

City of New Castle Delaware
City Council Meeting
Virtual Meeting via Zoom
Tuesday, August 11, 2020 – 7:00 p.m.

Call to Order: 7:00 PM

Roll Call

Present: Council President Linda Ratchford
Councilperson Suzanne M. Souder
Councilperson Russell P. Smith
Councilperson Michael M. Platt

Absent: Councilperson Valarie W. Leary

Also present: Mayor Michael J. Quaranta
William Barthel, City Administrator
Daniel Losco, Esquire, City Solicitor
Richard P. McCabe, Chief of Police
Janet Carlin, City Treasurer
Jeff Bergstrom, City Building Official
Brian Whittaker, City Clerk
Debbie Pfeil, KCI Sr. Planner
Madalyn Puskcar, KCI Engineer in Training

Council President Ratchford called the August 11, 2020, Regular City Council meeting to order and introduced the Council and attendees.

Council President Ratchford stated that the City sustained minimal damage from the two recent storms, and the number of positive cases of COVID-19 and the percent testing positive are both going down.

Discussion and review of the Draft "2020 Comprehensive Plan Update, including the remaining steps in the process, which will include Public Hearings before the Planning Commission and the City Council. (Council President Ratchford - posted 8/4/2020.)

Council President Ratchford introduced Ms. Debbie Pfeil, KCI Sr. Planner, to present an update of the Comprehensive Plan. Ms. Pfeil presented an overview and highlights of the 2020 Draft Comprehensive Plan. A version of the presentation will be available on the City's website.

The Public Comment period will be August 11 to October 12. Advanced comments are requested and comments should be submitted on the designated form that will be available on the City's website as a Microsoft Word document or a PDF document. Legible handwritten comments on the designated form can be dropped at City Hall or scanned and sent via email to project.outreach@kci.com by October 12.

Ms. Pfeil commended the Planning Commission and the Municipal Services Commission for their outstanding efforts and contributions to the Plan.

Council President Ratchford invited David Baldini, Chairman of the Planning Commission, to add his comments, and thanked the Planning Commission members for their hard work on the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Baldini stated that it is significant compliment to those who contributed to achieving the accomplishments detailed in the Plan, which looks not only at the goals, ideas and processes within the City of New Castle, but starts to look outward as the City relates to other cities and municipalities as New Castle ties into their Comprehensive Plans.

Mayor and Council Questions

In response to a question from Mayor Quaranta, Mr. Losco stated that for the First Reading the date of “August 2020” is sufficient, and the Ordinance can be amended at the time of final adoption of the Plan to insert the final date.

Mayor Quaranta thanked the Planning Commission for its work on the Plan. He emphasized the importance of the document and encouraged the residents of New Castle to carefully review the Plan and provide feedback.

First Reading of Ordinance No. 528, an Ordinance to Adopt the Update to the 2009 Comprehensive Plan, entitled the 2020 City of New Castle Comprehensive Plan. (Council President Ratchford - posted 08/04/2020.)

Council President Ratchford called for a Motion to consider Ordinance 528.

A Motion to consider Ordinance No. 528 was made by Councilperson Platt and seconded by Councilperson Souder. Council President Ratchford read Ordinance 528 into the Record.

Approval of the Minutes by Date:

A Motion to approve the Minutes of the July 14, 2020 Public Hearing, the July 14, 2020 Public Hearing as presented, and the July 14, 2020 Regular Meeting as amended was made by Councilperson Smith and seconded by Councilperson Platt. On vote, the Motion was unanimously approved.

Approval of the Treasurer’s Report

Ms. Carlin presented the unaudited Treasurer’s Report as of July 31, 2020:

Total unrestricted funds	\$2,738,167.30
Total restricted funds	\$2,274,180.67
Total cash	\$5,012,347.97

Property Tax receipts are down 18% from the same time last year; however receipts do not include escrowed taxes that have not been received from mortgage companies. Transfer Tax receipts are down 28.5% from the same time last year; however, that is partially due to a new system implemented by the County that has delayed payment to the City. Because property taxes for 2/3 of the homes in New Castle are non-escrowed, the situation bears watching.

A Motion to approve the unaudited Treasurer's Report of July 31, 2020, as presented was made by Councilperson Smith and seconded by Councilperson Platt. On vote, the Motion was unanimously approved.

