

City of New Castle Delaware
Special City Council Meeting
1 Municipal
Tuesday, September 29, 2022
6:00 p.m.

Call to Order: 6:00PM

Roll Call

Present: Council President Michael M. Platt
Councilperson Valarie W. Leary
Councilperson Suzanne M. Souder
Councilperson Joseph F. Day, III
Councilperson Russell P. Smith

Also present: William J. Barthel, City Administrator
Daniel R. Losco, Esquire, City Solicitor
Janet E. Carlin, City Treasurer

Council President Platt called the September 29, 2022, Special City Council meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The assembly stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Council Discussion Concerning Municipal Public Service Center.

City Administrator Barthel gave a presentation explaining the background of the City's exploration of a Municipal Public Service Center from 2019 to the present.

Two security evaluations were performed, one by the New Castle Police Department and one by PMA, a risk services group. Both evaluations were presented to Council in Executive Session.

Why a Municipal Center

- Safety – The City is behind with antiquated buildings, equipment and safety.
- Workforce – The City wants to provide a safe, modern, healthy work environment to attract and retain high-quality employees.
- Customer Experience – The City wants to provide the best, safest customer experience to residents.

Work Safety

- The OSHA Handbook states, and the City Solicitor concurred, that employers have the responsibility to provide a safe and healthful workplace; and this falls on City Council to ensure that all employees are working in a safe environment.
- Mr. Barthel stated that there is a disturbing trend in violence, and noted five different instances where there was a shooting at a Municipal or State complex resulting in death and/or injury.

Current Facilities

- 220 Delaware Street – At the request of Council, the building was appraised in September 2021 at \$400,000. The building was constructed circa 1930 and used as a Bank until 1981. Since 1982 the building has been used as a City building. Mr. Barthel explained the layout of the building, noting that the one bathroom is not ADA compliant and parking is an issue.
- MSC Offices – The building was constructed in 1978 and has been used as MSC Offices since that time. Mr. Barthel explained the layout of the MSC Offices, noting that there are two bathrooms and neither is ADA compliant; and that Parking is an issue.
- Council Chambers – Currently City Council meets at the New Castle Senior Center.
- City Boards and Commissions – Meetings for City Boards and Commissions are currently held at the New Castle City Police Department building. Parking is an issue.

Other Municipal, County and State Offices

Mr. Barthel reviewed a number of other Municipal, County and State Office buildings, noting modernizations and safety features currently lacking in the City of New Castle offices and meeting rooms, including: armed security, multi-tiered electronic screening devices, secure offices, improved safety, and state-of-the-art technology.

Current State Projects

- Family Court Kent County – In the opening ceremony for the new building the Governor stated “State workers ... deserve to work in facilities where they can do their jobs well.” Mr. Barthel opined that statement would apply to all branches of government as well as private and public corporations. Senator Nicole Poore stated that “This is an opportunity for the State to finally catch up on much-needed upgrades and repairs that have long been deferred.”
- Millsboro – A new Police Station is being built and the Town approved to receive \$5M for construction.
- Dewey Beach – A \$3M grant was received from the State for the replacement of the current Town Hall and Police Department.
- Delaware City – \$1.3M was received from the State for a new Community Center.

Mr. Barthel noted that the State has granted a number of Municipalities funding to upgrade and replace facilities, and that Governor Carney recognizes the need for safe, secure facilities.

Talent

Mr. Barthel noted that New Castle is antiquated in terms of technology and safety, and reiterated that attracting and keeping first-rate employees is critical. He quoted “organizations must create a digital workplace that prioritizes frictionless work strategies to attract and retain talent.” Mr. Barthel stated that New Castle is not only competing with other governments but with private and public companies for qualified candidates.

Mr. Barthel noted that Mayor Quaranta stated in his comments to City Council that employees want “clean, safe, modern places to work, competitive salaries, and best-in-class technology” to

attract and keep good employees, and that in order for the City to remain self-sufficient it “needs to maintain a competitive workforce and have modern workspaces.”

Economics of Combining the Workforce

Eliminate duplications and redundancies and improve economies of scale.

- Capital Expenses – There are currently multiple roofs, heating and air conditioning systems, phone systems and technology, as well as duplication in personnel. Mr. Barthel stated that there are no plans to reduce the workforce; but that productivity will be increased through attrition and cross training, as was done in the City offices.

Promote economic development

- 220 Delaware Street – By selling 220 Delaware Street new business opportunities can be created in downtown for another restaurant or business, which would increase the City tax base.

Current Status

Two concepts were presented to City Council:

- Concept A (Plaza Concept)
- Concept B (Police Department Extension Concept)

Concept that has not yet been presented to City Council:

- Trust Property – The Trust owns a property across the street from the Police Station, and they have expressed a willingness to work with the City to allow the City to build on that site.

Mr. Barthel displayed a property that could potentially be used as a new site for the Good Will Fire Company; adding that the Good Will Fire Company currently has no desire to relocate.

Cost

Trust Property – The projected cost to build on the Trust property is \$5,924,963.00.

