

January 22, 2020

Strategic Planning & Partnerships Commission

Proceedings by Authority

State of New York,
City of Jamestown ss.:
Police Training Room

The regular meeting of the Strategic Planning & Partnerships Commission of the City of Jamestown, New York was held on Wednesday January 22, 2020 at 8:30 A.M in the Mayor's Conference Room, City Hall.

Members Present: Mayor Eddie Sundquist, Kevin Sixbey, Andrea Magnuson, Mike Haines

Others Present: Crystal Surdyk, Pete Miraglia, County Executive P.J. Wendel, Becky Robbins

Mayor Sundquist called the meeting to order in Chairman Rabb's absence.

Mayor Sundquist: Fantastic. Good morning everyone, thank you for being here. This is my first Strategic Planning and Partnerships Commission meeting and I was invited to come. So, I'm here, we do want to get an update on the Imagine Jamestown program that's been going on and then I would just like to talk a bit briefly about kind of a vision for Strategic Planning and Partnerships Commission going forward. I have gotten mixed results and mixed reactions on this group so I want to try to give it a bit more vision on top of the Imagine Jamestown. So, I'd love to have Crystal give us an update if you could on kind of what's been going on with the Imagine Jamestown Program.

Imagine Jamestown: Identifying and recruiting sponsors as well as an update from the Imagine Jamestown Committee

Ms. Surdyk: So, Kevin is on our committee as well. This past weekend, we participated in the Doors Open Jamestown and we were set up at the Chamber of Commerce. The weather wasn't very cooperative, we did have a couple people come by specifically for that. A few other people that were interested just because they were passing through. But, the turnout was not great. The first event, I think we talked a little bit about the first event at the last commission meeting. We had a pretty good turnout, twenty-seven or so people. We've had some ongoing interaction with those who have shown interest. We are still trying to raise awareness and right now, I think, what would really give it the kick that it needs or the boost that it needs is for us to be able to announce prizes. But, right now our options for prizes, outside of the, what I think is extremely valuable, the commission's intention to continue to work with whoever the overall winner of the competition is to further their ideas, to further develop their project. I think that if we could make a really great announcement that we've gotten some sponsorships and we have some prize money, that would help us a great deal. I know we put that out to the commission a few different times, so far, no takers. We do have, we did get a donation from La Bella Associates, \$250.00. That came in and JURA is handling the passthrough part of that. Unfortunately, Greg and Marie and Steve are all absent and I'm not actually a real member

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of the commission, so I humbly ask you to consider what you can do, take back to your organizations, and if there's any potential sponsorship out there, we really could use something a little bit more behind the competition to give us that kind of added motivation for people to enter. Because it does take a lot of time, it does take a lot of energy to put something, like what we're asking, together, to really think through the ideas that we're looking for. We want to make sure that people feel like it's a valuable use of their time and a valuable way to participate and that there's kind of a carrot at the end. I don't know if there's anything more, any questions?

Mayor Sundquist: What would you envision the prize levels to be? We're not looking at hundreds of thousands of dollars or anything?

Ms. Surdyk: No, we had talked, and Kevin you can fill in, I think we had... we haven't set limits for ourselves because we are starting from nothing. We would love to be able to do like a \$1,000 top prize if it could be more, that would be great, but if we're trying to at least get somewhere, \$1,000 would be a good level for us to start with and then incrementally from there. So, there's the overall prize winner, which will win the top prize out of all the categories. And then there's three categories, so there's the professional category, there is the student category and then there's subcategories within that student category so there's the college level, high school and then middle school, grades 5-8 and then the other category is, we just refer to it as other, so it would be a citizen, sort of a citizen participation category. Each of those, if each category is a \$500 prize or a \$250 prize, just something, you know, this is the first year so I think its reasonable to expect prize levels are not crazy, but if we could do something, you know professionals, we do actually have some professionals who are likely going to enter. They will probably enter with or without a cash prize, but to be able to I think, garner that interest, to have something that is kind of worth putting in all that extra time would be great.

Mr. Sixbey: I have nothing to add to that, other than to say that I agree. At this point in the process, without being able to announce what the prizes are, I think it creates some hesitancy on some people. It would push a little bit more motivation.

Ms. Magnuson: I have an idea that I'll talk to you about.

Mayor Sundquist: How bad does USI want to be in the Southern Tier? Anything else on it?

Ms. Surdyk: Does anybody have any questions about it? I know we've talked about it a number of times so I don't want to overdo it.

Mr. Miraglai??: When is the event for it?

