilor Walker inquired if there was a date proposed for the County shelter to open. Mayor McCarley stated that the shelter is prepared to open at any time an emergency sheltering need is established. At this point, the County has not considered the level of cold to constitute an emergency. Councilor Walker referenced the nighttime temperatures in the teens and expressed dismay that these temperatures had not been considered cold enough to open the County shelter.

Councilor Hutchinson stated that this issue is what happens when the City loses local control over when a shelter should or should not open; the City is at the behest of the County and there is no clear indication of how cold it needs to be to open, how long it needs to be at said temperature, or if there needs to be a particular type of weather event to open; because the Municipality has no control over this criteria. Councilor Hutchinson stated that this is why the Council needs to discuss the potential of opening a local shelter with the available CDBG funding, in order to maintain some control in the decisions behind the shelter. Councilor Gray stated that there are State representatives in Rochester who have control over what goes on at the County level, and suggested that the Council reach out to the State representatives in order to direct that action be taken.

6. Department Reports

Councilor Varney referenced a study in the Economic Development report regarding residential development on the Ridge and asked where this item was headed. City Manager Cox stated he would check in with Planning Department staff to determine where this item is headed and when it would come back to Council.

Councilor Varney directed Council to an item in the Department of Public Works report regarding the Granite Ridge Development – Phase 2 and a revised traffic impact analysis. Councilor Varney stated that he hoped the analysis included the 450+ residential units which had been outlined in consultant Bruce Mayberry's report. Councilor Varney also emphasized funding be in place to improve Route 11 prior to these units being built.

7. Other

Mayor McCarley gave a brief update on the Mayoral Ad Hoc Committee regarding Chapter 275 of the City Ordinances for the Downtown Commercial District. Mayor McCarley said the meetings had been productive and they had identified some new wording which may be beneficial in moving forward with the plan. The changes will be coming back to Council in the upcoming months for a possible zoning amendment.

Councilor Gray inquired about the swearing in of the school board write-in candidates now that the election results have been certified. Mayor McCarley stated that she had spoken to the City Attorney and the School Board Chair about this matter earlier and it was determined that although the write-in candidates are able to be seated, there is no requirement to do so by Charter. The School Board's intention was to leave the Ward 3 seat open for the remainder of the year to recognize Julie Brown's commitment to the Board and her length of service. Councilor Gray agreed that leaving the seat vacant to recognize Ms. Brown was a nice gesture, yet it also means that the citizens of ward 3 are underrepresented on the School Board. He suggested that the Council follow the direction of the Charter and swear in the write-in candidate as soon as possible.

8. Non-Public/Non-Meeting

No non-public meeting.

9. Adjournment

Councilor Lachapelle **MOVED** to **ADJOURN** the City Council Workshop at 7:43 PM. Councilor Walker seconded the motion. The **MOTION CARRIED** by a unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cassie Givara
Deputy City Clerk