

City of New Castle Delaware
City Council Meeting
Virtual Meeting via Zoom
Tuesday, September 8, 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
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

Council President Ratchford called the September 8, 2020, Regular City Council meeting to order and introduced the Council and attendees.

Council President Ratchford gave a special tribute to the employees of the City of New Castle for doing an exceptional job in the New Castle Community.

Approval of the Minutes by Date:

A Motion to approve the Minutes of the August 11, 2020 Regular City Council meeting as presented was made by Councilperson Platt, seconded by Councilperson Smith and unanimously approved.

A Motion to approve the Minutes of the August 17, 2020 Special City Council meeting as presented was made by Councilperson Platt, seconded by Councilperson Smith and unanimously approved.

Approval of the Treasurer's Report

Ms. Carlin presented the unaudited Treasurer's Report as of August 31, 2020:

Total unrestricted funds	\$5,116,932.89
Total restricted funds	\$2,274,275.93
Total cash	\$7,391,208.82

Ms. Carlin noted that the total property tax revenues received to date exceeds what was received at the same time last year.

A Motion to approve the unaudited Treasurer's Report as presented was made by Councilperson Smith, seconded by Councilperson Leary, and unanimously approved.

Council President Ratchford introduced Mr. Jerry DuPhily and Ms. Julie Mirowenger from Event Allies to present an update on the River Towns 2020 Program.

River Towns 2020 Program Update

River Ride

Ms. Mirowenger stated the River Ride on October 3, 2020, will be held with a recreational ride component only. Riders can start from any of the three locations and will compete for a medal based on completion of the circuit. All registrations will be completed online and wrist bands will be mailed to participants prior to the event. There will be no day-of registrations and no post-party. The link to the Registration Form will be available on the City website and at Rivertownsfestival.com. Ms. Mirowenger will provide a copy of the turn-by-turn route of the Ride for Council members.

Separation Day

Councilperson Smith suggested that preliminary discussions for Separation Day 2021 be held with Event Allies.

City Administrator & Staff Reports

Report from the City Administrator

Budget

Mr. Barthel explained that the City is at 100% of the projected Budget. To date \$112,677 has been collected vs \$92,887 collected last year at the same time. The transfer tax received in August was \$72,313; and of that sum \$60,000 was collected for the sale of one property that sold for \$4M. Property tax collected is \$2,897,877, or 107% of this year's budget.

The Crier

Effective October 1, 2020, the Trustees will no longer fund the \$264 monthly printing cost of The Crier. If Council chooses to fund printing costs from October-June, the cost would be \$2,376; however, it would not be necessary to fund the entire cost immediately.

Christmas Tree

Mr. Bergstrom obtained several recommendations, one of which was the Norway Spruce. A 24' tall Norway Spruce can be obtained for approximately \$7,500-\$8,300, depending on the area where it is planted.

Signage

Complaints have been received for the lack of speed limit and "Children At Play" signs in the City. Chief McCabe stated there are inconsistencies in signage in the City and recommended that all one-way streets from 6th Street in be kept at 15 mph with signage on each block. Regarding "Children At Play" signs, the Police Department will look into areas where residents feel there

should be signage and follow the required guidelines. Signage in areas identified as problematic and inconsistent speed limits will be reviewed by the Department. Chief McCabe explained the Statute requirements and Mr. Losco noted that if the City imposes any type of traffic regulation a Resolution is required.

After discussion, it was agreed that Staff will present a full recommendation to Council for review with an eye to crafting a Resolution.

Feasibility Study

Mr. Barthel will contact Council members to get suitable dates for a follow-up meeting on the Feasibility Study.

Delaware Street

Delmarva Power has intimated their work on Delaware Street may not be completed for paving to begin by the end of October. Paving is more successful in warmer weather. It was noted that COVID restrictions have affected Delmarva's ability to enter residents' homes at this time; and Union decisions were possibly a factor as well. Council President Ratchford recommended further communications be held with Delmarva Power. Mr. Barthel will provide a summary email to Mayor Quaranta and Council President Ratchford and they will reach out to Delmarva Power.