Ms. Surdyk: February 13th, let me just double check that. That is, we have to confirm but I believe it is going to be at St. Luke's. Yes, February 13th, 5:30 – 7:30, it will be again, another mentor workshop, so, this past weekend's event, the mentors that we had had chosen to participate, because we decided to do it sort of last minute, we didn't ask them to add an additional day to their commitment. So, they all committed to two events and then of course the

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final event which will be the award celebration. So, this will be their second event that they will participate in and there will be opportunity for potential entrants to have some one on one conversation and give some guidance on where they are and where they see their design or their idea going.

Ms. Robbins: When is the deadline? When does it wrap up?

Ms. Surdyk: February 1 is the deadline for registration. So, we are asking everyone to pre-register with their intention that they plan to submit. That way we can kind of use the beginning of February to follow up with them and make sure they don't have any questions and not lose those people that are planning to enter. February 7 is the deadline for questions. April 17th is the submission deadline. And then we haven't selected a date in May yet for the awards, but that will happen probably mid May. So, April 17 is the big day as far as getting submissions in. If we need to extend the registration deadline that's something we can do very easily if we feel like we don't have enough. We can make a big announcement, and say hey, we're going to give you one more week to register.

Mayor Sundquist: What are the registrations so far?

Ms. Surdyk: There is a handful, I don't know the names off the top of my head. I know one particular person who has indicated, and then I've had conversations with some other people but they haven't actually gone to the website to register yet. Ideally, our goal would be if we could have twenty or thirty, that would be amazing. We did do a big push last week, we had 5,000 flyers printed. They were targeted, the messaging was targeted at the school kids, the high school and the middle school so those all went to the schools to be distributed and sent home with all the kids. Now, if a quarter of them actually look at the flyer before they shove it in their backpack, maybe we will get a good turnout from that. Notices and that communication all went out to the teachers as well. We're hoping to drum up some interest from classes that might enter together or something.

Mayor Sundquist: Great, anything else from Imagine Jamestown?

Mr. Miraglia: Your focus is still on empty lots?

Ms. Surdyk: Well, it's not just empty lots. We focus on a little bit on infill, as far as those empty lots might go but also just neighborhood and neighborhood level, what, when looking at the context of the neighborhood, what kinds of things make for a healthy neighborhood. What kinds of things do you see this neighborhood might need? So, it could be specifically an empty lot but it could be even a redevelopment of an existing building or something if someone has a specific site in mind.

Mr. Sixbey: It could be addressing the food desert issues, it could be addressing activities, it could be addressing networking the neighbors together.

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Mr. Miraglia: We'd like to do more with our Renaissance Block Challenge, try to go back to past participants and see where they're at with the neighborhood cohesion and stuff so we can kind of talk about that too. I don't know if that can tie in at all.

Mr. Sixbey: Maybe even while you're doing that if they want to maybe even promote this opportunity even dig further into the cohesion of the neighborhoods.

Ms. Surdyk: That'd be a good group of people to share this with and maybe even come up with a neighborhood entry.

Mayor Sundquist: Well that'd be interesting.

Ms. Surdyk: That would be great. I did bring sponsorship packets if anyone would like to take one.

Mr. Miraglia: I'll talk to you about that, I'll take one.

Ms. Surdyk: With the sponsorships, the information is in the packet, but we'll promote on the website, on all of our marketing materials, all of that stuff so there is some at least some promotion that will go along with it to thank all of our donors.

Mr. Sixbey: Our Rotary Club vision committee is meeting in two weeks and this is on the agenda.

Mayor Sundquist Goals

Mayor Sundquist: Great, thank you so much for that. There are just two things I wanted to point out for this commission and I'll follow up with an email too. I think Imagine Jamestown is a great thing that came from this commission but this city is also facing a lot of different challenges and we want to try to use the Strategic Planning and Partnerships Commission to help us work through some of those challenges to hopefully move us in a more positive direction. One of the things that we've been discussing, especially with our departments, just kind of an internal thing, is a better way for our city departments to share data amongst each other. One of the things that are looking at, we've looked to see what other cities are doing is, they use a city wide data management software, data management program to start to get more statistics, make those statistics open to the public, but also to help departments share data, share information, on houses, events, things that are going on in the city. So, one of the things that I'm trying to bring to the commission is to ask you guys to help us, help our departments partner with you to find kind of the right program, the right software and the right methodology to help us start to share data amongst city departments. Believe it or not, you would think that we are all connected, we are not. In fact, many departments still use all paper. And so we are looking to, I'm not saying its good or bad because some do have to use it. But we are looking for ways to make it easier to share information. So, in an era where we could facilitate that, we would like the commission to start to help us look for and look to see what other cities are doing to better data sharing within city government and other entities. There is a potential we could partner with the county for data