City Administrator & Staff Reports

Report from the City Administrator

Budget Update – Mr. Barthel reported the following:

- Municipal Street Aid – \$120,147 received from the State
- Separation Day – \$35,000 received from the State
- Police Pension Supplement – \$23,746 will be received in December
- Workers' Compensation Premium Renewal – \$90,845, which is a reduction of 23.4%. The City's Experience Modification Rating went from 1.18% to .902% which is a reduction of 23.6%. This translates to a savings of \$59,155 in the Budget.

Storm Preparedness – Mr. Barthel stated he and Chief McCabe were in constant contact prior to, during and subsequent to recent storms, and Chief McCabe was in contact with DelDOT and the Goodwill Fire Company. Public Works staff were out prior to and during the storms cleaning drains. MSC was included in City communications. Mr. Barthel assured Council that when any storm is predicted there are regular communications with all relevant City, municipal and County offices throughout the event. Council President Ratchford added that MSC reported no outages in New Castle and they were able to send crews to the City of Dover.

Delaware Street – Mr. Bergstrom stated that the project on Delaware Street is going well. The area of brick is slightly higher than originally anticipated. It is anticipated that the work for underground utilities will be completed within 30 days. Mr. Bergstrom recommends waiting for all gas service work to be complete before paving is begun and he anticipates paving will be completed by the end of October.

Battery Park – Mr. Bergstrom stated the permit from DNREC should be ready soon. The bulkhead will be replaced with riprap in the same location. Council President Ratchford stated her understanding that the riprap is for stabilization and does not rule out a living shoreline in front of it. She also expressed her appreciation for the work done by the Trust to maintain Battery Park. Approximately 160' of wooden bulkhead will be replaced and Mr. Bergstrom opined that there were no structural concerns.

4th Street Bridge – In response to a question from Councilperson Platt regarding clarification of a statement at the May Council Meeting relative to a major paving project on the 4th Street Bridge that would be completed in July 2020, Mr. Bergstrom stated that he intended to report that a

minor project was completed and DelDOT stated that a major repaving project would be done this year, and indicated it would be done in July.

Report from the Police Chief

High Water – Chief McCabe stated that the decision was made not to do a hard closure in Dobbinsville and he is not aware of any calls being received. Drivers who ignore soft closure barriers are cited and in some cases are charged criminally. Jersey Barriers, which are used for hard closures, cannot be driven around. Sign boards were placed on Washington Street at West 7th Street and Rt. 273 during the recent storms. Work previously done by DelDOT improved drainage at the intersection of Washington Street and West 7th Street.

Miscellaneous

WILMAPCO – Mr. Barthel stated that after review and evaluation of the proposals for the New Castle Transportation Plan, and interviews with the top contenders, Century Engineering was selected unanimously.

Council Communications

Seniors Tax Rebate – Councilperson Souder recommended that the City communicate the Tax Rebate program for seniors more widely to residents.

Centerpoint Industrial Park – Councilperson Platt stated a resident of Washington Park called with concerns about the construction and who noted that many of the residents' concerns were addressed at a recent meeting with the property owners. Councilperson Platt also commended the Planning Commission on its review of the Application presented to them.

Honey Bees – Councilperson Smith advised that Mr. Tom Lunt is keeping bees, and has formed the Ft. Casimir Honey Company. The Trust put in two pollinator meadows and is pleased that Mr. Lunt's bees are out there pollinating. (<https://www.facebook.com/fortcasimirhoney>)

Business from the Mayor

Board of Health – The Mayor is nominating three individuals to the Board of Health and will have another nomination next month. The Mayor recommended that the Code be amended to stagger the terms of Board Members.

Movie Night – A movie night is being scheduled for September that will begin earlier and end earlier. Movie night may move to a Friday or Saturday evening to accommodate families with school-age children, depending on the vendor's availability.

Delaware State Housing Authority – The Governor has implemented two programs to provide mortgage/rent assistance to residents who may have been economically impacted by COVID-19. More information can be found at <http://www.destatehousing.com/>.

Storm Water – The Mayor recognized the Trustees for their efforts with water remediation in Battery Park, and recognized Council and City Staff in partnership with the State and the Trustees for actions taken to mitigate flooding on 3rd Street.

Overgrown Weeds – The Mayor noted that many areas will exhibit overgrowth due to the recent rain and encouraged residents to report these instances to the City.

Notes from the Council President

Board of Health – Council President Ratchford noted that the Board of Health Ordinance is outdated and should be reviewed. She added that the City Solicitor advised that the City is required to have a Board of Health, and noted that it has a valuable role in the City. Council President Ratchford invited comments and thoughts from the Board Members on how it can be better structured.

