

CITY OF NORWICH
JOINT MEETING of the
PUBLIC SAFETY / PUBLIC WORKS and
FINANCE/PERSONNEL COMMITTEES
December 5, 2023

Present:

Mayor Brian Doliver
Ald. Eric Warren
Ald. Fred Gee
Ald. Nancy Allaire
Ald. William Loomis
Ald. David Zieno

Also:

Director of Finance/City Clerk Dee DuFour
DPW Superintendent Edward Pepe
Youth Bureau Director Anthony Testani
Fire Chief Jan Papelino
Community Development Director Erik Scrivener
City Attorney Stephanie Hanrahan
Deputy City Clerk Agnes Eaton

Supervisor Robert M. Jeffrey arrived 6:35 p.m.

Media Representative: none

Absent

Ald. Robert D. Jeffrey
Supervisor James McNeil

Ald. Zieno called the joint meeting of the Public Works/Public Safety and Finance/Personnel Committees to order at 6:30 p.m. at the Council Chambers.

Approval of Minutes – Ald. Gee **moved** to approve the minutes of the November 8, 2023 meeting. Seconded by Ald. Warren, approved ayes all.

Department Head Reports

DPW

Update on Meter Replacement Project – E. Pepe reported that 23 meters have been installed and are being tested. The rest of the meters will be installed between January 1 and March 1 of 2024. In total there are 2,500 meters being replaced.

Update on Well 4 Study – E. Pepe reported the testing has been completed and went well. Well 4 was shut down from November 15 -21 and was switched to the Filter plant. There was some loss of pressure, but not too much. Geo Tech is analyzing the data and will submit to the Susquehanna River Basin in January. The purchase order for the Well 4 pump inspection was sent. Currently Well 3 is online.

Update on WWTP Upgrades – E. Pepe reminded the Committee that projects planned will be \$4 million and that a \$2 million grant has been awarded. Further grants or zero percent funding will continue to be sought. The next step will be to complete the SRF financing application and then enter the design phase. The design phase should be done within the next 4 – 5 months with construction beginning in 2025.

Fire Department

Ambulance calls outside CON – J. Papelino reported 8 calls outside the CON – 4 of which were billable.

Account transfers – J. Papelino reported that after this pay period in which payouts of unused holiday time, longevity etc. are done, a transfer may be needed into the Personal Services line. He will know how much by the Council meeting. Ald. Loomis moved to recommend the Common Council approve the transfer. Seconded by Ald. Gee, approved ayes all.

Bell Install – J. Papelino reported that the bell have been reinstalled. Burrell's has been instrumental in laying the pad, digging the trench for the electric and paying for the steel bell structure which was done by Sherburne Steel. Mealy Electric will be adding the electric as the structure will be illuminated at night. The bell was the original from the fire station in 1892. Thanks were given for all those involved.

Two certified Firefighters – J. Papelino reported the 2 firefighters at the Utica Academy have graduated and are currently undergoing orientation at the fire station. They are working 12-hour shifts Monday through Friday and will start working regular shifts at the beginning of 2024.

EMS Billing – J. Papelino reported speaking with Bill Shipman from MultiMed regarding direct pays to EMS that the Governor signed. During that conversation the City on average is low on what it is charging. Papelino proposed increasing the fees. Comparisons were made with other municipalities and the charges would be in line with what Sherburne is charging. Papelino reported that for-profits are currently charging much more than what is proposed. He further said that the services by Norwich are not to make a profit but to provide good service. He further stated that 82% of calls are either Medicare or Medicaid which is capped at a low reimbursement rate. Ald. Zieno expressed concern that the disadvantaged would have a hard time paying. Papelino said the most people impacted by the increased rates will be the 11% who have commercial insurance and the 6% that are self pays. He further stated that payment plans are very flexible. Ald. Loomis moved to recommend the Common Council approve the proposed rates. Seconded by Ald. Allaire, approved 4 – 1 with Ald. Zieno voting nay.

Code Enforcement

Court hearings – J. Papelino reported that court hearings were held today and all were postponed to reappear on January 4, 2024. These included properties on Cortland, Grove and Division Streets.

Letters, red tags & inspections – J. Papelino reported that 2 letters, 22 red tags and 11 rental inspections have been issued. Notification of an appointed Rent Receiver, Howard, Hinman and Kattel, has been received concerning the Knuth properties and what they are calling a foreclosure. This does not include the North Broad St. properties or Gold St.

Ald. Zieno asked about the status of the Electrical Board proposal concerning licensing and the modifications that were made; he also wondered about any progress regarding the Plumbing Board licensing.

Community Development

Resolution Request for COPS Grant – E. Scrivener asked for authorization for the Mayor to execute the COPS agreement for \$125,000 for the hiring of a Police Officer. Ald. Loomis **moved** to approve authorization. Seconded by Ald. Gee, approved ayes all.