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sharing, they do a lot already with police. We've talked about some things as simple as being able to put computers in our fire trucks with a map of all the fire hydrants in the city, so when they get a call, they can easily see where the nearest fire hydrants are on their in-vehicle tablet. We don't have that currently. So, things like that would make our kind of sharing between departments so much easier and improve the services that we offer our residents. So, I'm kind of asking you guys to help us in that process, to start to look to see what some other cities are doing. If you've got contacts or you maybe can see something that we can do better in terms of sharing please let us know.

Mr. Miraglia: If I may, there's been a lot of discussion about that with our Healthy Housing Task Force which is led by the county. Some of the issues we kind of got in, and we've actually had talks. We had one meeting with BPU folks there, city folks there. The idea of better communication between those different departments like with the County Health Department and you run into situations. We have a lot of people on the ground, we have firemen, policemen, seeing some of the issues that we have in town. Health Department inspectors, all that. If we could get a common database, common communications between everybody, I think we could see some big improvements here.

Mayor Sundquist: Most cities look towards integrating it with their GIS mapping so that you can do overlays. I know the BPU has done a lot in this regard. We've talked about integrating even with BPU for some of that mapping capabilities. We've talked about potentially; can we integrate with the county's GIS service. Those are the types of things we're looking to do. It doesn't necessarily need to be county wide, although that would be fantastic, even as the city, are there ways we can start to see hot spots, trends, can we be more proactive than reactive to certain housing events, things like that.

Mr. Miraglia: So, what you're asking from us is to see if we know of any other system that would work for Jamestown? Looking at other towns.

Mayor Sundquist: Yes, you guys have a lot of other contacts out there and there are a lot of different systems and opportunities out there that will better serve our residents. We want to just try to get some information on that and see what you think. This could be an opportunity for us to partner with foundations and other entities to help share some of that data and more importantly, a large goal of mine is to make a lot of that data available. So, the number of requests that we get for certain pick ups or the number of times we are visiting a home for certain reasons. The number of phone calls we get on certain things. That's all data that helps our foundations and community partners better understand what's going on in the city. And so as a city we also want to make that public. It's a way for us to do that. The second big challenge that I would like to task you guys with to start to think about is, taxation in the city. I know we all hate this topic, right? One of the biggest things that we are going to face as a city is a giant shortfall in our budget in the next year or two. With the pending litigation for our police and fire, we are looking at a potential to wipe out our entire contingency fund in the next year or two. That is obviously a huge issue because we're not bringing in much tax revenue and its been flat, obviously, because we're at our tax limit. But we haven't looked at other ways that we could tax here in the city and we haven't looked to see necessarily what other cities are doing. There are certain restrictions on what we can and can't do... but no one said we couldn't get creative in the

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way we do it. I'll give you an example. Allentown and Harrisburg, although not in the state of New York had a problem with vacant lots. What they decided to do, is change their tax rates to charge more for vacant lots and less for developed lots. So, what they found was developers started coming in, buying vacant lots and developing on those lots, because the tax rate was more favorable to developed properties. Also, the more renovations that people put in, the more that they would have a favorable tax rate for it. I'm not saying it would necessarily work but it's something we should start to look into and I would love to partner with this commission to help us look into some of those things. I'll give you another example, the city of Rochester, they have a unique situation where they have actually pulled from their tax bills things like snowplowing, road repair and sidewalk repair. Those are a separate user fee; they are not on their tax bills. If it's a user fee in the state of New York, that is charged to every property, and the way they do it in Rochester is that they charge it based on the amount of frontage you have, the amount of curb that's touching the road or sidewalk. So, it's a uniform fee that every property is charged, whether you're tax exempt or nonexempt. I not saying we should go that route; I'm just saying these are other options we should start to look at to see are there ways that we can reassess what we have in the city and get creative with some of our funding.

One of our biggest challenges is that almost 40% of the properties in the city are tax exempt. That is statistically very high for cities in the state of New York. So, I'd love for you guys to start to think about that, help us try to come up with some ideas; our departments have been looking at different options as well but I think this is the perfect group to help us come up with some new, fresh ideas that we could start to look at that and see if it would work here. I'm very much of the mindset that we should try things, it may not work, but you know what, we have to try, because there's really nowhere else we can go from here. We're just under our property tax cap and we have a lot of issues that we need to resolve in the next year or two. So, the more we can partner with this group, the more we can tap the incredible knowledge that we have here, the better it is for the city. So, think about that too. Those are heavy things, sorry, I know... I give you all coffee we talk about Imagine Jamestown, and I'm like "let's talk about taxes."