Report from the Police Chief

Monthly Report

- Part I, II and III crimes continue to drop.
- Quality of Life complaints were down in August.
- There was an armed robbery at Walgreens. The Department Detectives identified the suspect and an arrest was made.
- Conduct complaints in Battery Park have been received. Patrols will be increased in the area and Council will be kept informed.
- In response to complaints, traffic enforcement is being focused on Delaware Street and Moore's Lane.
- The Department is working with the Office of Highway Safety to generate an overtime job to focus on the Delaware Street crosswalk for the fall months.

Initiatives

- Take Care of Delaware – all Officers are now certified in the Take Care of Delaware Initiative to recognize children exposed to trauma.
- Back To School – the Department is continuing the Back Pack initiative and will start collecting items to distribute to at-risk children who may not have access to supplies.
- Delaware Police Accreditation Commission – an on-site assessment was completed this month and the Department received a positive review. Chief McCabe will provide more details at the next Council meeting.

- Drug Enforcement Initiative – the Department will create a team funded through overtime and managed by the Operations Boss with a Patrol Supervisor to obtain and process Department Intel and citizen complaint data, and scrutinize issues relative to drug activity in the City. No tactical information or updates will be submitted.

Noise Complaints

Councilperson Souder asked for an update on noise complaints in the City. Chief McCabe explained the Department's process for issuing a noise violation and/or being placed on the Disorderly Watch List. The Department also brings in mediation to resolve neighbor disputes.

Dangerous Intersection

Mayor Quaranta asked for comment relative to confusion and potential danger at the 7th Street and South Street intersection for vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Council President Ratchford stated that another Grant Application to study bicycle traffic in that area has been submitted and that intersection will be a target of the WILMAPCO Transportation Update study. Chief McCabe made a number of recommendations for Council consideration and Councilperson Smith suggested "Oncoming Traffic Has Right Of Way" signage. Council President requested that Chief McCabe and City Administrator Barthel bring recommendations to the next City Council meeting.

Delmarva Power Gas Main – Rt. 273

Mr. Bergstrom stated the transmission line is open from the Trail to Hare's Corner with no customers on it, and it is scheduled to connect to Boulden Boulevard. Mr. Bergstrom will keep Council updated.

Council Communications

Zoom Meetings

Councilperson Souder noted that a resident complimented Kim Burgmuller for the manner in which she hosts the Zoom meetings.

Tree Removal

Councilperson Leary shared with Council Ron Vukelich's explanation to her of why the trees on 2nd Street were removed and noted that those trees will be replaced.

MSC

Councilperson Leary recognized MSC for their cooperation and generosity in working with a non-profit she belongs to in providing bags of school supplies to be distributed to William Penn students.

Business from the Mayor

Rental Properties

Mayor Quaranta noted that some residents have expressed concerns about rental properties in their neighborhoods managed through the State or non-profit organizations. The Mayor will

reach out to other Mayors to see if they have similar concerns and determine if the State can help the City better understand the breadth of the properties they manage directly or indirectly in New Castle; and ascertain if the City has the right tools and contact information to manage the rental properties in a way that will best support the residents.

Christmas Tree

The Mayor noted that fall is the best time to plant an evergreen tree and suggested obtaining a tree can be done at a low or no cost to the City.

Public Safety

The Mayor recognized Chief McCabe for addressing community public safety in his Report.

Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

The Mayor has communicated to the Planning Commission and the Historic Area Commission regarding electric vehicle charging stations and how those future needs will be addressed as a community.

Property Repairs

The Mayor and the City Administrator spoke with the Director of the State Housing Authority regarding programs that allow for repair of owner-occupied residential properties in light of the Trustees having funded a program to help repair properties in New Castle.

Recognition

The Mayor recognized residents Bob Davis for weeding the front sidewalk of the Dutch House, and Judge and Barb Cooch and Mark and Cynthia Batty for their power washing efforts on Silsbee's Alley.