Board of Building Appeals – Council President Ratchford noted the City Board of Building Appeals has not met in many years, and added that many municipalities that have both a Board of Building Appeals and a Board of Adjustment refer matters to their Board of Adjustment. She suggested that Council look into this.

Electric Vehicle Chargers – MSC has a rebate program for electric vehicle chargers. Council President Ratchford opined that Council may wish to address the use of chargers in the Historic District, and if there are potential issues with residents who install chargers not being able to access their charger.

Miscellaneous

Stuyvesant Avenue Lights – Councilperson Platt noted that all the lights on Stuyvesant Avenue are energized and it has made a big difference in the neighborhood.

Public Comments

Mr. Phil Gross

- Mr. Gross expressed his appreciation to MSC for keeping the power on, and City workers for their outstanding efforts during the recent storms.
- Summer concerts have been going very well and are a welcome distraction. Mr. Gross identified the Councilperson who did not wear a mask at one of the earlier concerts for the Record.
- Mr. Gross asked for clarification on the funds received for Separation Day. Mr. Barthel stated that \$35,000 was received; those monies will be kept in a separate account; and the City will apply for funding next year as well.
- Mr. Gross asked what will be used to replace the bulkhead, and Mr. Bergstrom explained it is riprap, which is rock or other material used to armor shorelines.

Motion, Discussion and Vote on Resolution 2020-18; A Resolution Approving Mayor's Re-appointment to the Planning Commission of Joseph F. Day III. (Council President Ratchford - posted 8/4/2020.) Joseph F. Day III - Term Ending July 11, 2023

A Motion to approve Resolution 2020-18 was made by Councilperson Platt and seconded by Councilperson Souder. Council President Ratchford read the Resolution.

Mr. Day stated that it is an honor to serve and he appreciates the appointment.

There being no discussion, Council President Ratchford called for a vote. On vote, the Motion was unanimously approved.

Motion, Discussion and Vote on Resolution 2020-19; A Resolution Approving Mayor's Re-appointments to the Board of Health. (Council President Ratchford - posted 8/4/2020.) Eleanor Green - Term Ending September 11, 2022; William Hentkowski - Term Ending October 9, 2022; and Dr. Joanne Viola - Term Ending October 9, 2022

A Motion to consider Resolution 2020-19 was made by Councilperson Smith and seconded by Councilperson Souder. Council President Ratchford read the Resolution.

There being no discussion, Council President Ratchford called for a vote. On vote, the Resolution was unanimously approved.

Council Discussion and Possible Action on City's Operations, Budget or Recovery due to COVID-19 (Council President Ratchford – posted 8/4/2020.)

The City Administrator stated that the City has spent \$22,759, \$5,574 of which has been through Police Grants. The remaining \$17,185 has been submitted to the County through the CARES Act. The City will continue to submit allowable expenses for reimbursement.

Tetra Tech, Inc. is drafting a Proposal and Action Plan for opening the City office that should be available by the end of next week. The objective is to fully open the office; however, when that will happen is still undetermined. An Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response Plan is being developed with PMA Group/Risk Control Services, and the City is getting a quote for a buzzer access system for the office.

Any significant expenditure for work on the City office will be submitted to the County for pre-approval through the CARES Act. Mr. Barthel also explained that after review, work required to fully secure the building is not feasible; however, the City is looking at portable options to secure the office.

The Governor did not announce when the State would move to Phase III during his latest update.

All City services continue to be provided, and residents can come to the City office to pay property taxes in person by appointment.

Bike Race – Mr. Barthel had no update on the Bike Race, and he will follow-up.

City Council of New Castle
August 11, 2020

Recognition – Council President Ratchford initiated a discussion for recognition of the Police Department, noting that their position is very high-risk relative to COVID-19, and members of the Police Department have been asked to postpone vacation to provide the level of service expected by the community. After discussion, Council agreed to award 40 hours of vacation to all members of the Police Department and the City Administrator. Council President Ratchford tasked Mr. Barthel with the preparation of a proposal for Council review.

There being no further business to discuss, a Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Councilperson Platt and seconded by Councilperson Smith. On vote, the Motion was unanimously approved and the meeting adjourned at 9:06 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Weirich
Stenographer

Next Regular Meeting Date: September 8, 2020
Posted: 08/04/2020