

COMMON COUNCIL

July 22, 2004

Mayor Robert Raphael presided at a special meeting of the Common Council held at 7 PM on July 22, 2004, at One Court Plaza.

Present:

Mayor Robert Raphael
Ald. A. Anthony Abraham
Ald. James Cushman
Ald. Suzanne Williams
Ald. Joseph Biviano

Also:

Clerk / Director of Finance William Roberts
Public Works Supt. Carl Ivarson
William Tomkins, Shelter Planning
Thomas Suozzo, NYS DEC

Absent:

Ald. Jeffrey Thornton
Ald. Joseph Maiurano

Mayor Raphael stated that the purpose of this special meeting was a work session to discuss and brainstorm the possibilities for the state Brownfields Opportunity Program, and for community development and planning ideas and goals in general.

Prior to beginning the process, he first introduced Tom Suozzo from the Environmental Remediation Division of the NYS DEC to inform the Council on very recent developments involving environmental concerns in the northeast area of the city, particularly on Lee Avenue. Tom referred to the factory site formerly occupied by the old Simmons Precision facility and presently by the Gee Willikers childrens' clothing manufacturing operations. He stated that in previous years, organic solvents were discovered near the railroad tracks behind the facility. At that time, the facility ownership was under Simmons' parent company owners Hercules, and later B. F. Goodrich. In coordination with the DEC, the source area of the contaminants was removed, and the ground water subsequently tested okay, as did also the interior air quality in the building. However, current technology and measurement precision have tightened acceptable limits, and recent inspections have disclosed concerns with reemergence of the compounds. These concerns are being addressed by DEC, who is also in contact with the previous owners. Tom assured the Council and a few Lee avenue residents who were present that the DEC would follow through on the issue, regardless of where responsibility may lie. He explained the testing process, and said he will keep all residents of the area advised. He also said that DEC will take whatever measures are necessary to ensure expedient remediation.

At 7:32 p.m., Mayor Raphael then turned the meeting over to Bill Tomkins, who pointed out that this was strictly for brainstorming, being open to all ideas or concerns, and the only limitations might be available resources.

Ald. Cushman expressed concerns for addressing a section in the Second Ward in the northwest corner, off the end of Pleasant Street, to include it in listed target areas.

Ald. Biviano talked about focusing on a city-wide approach to senior citizens' housing rehabilitation needs in all wards. Ald. Williams concurred, adding that many areas are quite dated, needing exterior rehabilitation. Ald. Biviano said that several rehab locations have been done more than once over many years, but were largely focused on interior concerns such as heating, wiring, and lead paint removal. The exterior remained unchanged except for gradual deterioration, pointing out the need for an emphasis on exterior appearances too.

Ald. Abraham spoke about the youth of Norwich, and the importance of starting them off on the right foot. He emphasized exploring possibilities for establishing effective youth centers.

Ald. Cushman added considerations for the need for senior citizens centers. Mayor Raphael suggested the possibility of joint purpose centers for both age groups.

Ald. Williams mentioned downtown facades and also second and third floors needing updating and codes compliance, with attention to their being fully utilized for enhancing downtown vitality. Ald. Cushman pointed out that several such locations could likely involve very costly remedies.

Ald. Biviano asked about developing a downtown comprehensive plan to address all of the various strategically important aspects. Bill Tomkins said his role would be one of facilitating and organizing efforts between the property owners, the B.I.D., and the City. Mayor Raphael pointed out that this latest point definitely ties in with the City's Comprehensive Plan. A lengthy discussion followed on several elements of downtown buildings and related enhancements. Ald. Williams also asked about the evident under-utilization of areas such as the large blacktopped parking area (Benderson Development's property) behind the VFW. This led to thinking about a broader concept of the downtown area being more than just the Broad Street corridor. Bill Tomkins suggested there could be many possibilities both east and west of Broad Street that would significantly enhance a greater downtown area.

Ald. Williams pointed out the opportunity for new homes development in the northwest section of the City, and also questioned the possibility for sections off of Prentice Street.

Bill Tomkins then gave some ideas of possible funding sources to support the several ideas that had been discussed. Among the ones he mentioned were the Governor's Initiative on Downtown (announced last May), a Niagara Mohawk downtown oriented grant program, Community Development Block Grants of the Small Cities programs – which cover a variety of applications, the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal Home Program (housing only), the Appalachian Regional Commission, and the Economic Development Administration. As the Council progresses in focusing and prioritizing objectives and goals, he can assist in identifying corresponding funding approaches.

Adjournment –Ald. Abraham moved to adjourn at 8:37 PM. Seconded by Ald. Biviano and duly adopted, ayes all.