Notes from the Council President

City Code

Council President Ratchford solicited Council input relative to having Board of Health regulations and the Board of Building Appeals reviewed by the City Solicitor to implement changes to the Code. She noted that the City does not currently have a Board of Building Appeals and recommended that it be combined with the Board of Adjustment. She invited other Council members to work with her on this matter.

Comprehensive Plan

Comments on the Comprehensive Plan are due on October 12, 2020.

Public Comment

Philip Gross

- Mr. Gross asked who decided on the location of the 100th anniversary of the women's right to vote historic marker. Council President Ratchford explained that the location of the historic marker has not yet been decided. The proposed location is related to the

Bethlehem Steel plant and the suffragists that worked there and is supported by a number of historic experts.

- Mr. Gross asked which property sold for \$4M. City Administrator Barthel will provide that information to Mr. Gross.
- Mr. Gross expressed his support of the City taking back organizing Separation Day from Event Allies and urged Council to consider that course of action.
- Mr. Gross opined that The Crier is an important communication for City residents and suggested that funding from the Trustees for Separation Day be utilized to fund printing The Crier.
- Mr. Gross asked where he could obtain information on the River Town Ride and was directed to the City website.

Tami Vickers

- Ms. Vickers suggested that Council members visit Dobbinsville to better understand the area and the needs of the residents.
- Ms. Vickers noted that there are a number of very large potholes in Dobbinsville that require repair.
- Ms. Vickers opined that more City attention should be focused on outlying areas of New Castle and residents who may need the City's assistance.

Council President Ratchford stated that all residents in every area of the City are important. She agreed that potholes in the City should be fixed and noted that she also has concerns about vacant properties in the City. She encouraged Ms. Vickers to reach out to the City office or Council members with any concerns she may have. Ms. Vickers proposed that Council members meet with her to walk through Dobbinsville and offered to assist with City efforts to improve the community and aid the residents.

Councilperson Leary noted that Dobbinsville is on the October City Council Agenda, and she will meet with Ms. Vickers to outline the priorities in Dobbinsville in preparation for the meeting. Council President Ratchford said that she would also be happy to meet with Ms. Vickers and reiterated that City Council does care about the Dobbinsville community. Councilperson Smith volunteered to meet with Councilperson Leary and Ms. Vickers.

Councilperson Platt recommended that the City Administrator inspect the potholes in Dobbinsville.

Gail Levinson

- Ms. Levinson stated that excessive vehicle speed on South Street and 4th Street makes the area hazardous for bicycles and pedestrians. She opined that the removal of parking in front of the Senior Center encourages more speeding and suggested that the Police focus on those areas for speeders.
- Ms. Levinson opined that instead of spending \$5,000 for trash cans on Delaware Street, trash cans should be put south of Delaware, in parking lots, and in Battery Park to accommodate visitors.

Old Business

Council Discussion and Possible Action on City's Operations, Budget or Recovery due to COVID-19

Playgrounds

President Ratchford recommended that City playgrounds remain closed until Phase III. It was noted that sanitization of equipment is a guideline and not a regulation; County playgrounds are open; and the State is not prohibiting playgrounds from being open.

Public Bathrooms

Councilperson Leary opined that public bathrooms should be opened. The last discussions with the Trust regarding opening the public bathroom in Battery Park were relative to concerts and movie nights. The City Administrator will contact the County to ascertain if public bathroom cleaning costs are reimbursable under the CARES Act.

Signage

Chief McCabe will reach out to DeIDOT to see if the placard messaging can be changed.

Council President Ratchford called for a Motion on the issue of opening the City Playgrounds.

A Motion to reopen the City Playgrounds was made by Councilperson Platt and seconded by Councilperson Leary. On vote:

- Councilperson Platt – aye
- Councilperson Leary – aye
- Councilperson Smith – nay
- Councilperson Souder – nay
- Council President Ratchford – nay

The Motion failed.