Mr. Miraglia: I'd say, that's a good start. To me its what's crippled this town. We don't see, we've talked a lot about this in some of our Housing Committee meetings as well. You always hear, Jamestown's got the oldest housing stock in the country, that kind of thing. But there's East Coast cities that have their residences built long before ours. The problem is, we just have not replaced the old housing stock with new housing to bring that average down. When you look at the combined property tax rate here, you'd be crazy to build a new house. Just a modest house is \$200,000 in construction with the tax rate is like \$53 a thousand, you've got \$10,000 in property taxes. It's really driving a whole issue.

Mayor Sundquist: It is, and that's why some cities have kind of changed their tax models. Looking at Rochester as well, they do a very interesting thing where they tax more on commercial property and less on residential property, is part of it. Here we do, Jim correct me if I'm wrong, we do a uniform tax on all properties here. Nothing prevents us from changing that and we can easily make adjustments to encourage more development and discourage more vacant lots here in the city.

Mr. Miraglia: You tax what you don't want and lessen the tax burden on what you want.

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Mayor Sundquist: That's correct, yes.

Mr. Sixbey: And that's kind of going where my thought is. We can get creative in how we generate new revenue. But I think part of the city's issue is that the valuation of homes continues to deteriorate; or can't be increased because we're not there. The market doesn't show that or anything. How do we change that model, how do we start to increase property values? When we do talk about East Coast cities with houses that were built in 16 whatever or 17 whatever a lot those houses been fully renovated or the valuations are substantial which allows you to bring your rate down while still collecting the same amount of revenue. And I think, to me that's a long-term goal but I think it's a goal we need to start on. Increase property valuations, frankly, what I pay in taxes in my home on the northside here, I don't mind the dollar amount, I mind the rate. If my house was valued at a higher level, that's a great number to pay. On the lake they pay a lower property rate but they have huge property values. We can't move the lake.

Mr. Miraglia: The other thing, too that we were talking about yesterday again we brought it up, about getting information out to the public, about if you paint your house it's not going to raise your assessment. They try to get the properties renovated to a point, I mean once they building on additions and stuff, well, yeah. So, again some of this will in time, publicity, getting the information out to the public

Mayor Sundquist: We could easily do that. The other recommendation from this commission might be, we hold off on upping those assessments, right? There's nothing says that we have to automatically up your assessment right away on your property tax. It's all a matter of just our internal process. The way we do it now, is we up it a little bit in order to anticipate the larger assessment the next tax year, but we could easily hold that off on that a year or two if you're doing a very significant improvement it could be amortized over ten years, five or ten years under New York State law. But, some of those are just internal mechanisms that we can adjust to encourage more people to make repairs to their homes.

Ms. Surdyk: I think it is, just to add to all of that, in that messaging or in that, there's an education piece and I think we've got to figure out the best way to get that out. But we're talking about making repairs, like a roof or siding or windows. Those are maintenance kinds of things so... I actually went to the Real Estate Investors Association meeting last night and one of the landlords said, the interiors of all of his units are pristine. He puts all of his money and effort into the inside because that's what his tenants want. They don't care so much about the outside because they come home, they don't maintain it, its not theirs. He would rather put the money on the inside because then the outside, its not raising his tax bill. But that's so wrong. Its an education for landlords and owner occupied and its just something that, I think, opening that conversation up better, having conversation even. I don't know if it's over a period of time, like how do we do that? We can put together pretty brochures and flyers and whatever and hand them out but I think there needs to be almost a campaign to do that.

Mayor Sundquist: One of the things we've talked about right before the last tax bill cycle is potentially putting in an insert in tax bills to talk about potential repairs and renovations to the home and what would be... We also talked about describing junk and debris, because that's a

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common code violation that we get. So just educating residents through those tax bills but we could easily do it as a separate mailing campaign to all households.

Mr. Sixbey: I think in the tax bill makes sense but then when you factor in the number of landlord units we have, people who are living there and leaving that junk out, aren't going to be getting that message. I'm not just saying that it's all tenants. There are homeowners that are just as guilty as those bad habits.

Mayor Sundquist: But the landlords don't even understand the definition of junk and debris which is becoming an issue.

Ms. Surdyk: Right, or who's responsible. That was a big point of contention.

