

City of New Castle Delaware
Special City Council Meeting at Town Hall
201 Delaware Street – New Castle
Monday, October 29, 2018

Roll Call: 6:30 p.m.

Councilperson Valarie W. Leary
Councilperson Michael J. Quaranta
Council President Linda Ratchford
Councilperson Michael M. Platt
Councilperson John A. Di Mondì

Also present:

William Barthel, City Administrator
Richard McCabe, Chief of Police
Jeff Bergstrom, Building Official and Fire Marshal
David Athey, City Engineer

Council President Ratchford stated the purpose of this meeting as being to have a workshop on Delaware Street redesign, in preparation for improving drainage and paving.

Since the original presentation by the City Engineer, there have been concepts considered, research on old photos, contact with the Historic Area Commission architect, comments from people in the community, volunteer time from Marco Boyce, and feedback from others, contributing to the background information on this project.

Handouts of the Revised Plan for Delaware Street Modifications for Discussion were provided to all attendees.

David Athey, City Engineer, presented on the Delaware Street construction project, referring to the provided handout, and including the following items of information:

- Research and preparation on the project has been underway for over two years, including time spent assessing municipal services, including water, power, gas, sanitary sewer.
- DNREC provided a grant approximately two years ago, to work on a green approach to managing stormwater.
- Additional manholes have been placed, in preparation for the project, to improve access to the storm sewer, in order to put cameras into the pipes.
- Within the next couple of months, storm pipe will be dug up and replaced on Delaware Street, between Second and The Strand.
- How to deal with the storm pipe from The Strand to the river is still being evaluated.
- Once final direction has been provided, the hope is to have the Delaware Street project ready for bid by Spring of 2019, and ready for work Spring, Summer and possibly Fall of 2019.

- Some current issues with Delaware Street include cracking (which should be addressed fairly soon), curb deterioration, curb depth shortages due to pavement overlays, drainage along the curb/gutter line.
- Planned work includes raising the curbs where needed, which will require reworking of the sidewalks in some areas.
- Handicapped ramp availability is currently inconsistent. A complete makeover of all of these is included in the proposed project plan.
- Improvements to crosswalk and pedestrian refuge availability are included in the proposed project plan.
- Improved traffic control is needed.
- Improved management of stormwater is needed.
- The plan in the provided handout includes a traffic circle, raised sidewalks, and bump-outs.
- Better stormwater management is expected to be required in the future, and this plan anticipates that.

Marco Boyce presented, including the following information:

- The proposed plan is intended to make Delaware Street a “gateway” into town, and provide better pedestrian access.
- Lack of traffic direction at Third Street results in some people driving a little faster, when heading toward the wharf.
- Sometimes, trucks at the businesses park in the middle of the plaza.
- Parking is lacking, at the wharf.
- At Third Street, narrowing the paved area, to provide shorter pedestrian crossing distances, lends itself to provide an opportunity for wider sidewalks.
- A stop sign at Third Street, heading east on Delaware, is a consideration.
- Further east, the plan includes angled parking and adjustment of street tree planters.
- A traffic circle around the plaza allows for improved pedestrian crossing.
- The proposed plan allows for truck parking that is off to the side, to not disrupt traffic.
- Improvement to the façade of the Old Town Hall is included in the proposed plan.
- A speed table is proposed for Delaware Street and The Strand, to slow traffic and improve pedestrian safety.
- At the indicated green spaces, stormwater will flow into those areas first, and then flow into the stormwater system.

David Athey added that having the stormwater flow into the green areas first would assist in filtration of the stormwater. Mr. Athey’s understanding is that the Trustees have also expressed interest in some sort of stormwater feature on the park.

Mr. Athey noted:

- Adding the pedestrian bump-outs is consistent with work that is being considered in Wilmington, as well as other cities.

- Seating areas could be placed where the sidewalk is wider.
- Pedestrian refuge areas can double as part of the green stormwater management improvements.
- Above-ground directional signage in the proposed traffic circle would impede emergency vehicle access.
- Emergency vehicle access was taken into consideration in the design of the proposed traffic island.
- There would be a net loss of roughly a dozen parking spots, under the proposed plan.