Councilperson Platt protested the Motion, stating City Council did not vote to close the playgrounds and therefore, a vote to open them is not required. Council President Ratchford stated that City Council assumed the responsibility of managing COVID issues when the State of Emergency was terminated.

CARES Act

City Administrator Barthel stated that the City and MSC have worked out an agreement and an MOE has been executed whereby MSC will apply for CARES grant funding through the City. The City stipulates that MSC can only access up to \$15,000 and if the City is required to reimburse the County for those funds, MSC will reimburse the City.

Council Discussion: Revisions to Chapter 28 of the Code of the City of New Castle regarding States of Emergency

Mr. Losco gave an overview of the revisions made to Chapter 28 of the City Code relative to expanding the Code to encompass a wide variety of emergencies and associated roles and responsibilities. During discussion, Council members made comments, corrections, and editorial recommendations to the proposed revisions.

Motion, Discussion and Vote on Resolution 2020-20; A Resolution Allowing for the Placement of a Historic Marker in Connection with the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment, Women's Right to Vote, to be Placed Approximately 100-200 feet past the 1 % Mile Marker along the Biking Path South of Dobbinsville.

A Motion to consider Resolution 2020-20 was made by Councilperson Leary and seconded by Councilperson Smith. Council President Ratchford read the Resolution. After discussion, Council President Ratchford called for a vote. On vote, the Resolution passed unanimously.

Motion, Discussion and Vote on Resolution 2020-21; A Resolution Approving Mayor's Re-appointments to the Board of Health.

Joseph Day - Term Ending September 11, 2022
Tish Gallagher - Term Ending September 11, 2022

A Motion to consider Resolution 2020-21 was made by Councilperson Leary and seconded by Councilperson Smith. Council President Ratchford read the Resolution. There being no discussion, Council President Ratchford called for a vote. On vote, the Resolution passed unanimously.

Motion, Discussion and Vote on Resolution 2020-22: A Resolution to Designate Trash Truck owned by the City as Surplus Property and Authorizing Disposal of said Surplus Property.

A Motion to consider Resolution 2020-22 was made by Councilperson Smith and seconded by Councilperson Leary. Council President Ratchford read the Resolution. City Administrator Barthel explained the rationale for disposing of the truck. Council President Ratchford called for a vote. On vote, the Resolution passed unanimously.

Motion, Discussion and Vote on Resolution 2020-24; A Resolution Approving the City of New Castle Housing Assistance Program, Funded by the Trustees of the New Castle Common.

A Motion to consider Resolution 2020-24 was made by Councilperson Platt and seconded by Councilperson Leary. Council President Ratchford read the Resolution. City Administrator Barthel explained the program and answered Council questions. After discussion, Council agreed Resolution 2020-24 should be amended by adding the words "or permanently disabled" to Criteria #2 of the Resolution.

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A Motion to amend Criteria #2 of Resolution 2020-24 by adding the words “or permanently disabled” was made by Councilperson Souder and seconded by Councilperson Smith. On vote, the Motion passed unanimously.

Council President Ratchford called for a vote on Resolution 2020-24. On vote, the Motion passed unanimously.

Motion, Discussion and Vote on Resolution 2020-23; A Resolution to Request that the \$5,000 Funding Commitment for Separation Day from the Trustees of the New Castle Common be allocated to the Purchase of Trash Cans for Delaware Street.

A Motion to table Resolution 2020-23 was made by Council President Ratchford and seconded by Councilperson Platt. On vote, the Motion passed unanimously.

Councilperson Leary noted that funding for new trash cans consists of \$5,000 from the Trust and \$2,800 from the Partnership and would not come out of the City Budget.

There being no further business to discuss, a Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Councilperson Leary and seconded by Councilperson Platt. On vote, the Motion was unanimously approved and the meeting adjourned at 9:33 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Weirich
Stenographer

Next Regular Meeting Date: October 13, 2020
Posted: 09/01/2020