

JOHNSTOWN CITY COUNCIL
WORKSHOP MINUTES
Wednesday, August 5, 2020

City Council met in a stated session for the general transaction of business. Mayor Frank Janakovic called the Workshop to order at 5:02 p.m.

Mr. Vitovich offered the invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The following members of Council were present:

Mr. Arnone, Mr. Capriotti, Mayor Janakovic, (via videoconference), Reverend King, Mrs. Mock, Mr. Vitovich (6).

Mr. Britt was absent due to medical reasons.

Present in person were John Trant, Interim City Manager; Robert Ritter, Finance Director; and John Dubnansky, Economic Development Director

Present via videoconference were Deborah Grass, Act 47 Coordinator; Winnie Branton, PA Housing Alliance; Joseph Senita, Tetra Tech, EPA Brownfield Program; Ethan Imhoff, AICP, Executive Director, Cambria County Planning Commission; Michael Foreman; Kathy Clark; and Elizabeth Benjamin, Esquire, City Solicitor.

Present via telephone was Renee Daly, Executive Director, Cambria County Redevelopment Authority

Deborah Grass, Act 47 Coordinator, commended the City for "coming a long way" and stated she was present to provide an update with regard to the City's Exit Plan. She introduced Winnie Branton of PA Housing Alliance, Joseph Senita from Tetra Tech; Ethan Imhoff, AICP, Executive Director, Cambria County Planning Commission; Kathy Clark, part of the Act 47 team; and Michael Foreman.

Ms. Grass addressed several priority items with regard to the Exit Plan, which was adopted by Council November 1, 2019, including implementation of the Exit Plan, the management team, community development, addressing some of the language in the City Charter and revenue generation.

Ms. Grass divided community development into three categories, including prevention, elimination of blight, repurposing of land.

Winnie Brant, PA Housing Alliance, provided an overview of the community development plan strategies. She shared some sample ordinances and a model ordinance, as well as discussed action plans in place and activities underway to implement them.

Ms. Brant discussed land banks. She suggested a plan be in place that references the type of property in inventory. She noted a strong code enforcement program would be necessary for land banks to be effective.

She noted Mr. Trant was working on reintroducing an ordinance with regard to the rental property registration program, which she suggested residents be educated on in 2021 after COVID. Ms. Brant indicated a number of vacant structures would need to be moved back into occupied status going forward. She discussed funding programs available that can be applied for as well as legal processes that Council can pursue.

Ms. Brant suggested the City should first prioritize properties to be demolished and add code enforcement employees to make that department strong, explore and educate on rental property registration programs, enact an ordinance regarding third party providers for vacant structures, and explore the land bank.

There was discussion regarding the purchase of properties scheduled to be demolished. It was noted that letters had been sent to purchasers with regard to what their redevelopment plans are, and after 20 days from the tax sale, the sale can be stopped to prevent what happened in the past. Reverend King suggested there should be a way to verify the identity of the purchaser of these properties. Ms. Brant noted a copy of the driver's license could be taken for contact information. If a corporation were involved, the authorization of an agent to purchase on its behalf would be required. Workshop participants had questions and comments.

Ms. Grass focused the discussion on blight elimination. Mr. Dubnansky offered explanation on how decisions are made and how information is collected with regard to blight. He noted first cleaning up corridors in and out of the City involving Route 56, Route 403, Franklin and Ohio Streets, Route 271 followed by neighborhood cleanup. He suggested that a solid database of blighted structures in the City would first need to be compiled. Mr. Dubnansky discussed utilizing and accessing a GIS online mapping system and explained what that entailed.

Ms. Grass touched on sharing costs of maintaining vacant lots.

Joseph Senita, Tetra Tech, EPA Brownfield Program, stated the current brownfield program has been working since 2017 and the current grant would expire September 30, 2020. He indicated the City was awarded an EPA Coalition Grant for \$600,000, where the City is primary recipient partnering with JRA and the Cambria County Redevelopment Authority. Mr. Senita discussed how

blight elimination and brownfield revitalization go together hand in hand and talked about activities within the context of the grant and suggested continued development of the GIS based mapping and information system.

He referred to tools that had been developed under the brownfield program, including public engagement and marketing as well as a system private to the City. Mr. Senita suggested another use for the EPA grant would be for market analysis.

Renee Daly, Executive Director, Cambria County Redevelopment Authority, commented that identifying project areas and areas for development were important factors for funding.

Ethan Imhoff, AICP, Executive Director, Cambria County Planning Commission, talked about housing options that the City should consider to draw people back to the area. He suggested the use of a development consultant to pull together agreements and financing packages moving forward. Mr. Imhoff noted there has been a good bit of interest expressed.

Mr. Dubnansky indicated an investor has purchased a large building in downtown, which he will make into housing units. He noted a nondisclosure agreement was signed with regard to a project at the end of Main Street.

Ms. Grass suggested funding additions to next year's budget. She indicated the City collected 11 percent more revenue in 2020 than 2019. EIT collections were down a little. She noted weakening in some areas, which will need monitored.

Kathy Clark discussed updating the Home Rule Charter and indicated a committee was formed to discuss potential changes or amendments that might need to be made.

The changes discussed include Council enacting by resolution or motion rather than ordinance to move matters along more quickly. Eliminating the public hearing requirement except in certain situations where required by state law. Changes to the residency requirement and contract for the City Manager, which is still in open discussion. Eliminating the City Clerk position. Simplifying language in the Administrative Code to supplement the budget. Identifying signatories for check signing. Updating requirements for Labor and Industry regarding contract thresholds. There was also discussion regarding referendums. It was read into the record that amending the Home Rule charter has to be no less than the 13th Tuesday before the upcoming election that the election office has to have signed the ordinances that Council

has adopted authorizing the questions placed on the ballot for the upcoming election.

Ms. Grass indicated that Act 23 of 2020 passed by the General Assembly allows for an emergency exit plan of up to 18 months. Mr. Foreman discussed procedures necessary if Council would decide to do the 18-month extension, which would take the formal exit to April of 2023. He noted that per Act 47, Section 123 (c)(2) the local services tax along with the earned income tax continues in place until the termination date of the plan adopted by Council. The group discussed the pros and cons of continuing the extension.

Ms. Grass reminded members that the auditors would be present next week.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Workshop concluded at 6:56 p.m.