Mr. Boyce mentioned that materials to be used as part of the proposed plan are consistent with the materials already in use in the surrounding area.

Tim Moore, of Good Will Fire Company, advised that their only concern was that access not be impeded for any of their vehicles, and those concerns have been addressed in the proposed plan.

Police Chief McCabe stated that there have been very few crashes in the area being discussed. Most of the incidents have been related to improper backing. One pedestrian has been hit, in a crosswalk. Sun glare and weather were involved in that incident.

City Administrator Barthel reported that the loan that the city received, that is being backed by the Trustees, was \$1,878,000. Current projects are going to come in at around \$871,000 (final numbers not available until the projects are completed). This leaves approximately \$1 million, for Delaware Street. \$400,000 was committed to the project out of the general fund, a couple of years ago. \$175,000 has been received in community transportation funds, and those funds have been earmarked specifically for Delaware Street. This leaves a total of approximately \$1.6 million for this project.

The city has been approved for a loan of \$367,500, for the stormwater portion of the project. If Council approves accepting that loan, that comes to approximately \$1.9 million for this project. Alternatively, acceptance of the loan could allow for \$367,500 of the project's available funds to be used on other projects.

About \$172,000 is available in municipal street aid. The state has been providing about \$106,000 a year over the past few years.

Mr. Athey reviewed the process by which the \$367,500 loan amount was calculated, for the stormwater portion of the project. He sees a possibility that the cost may be lower than that \$367,500.

In response to a question from Councilperson Platt, Tim Moore advised that Good Will's ladder is probably one of the largest in the county. Mr. Moore explained in some detail, the occasions in which the ladder truck might be deployed, as well as other emergency vehicles.

In response to a question from Councilperson Platt, Mr. Athey advised that the proposed plan does not include anything special, related to bicycles.

Councilperson Di Mondì asked about the option of getting rid of all of the on-street parking and adding a bike path.

Councilperson Platt asked about maintenance on the stormwater catch basins. Mr. Athey responded that the basins themselves would not require any more maintenance than they do currently. There is a maintenance component to the infiltration chambers. Pruning, dealing with roots, etc., need to be kept up with, in order to delay the need for complete replacement of the soil. In the loan application, a couple of thousand dollars a year are budgeted for maintenance, dependent on the pollutant loading of the soil. Regular annual maintenance will delay future major maintenance needs.

In response to a question from Councilperson Di Mondì, soil testing will be required in order to determine whether vegetation can be used for the filtration.

Councilperson Platt asked about the status of the other proposed design plans that were presented previously. They are still available for review. Mr. Boyce commented that some features of the other proposed plans could be used. Mr. Athey then displayed the three exhibits from the previous meeting. Councilperson Di Mondì mentioned that he would like the design adjusted, in order to preserve some parking spaces.

Council, Mr. Athey and Mr. Boyce discussed pros and cons of the various designs, as well as the possibility of temporarily trying out some features, for the public and emergency responders to review.

Councilperson Quaranta asked whether the funds that Mr. Barthel discussed earlier would be enough to complete the work from Sixth Street to the wharf. Mr. Athey responded that he recalls the estimated cost to have been about \$1 million, for the work from Third to Sixth.

Mr. Quaranta expressed concern that the cost of the overall project is too prohibitive, and suggested that some elements could be completed, in time. Mr. Athey advised that the \$1.3 to \$1.4 million estimate he provided earlier included the green infrastructure components. With the brick sidewalks and the circle, there would be an increase of possibly 8% to 10%.

Mr. Quaranta asked whether the details of the MS-4 plan requirements are known. Although they are not final, Mr. Athey is confident that stormwater treatment will be included.

Mr. Quaranta mentioned the expected move toward more electric vehicles, as opposed to internal combustion vehicles.

Mr. Quaranta asked whether consideration had been given to putting some utilities underground, to accommodate events that might take place on the street.

Mr. Athey clarified that his earlier estimate of \$50,000 to \$75,000 was for the inner circle, in the proposed plan. He and Mr. Boyce discussed some of the requirements for brick sidewalks.