Mr. Sixbey: So doing it both ways makes the most sense. The other thing, you talked about not giving an assessment when somebody does an improvement. Like you said, tax that which you don't like, incentivize what you do. Somebody does a painting project, somebody does improvement, maybe there's a way for them to apply for a discount on their taxes that year. A neighborhood betterment discount. We have a property because of where it's situated on the hill and it's a tall house, they have to bring in a lift to get up there and paint. We have a \$10,000 painting quote for a simple house. \$10,000 is a lot of money and that's the reason some houses aren't getting painted. But you know, hey, if I get \$1,000 off my tax bill next year maybe I'm more likely to do it.

Mr. Miraglia: One thing we've had some success with, like the Renaissance Block Challenge is that you can get a string of houses or a neighborhood involved, you can get discounts from the contractors. We've been successful with that with like driveway aprons and stuff. They'll start reducing the cost when they can do a whole bunch at once. Maybe we can do something like that with a painting program.

Mayor Sundquist: So that's the task for the Strategic Planning and Partnerships Commission. I wanted to make sure this group has kind of a bit of a focus going forward for this year. I will send out an email out to all of the other ones that were not able to make it here today as well. The more we can start to think about those two things, kind of citywide or countywide data sharing and taxation, and different methods to, as you said, tax the things we don't want and alleviate the things we do. But that's absolutely right, that's the way we need to start thinking to move the city forward and that's what good cities have started to do and I think we are a good city, we've got to just move it forward a bit.

Mr. Sixbey: Should the commission in addition to looking at taxation questions, also look at more shared services or more ways to lean up the city budget? You're working pretty lean.

Mayor Sundquist: Yep, we're working pretty lean as it is, but I think that's definitely part of it. We do have a transition team that has also been looking at some opportunity there for shared services. So, I think once that transition team report comes out, I think this commission would be great to start to look at some of those ideas and say, how do we then implement them? And

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so, I think it would be, I think shared services is part of that. I know there's a countywide effort for additional shared services. We've just come back and partnered with the supervisors and mayor's conference for the county and so we are engaging heavily in potentially shared services.

County Executive Wendel: There was a conversation last night after the budget review from the governor that, county executives had a conference and that's one of the things that we're looking at too. It's a state-wide initiative for shared services. There's a lot of things, the potential's there, without a doubt it's going to be a cost savings across the board. Unfortunately, some of the deeper things are a little bit more grave, its just going to take some... but just like Crystal said, a lot of everything we're looking at - my personal belief has always been on the roll out. If your roll out is successful you all have the same, not saying it doesn't happen, but if everyone's on the same page, speaking the same language and sending the same message, the roll out is simple. You have to, my goal has always been you get the dissenters and kind of more or less reel them in first. What's going on and why do you not like it? Let's share this because all it takes is one or two of those and that message gets tainted and I've said before it takes an ounce of poison to taint the lake and it takes a million gallons to cure it. It's the same with any initiative you start. If you have one or two naysayers they get out with the right voice and the right message, they start pounding the pavement, it takes so much dialog to try to correct that so anytime, we're looking at it, I've talked to my department heads. Whenever you want to roll something out, lets plan it, lets be strategic, lets look at this so that when it comes out, its not going to be foolproof, but you want to it be pretty simple, easy talking points and something anyone can grasp because, as you guys know, any change is challenging, especially shared services, or how its deemed and viewed by others, you're giving up power. It's not that, it's just, that's just how some people see it. It's I have the power to do this, yeah but, you have the power to help, that's really what it is, that's how I view it, so. We're working, it's a big initiative I was excited, as the mayor can tell you, I first started going to the Mayors and Supervisors Conference when I was first elected thirteen years ago and about ten or twelve people, and there was a packed house, the Sea Zurh House, I think the Fire Chief would have come in and violated - there was too many people in the room. Anyway, it just, its good to see that because that was excitement for me that people want to work and I think town supervisors and mayors have all realized that this is, its not any one community's problem, its everybody, we're in a position now in New York State, Western New York especially, sharing those services are going to be it shown to be productive. We have seen reduction in cost, we have seen a lot more expedited service or a little bit more complementary services, I think we're steps in the right direction. We just need to keep it going moving forward. Unfortunately, change takes time.

Mayor Sundquist: It does indeed. Anything else? I've tasked you with a lot.

Mr. Miraglia: These are important issues. I appreciate you having this commission look at that.

Mayor Sundquist: Yes, and I appreciate you all being here and being part of that. So, let's keep the conversation going. Thank you guys I appreciate you all being here and being a part of this.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

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Jennifer R. Williams, City Clerk/Treasurer