<u>Potential Funding</u>	
State Funding	\$4,000,000
220 Delaware Street	350,000
MSC Building	300,000
Homeland Security Grant	100,000
ARPA Funding	<u>1,200,000</u>
Total	\$5,900,000

Mr. Barthel noted that there would be almost no cost to the City, and there would still be approximately \$1.7M left in the ARPA fund.

Retrofitting 220 Delaware Avenue

Mr. Barthel has asked the City Architect to develop a plan to retrofit 220 Delaware Avenue. Ms. Hamroun provided a high level rendering, but is still working on pricing.

Potential Locations in the City

Councilperson Day had requested Mr. Barthel to investigate other potential locations for a municipal complex. Mr. Barthel presented a number of potential properties, noting that he has had no discussion with the owners of any of the locations.

- SPCA Building
- Rt. 9
- Knox Bus / Carpenter Hall
- Parts Plus Property
- Trust property on Rt. 9
- Chestnut and 3rd Streets

Conclusion

Mr. Barthel stated that doing something now will benefit the residents for decades by:

- Attracting and retaining a qualified workforce by providing the workforce with the right tools and a clean, healthy work environment;
- Provide the best customer experience for residents by hiring the most talented employees and having superior technology in safe spaces.

In response to a question from Councilperson Smith, Mr. Barthel explained that the property across the street from the Police Station would be either for a new Police Department building or a new Administration building. If the decision was to move the Police Department and renovate the current Police Department building, the cost would be approximately \$1.9M. Mr. Barthel recommended that the Police Department remain at its current location and that the Administration building be moved to the property across the street.

In response to a question from Councilperson Souder, Mr. Barthel stated that Ms. Hamroun is working on pricing to retrofit 220 Delaware Street.

Councilperson Smith asked if Mayor Quaranta, in his capacity as a member of the MSC Board, could speak to MSC's position relative to a municipal campus. Mayor Quaranta stated that he could not speak for the Board; however, he felt that there is a view that the building on Chestnut Street is too small, parking is limited and it is not modern. He added that MSC shares some of the same concerns that everyone has relative to retention of qualified employees, noting that nationwide Police Departments and the Trades are losing qualified people.

Council President Platt opined that it seemed MSC was on board with a municipal complex, and it would be logical to have everyone in one central location.

Councilperson Smith asked if the City has exhausted all opportunities to upgrade security at Town Hall. Council President Platt stated that Town Hall is a Trust building and due to safety concerns the City can no longer meet there.

In response to a question from Councilperson Day, Mr. Barthel stated that it depends on which concept City Council chooses, but the plan is to have the Public Works Director and City Administration work out of the main Administration building.

In response to a question from Council President Platt, Mr. Barthel stated that he is working with Chief McCabe on safety measures to protect the current Administration building at 220 Delaware Street.

Council President Platt noted that the Police Department was built in the current location because it is in the center of the City of New Castle.

Councilperson Leary expressed her concern that in a conversation with Mr. Blomquist of MSC, he indicated that MSC was not in favor of a municipal complex. Relative to retrofitting 220 Delaware Street, Mr. Barthel reiterated that the City Architect is working on design and pricing. Councilperson Leary opined that the stated economies of scale were minimal and that all other considerations for a location had not yet been exhausted. Councilperson Leary also expressed her concern that the 220 Delaware Street building might not sell and that other options for proposals and costs should be investigated.

Councilperson Souder stated that she is not ready to make a decision without concrete numbers and plans for retrofitting 220 Delaware Street.

In response from a question from Councilperson Leary, Mr. Barthel reiterated that the City Architect is working on plans and pricing to retrofit 220 Delaware Street. Council President Platt asked if pricing could be available at the next Council meeting.

During discussion, the merits of utilizing the Senior Center and improving technology there vs building an Administration Building were debated. Councilperson Day stated he is not opposed to retrofitting 220 Delaware Street; but renovating the space will be challenging.

Council Discussion of ARPA Funds and Potential Use

Council President Platt noted that when the Budget was done, the ARPA funds were placed in a restricted fund and the time has come to discuss ideas for the use of those funds.

Councilperson Day suggested that Council hold a public Workshop to get residents' thoughts on how to utilize the funds. His suggestions were: road infrastructure, Band Shell, improving the Wharf area, and security improvements to City buildings.

Councilperson Leary concurred with Councilperson Day's suggestion of a public Workshop. Her suggestions were: Street improvements, Catch Basin improvements and cleaning, paving, Band Shell updating with increased ventilation, and building restroom facilities at the Wharf with secure showers for use by Kalmar Nyckel and other Tall Ship crews.

Councilperson Souder concurred with everything said by Councilpersons Day and Leary. Councilperson Souder noted that the Sea Level Rise Task Force will be making

recommendations, but was not certain ARPA funds could be used for that. However, she suggested that if ARPA funds could be utilized for things already in the Budget, then Budget funds for those items could be reassigned to a Capital Reserve Fund for recommended improvements from the Sea Level Rise Task Force to mitigate flooding. Her other suggestion was: undergrounding utilities.