Councilperson Leary commented that a temporary display of what it would actually look like would be helpful. She also asked for some clarification of the proposed design, and whether there might be room for restrooms to be installed. There is some flexibility to the area she

mentioned. Mr. Athey advised that, due to the cost of such an installation, it would require re-thinking of the budget.

Councilperson Quaranta commented that residents would need to be consulted over such a large project. Also, various agencies and providers would need to be involved in the study of burying utilities in the area.

Mr. Athey brought up the possibility of installing conduit.

Councilperson Platt commented that this project should not be delayed for the number of years that it would take to have utilities buried.

Councilperson Quaranta commented that there are other priorities that make spending this much money for such a small area not something he is comfortable with.

Mr. Barthel reiterated his earlier comment that the \$367,000 potential loan might allow funds to be freed up for some of the other projects that Mr. Quaranta is concerned with.

Council President Ratchford asked whether the project could be staged, as opposed to doing it all at once. Mr. Athey responded that yes, it could be done, although potential contractors might have concerns about that.

There was discussion about how traffic would be handled during construction, such as narrowing to one lane, one-way traffic, traffic control, etc.

Teri Gormley, of the New Castle Weekly, asked if this project is necessarily completely separate from the Battery Park drainage project. Mr. Athey commented that he had had some discussions with the Trustees about the two projects possibly coming together. If the Trustees take care of what they had said they would, this project could cost less.

Councilperson Quaranta requested that Mr. Athey provide a couple of different estimates, including the order in which the project would be completed, without any of the features other than the pedestrian walkways. This would include the repair of the base layer, resetting of the curbs, and correctly completing the repaving job, without the circle and other features. Also, he would like to see an estimate for the same work he described, for basically all of Delaware Street, from Sixth Street to the wharf, possibly with improvements to pedestrian access included.

Mr. Barthel advised that the previous estimate for the work, not including the green stormwater management, was estimated at about \$1.1 million, from Third to the wharf. Also, phase one will begin soon, addressing the drainage issues from Second to the wharf.

Councilperson Leary stated that the green stormwater infrastructure will be required at some point in the future, so she would prefer that foresight be used, in preparation for future requirements.

Council President Ratchford pointed out that the bump-outs would be necessary, to deal with the pedestrian crossing issues.

Mr. Athey stated that the recent passage of a bond issue indicated to him that the citizens are behind the proposed green drainage infrastructure work.

Councilperson Leary expressed that she would like to see a visual representation onsite, like a demo.

Councilperson Di Mondì stated that he is concerned with the potential cost of the proposed green infrastructure work, while having lost 14 acres of watershed, as well as planning to replace another green area with a half-acre parking lot.

Council President Ratchford suggested that:

- How people feel about the proposed plan be looked at;
- A potential phased implementation plan be provided;
- The Trust be reached out to;
- See whether there would be room for a restroom at the end.

Council President Ratchford asked about possible alternatives to the traffic circle.

Councilperson Quaranta mentioned that electric vehicles are coming and expressed concern with spending a lot of money on remediating environmental issues that may not be a concern in the future. The coming MS-4 standards are likely to go through some changes. He would like to know more about the MS-4 requirements, and he approves of improvements to pedestrian safety. Beyond that, he would like to see unnecessary changes be set aside. He would also like the Third to Sixth area to be looked at.

Councilperson Di Mondì expressed disapproval of concrete sidewalks in the area, and other changes that eliminate the historic character of the city. He would prefer brick sidewalks.

Council President reiterated the need for a demonstration.

Councilperson Di Mondì would like to have a vote on whether or not to accept the loan previously discussed, before proceeding with the proposed green infrastructure project.

There was discussion of the cost and process to prepare the demonstration.

Councilperson Di Mondì would like businesses in the area to not be allowed to accept truck deliveries at certain times of day.

The demonstration area will be from Third and Delaware to Second and Delaware.

After a motion and second, the meeting was adjourned at 8: 23 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brian G. Whitaker

City Clerk of New Castle, Delaware