NY Main Street Grant – E. Scrivener reported that another grant for \$20,000 was awarded for 1315 South LLC for the building at 13-15 South Broad St. Funds will cover Technical Assistance related activities at the property. He will be looking to execute that contract soon.

Nuisance Ordinance Update – E. Scrivener reported that the Nuisance Ordinance is being reviewed and changes are being made such as adding language for the Appeal process. He introduced the Chair of the working group, David Francis, who explained how the Ordinance should work “in a perfect world”. Mr. Francis said the Ordinance is set up to be separate from both Code Enforcement and the Police Department. There is no enforcement power within the Ordinance itself. Once 3 [violations/incidents] are reached it will be referred to the Nuisance Officer who would be responsible for following certain steps to find resolution. If resolution is not followed through on it would then be referred to the City Attorney to either send to Court or to the Administrative Panel. The panel would review and make a ruling on what should happen, ie: make the property owner comply, remove the Certificate of Occupancy for up to one year, or issue a fine of up to \$100 per day.

Ald. Loomis was concerned that this would stretch the process out by months and Francis acknowledged that could happen. Discussion of the formation of the Administrative Panel ensued. Francis said the panel should be “neutral”. He continued by saying as soon as this Ordinance is approved, the Nuisance Officer would have to immediately meet with the City Attorney and possibly the Court to find out exactly what needs to be done to set up the hearing panel. It is anticipated that in 3 to 5 years the hearing panel will not be used [because the number of unresolved violations/incidents will have gone down].

Youth Bureau

Winter Program Update – A. Testani reported that the winter programs will begin January 8th with the exception of Wrestling which started December 4th. Programs are down about 1/3 from last year, but additional registrations are expected. All positions have been hired for the programs. Town contracts have been signed

with the Town of Plymouth deciding not to participate, saying Plymouth's summer participation rose from 50 children in 2022 to 95 in 2023.

Finance

SPCA Shelter Agreement – A. Eaton explained that the annual SPCA contract is up for renewal, however the new Executive Director has made significant changes to the agreement. Originally in the proposed agreement the SPCA was requiring that they be allowed to issue dog licenses on the City's (all municipalities) behalf. There was a meeting between the Executive Director the County Supervisors regarding the new agreements. The licensing issue has been resolved so that we will continue to issue our own licenses. The clause concerning the seizure of dogs of those arrested etc. who have no one to take their dogs will also be reinstated in the agreement. A major change in fees was also initiated by the SPCA. Instead of the current fee of \$75 for up to 5 days for dogs seized by dog control and taken to the SPCA, it will now be \$50 per day up to \$250 for the 5 days. After 5 days the dog becomes property of the SPCA. Even though the City makes no money from dog seizures, the fee is passed on to the dog owner when redeeming the dog. The concern is that this will be a hardship on the dog owner who will not be able to afford to get their dog back. Last year there were 26 dogs taken to the SPCA by the Police Department, 11 of them were not redeemed. The City has to pay for the dogs that are not redeemed. NYS Ag & Markets law requires municipalities to provide or contract with an animal shelter. Investigation for alternatives will continue, however there has been no shelter located less than a 35 minute drive which would not be conducive to the Police Department. If another facility can be found, there is a 30-day termination clause. It was recommended by an Ag & Markets representative that a backup facility should be found. Discussion of the fees was further discussed. Ald. Warren **moved** to recommend the Common Council authorize the signing of the agreement. Seconded by Ald. Zieno, approved ayes all. A Public Service announcement will be issued so that the public will know the cheapest way to redeem their dog is to ensure that the dog is licensed and has a collar with the license tags. This will make it very easy for the Police to contact the owner to get their dog back before the 24 hours when they are then required take the dog to the shelter.

Other Items

Volunteer Fire Department Property Tax Exemption – Mayor Doliver said he contacted NYCOM about any other municipalities that have adopted the property tax exemption now allowed by the State for volunteers in Fire Department. There are none in this area, but Baldwinsville has done so and the Town of Hamilton is considering it. The exemption would only be for 10% of the assessment on the City portion (not school or County) and would be for active volunteers that reside in the City limits. They would have to be a volunteer for two years before they are eligible. Currently there are four members that qualify. Ald. Loomis **moved** to recommend the Common Council set a public hearing at the next meeting. Seconded by Ald. Warren, approved ayes all.

Community Garden – Mayor Doliver said that there has been interest in re-starting the Community Garden. With the assistance of Community Development, a grant is being applied for. Although there are a few who do use the garden, it is in need of an overhaul. E. Scrivener said that partnerships with other organization may be possible, as they are looking to create 50 garden beds.

Adjournment

Ald. Gee **moved** to adjourn the Joint Committee Meeting at 7:37 p.m. Seconded by Ald. Warren, approved ayes all.