Councilperson Smith's suggestions were: Restroom facilities with showers, Band Shell modernized with better ventilation and mobility.

Council President Platt's suggestions were: Band Shell, recruiting and retaining employees (particularly with the Police Department).

During discussion it was noted that the City has \$2,849,693 in ARPA funds and those funds must be utilized for anything that is considered government related.

Council President Platt stated that another Workshop will be scheduled and urged attendees to tell their friends and neighbors to come with ideas on how ARPA funds could be used.

In response to a question from Councilperson Leary, Mr. Barthel stated that the City has consolidated positions over the years, and that at the present time he does not consider that the City is short staffed.

Councilperson Smith suggested that he and Mr. Losco work on drafting a contract for a Tourism Director. Mr. Losco stated that any discussion or action on that topic should be added to the next Council Agenda.

Public Comment

Karen Igou – 621 Cherry Street

Ms. Igou read a list of items listed on the US Department of Treasury website for which ARPA funds can be used.

Phil Gross – 13th Street

Mr. Gross asked how the Council Workshop had to be conducted, i.e., with more interaction, or more formal. Mr. Losco stated that if there is no quorum of Council, the Workshop can be more interactive with a more expansive discussion; however, if there is a quorum, it must be organized and more formal. Mr. Gross suggested that Council conduct both an interactive and a formal Workshop.

Mr. Gross opined that New Castle has much less crime than some of the municipalities referenced in Mr. Barthel's presentation. He also noted that the City Council in Delaware City meets in the fire hall and they have no plans to change. Mr. Gross opined that the City should begin setting money aside for a new administrative building in the future, and that now funds should be used to protect the City from flooding.

Bernadette Ruf – 157 East 2nd Street

Ms. Ruf stated that the City still has not addressed the flooding issue in the town, noting that what she heard during the meeting is that the City is fearful and needs to have more security. She added that in meetings she has attended, residents have been vocal, but no one has been violent. Ms. Ruf suggested that the City use the buildings we have instead of building a new municipal complex. She opined that people come to New Castle for its historic aspect and asked if the City is losing something by building a new complex. She reiterated that what she heard is that City Council is fearful, and that not living in fear is important; and that this is Historic New Castle.

Dorsey Fiske – 26 East 3rd Street

Ms. Fiske noted that the two plans on the City website show costs of \$10.3M and \$10.6M, and that is why people in the City are saying the cost of a new municipal complex will be \$10M.

Ms. Fiske stated that flooding is the concern that the City should focus on. She noted that she urged the Trustees to get concept plans from coastal engineers regarding flooding after Super Storm Sandy. She expressed her hope that the City looks seriously at flooding in New Castle.

Andrew Camac – 23 West 3rd Street

Mr. Camac noted that none of the five instances of violence referenced during Mr. Barthel's presentation occurred in New Castle.

Mr. Camac stated that he would like to see the basketball court in Battery Park updated.

Mr. Camac made a number of comments regarding the new municipal complex:

- The cost of renovation vs new construction is very important.
- Why was the Police Station even included in the presentation if it is not part of the new building?
- Are the existing City buildings going to be abandoned?
- How much violence is there in New Castle that requires metal detectors and security?
- Why do we need more room for Council Chambers if everything is going digital and online?
- Other historic towns upgraded and did not demolish.
- How many Council meetings had attendance of 100+ people that requires a 120 seat Council Chambers?
- Why is Council not helping more with the schools?

Marty Wright – 127 West 7th Street

Mr. Wright stated that he is opposed to the City spending money on a municipal complex. He stated that consolidating is beneficial to the City government, but why is it beneficial to the public? He opined that safety and security can be addressed in other ways than by building a municipal complex.

Brian Mattaway – 628 Delaware Street

In response to a question from Mr. Mattaway, Mr. Barthel stated that the State funding for the new Administration Building would be from the Bond Bill. Mr. Mattaway stated that with the exception of the sale of 220 Delaware Street and the MSC building, all funding for the proposed new municipal building would be coming from grants; and that point is imperative for people to know.

Mr. Mattaway stated that it is obvious that the City needs revitalization or new buildings in order to move the City forward to 2023 and beyond, and a workforce for us and our grandchildren. He noted that it is obvious that at the very least the buildings need to be refitted, or a new campus is needed. He urged Council to work together on that effort to do the best for the City, and think about multi-purpose rooms, advancing technology and the ability to help employees work from home, and have work phones forwarded to cell phones. Regarding the potential sale of 220 Delaware Street, Mr. Mattaway expressed his hope that it is done in a fiduciary concept because those buildings have dignity and that should be maintained; and perhaps an alternative is a long-term lease.

There being no further business to discuss, Council President Platt called for a Motion to adjourn.

A Motion to adjourn was made, seconded and unanimously carried and the meeting adjourned at 7:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer

Next Regular Meeting Date: October 11, 2022
Posted: 09/06/2022