**MINUTES**

**February 25, 2020**

Chairman Smith called the Special Council Meeting – Joint Public Workshop to order at 6:36 p.m. in the City Council Chamber.

Councilman Paul McAuley, Ward 2, and Councilman Edward Brady, Ward 4 were in attendance as well as the following Plan Commission members: Chairman Smith, Ken Mason, Joseph Morales, Robert DiStefano, Kathleen Lanphear and Ann Marie Maccarone.

Also present were: Jason M. Pezzullo, AICP, Planning Director

Douglas McLean, AICP, Principal Planner

Joshua Berry, AICP, Senior Planner

J. Jenkins, Clerk

Chairman Smith turned the meeting over to Jason Pezzullo, Planning Director, for a brief PowerPoint presentation.

Mr. Pezzullo explained what a Comprehensive Plan is and why it is important. Mr. Pezzullo explained that the City’s current 10-Year Comprehensive Plan has been expired since 2017 and State Law requires by the plan to be updated. Over the next year the Planning Department staff along with the Plan Commission and City Council Members will be seeking the engagement of the community and key stakeholders. The public engagement process will include a series of 6 public workshops, one held in each different council ward as well as interviews and surveys. Mr. Pezzullo also stated that the projected timeline to update the Comprehensive Plan would take approximately 4 years to complete and obtain approval by the State of Rhode Island.

Mr. McLean stated that although the meetings will be open to every Cranston resident, that the intent of holding these meetings throughout various geographic areas in the City is that the feedback provided may differ thus providing the most dynamic, localized input.

Councilman Brady posed the question that if the current Comprehensive Plan has been expired for 3 years and Mr. Pezzullo’ s projected timeline would take another 4 years to complete, would there be a penalty assessed by the State of Rhode Island?

Mr. Pezzullo state that the current comprehensive plan is still relevant and valid for local decision and will remain so until the State of Rhode Island approves the newly proposed plan. No penalty will be assessed to the City although a State-approved Comprehensive Plan could potentially have impacts on State decisions.

Mr. Pezzullo went on to announce that the public workshops will be held on the 4th Wednesday of each month for the next six months beginning March 25th as that does not appear to interfere with any other public meeting. Each Ward was chosen at random for these workshops and will be heard in the following order Ward 2, Ward 5, Ward 4, Ward 1, Ward 3, and Ward 6. Mr. Pezzullo asked that Council help with attendance at these meetings. Councilman McCauley confirmed that he would assist and would like to meet with Planning Staff in advance of the meeting in his ward.

Ms. Lanphear asked if these dates were set as she will be on vacation during the meeting for her Ward.

Mr. Pezzullo stated that because they were chosen at random and accommodations have not yet been made that they can be rearranged.

Mr. Pezzullo stated that a consultant would cost between $150,000 and $200,000 and that a shoestring budget won’t produce a good document.

Mr. Brady stated that he would like to check if the date of the Public Workshop for Ward 4 would work for the constituents of his Ward who frequent these meetings and also that Drake Patten has volunteered her space at Hurricane Hill Farm for the Ward 4 Public Workshop.

Ms. Patten stated that she would be available for the date of May 27th for the Ward 4 Public Workshop.

Mr. Morales asked what venues would be chosen for the meetings.

Mr. Pezzullo expressed that the meetings would come to each ward and that the Planning Department would be open to suggestions from the public as well as the Council Members as to which venues in their Wards would provide the best environments to hold these Public Workshops.

Mr. Mason asked what a stakeholder group is. Mr. Pezzullo explained that it is anyone who has an interest in the City.

Chairman Smith opened the meeting to public comment.

Annette Bourne, 51 Community Drive, asked if arrangements had been made for translators or sign language interpreters in order for these workshops to remain inclusive.

Mr. McLean assured Ms. Bourne that the City offers interpreter services, when requested, for all public meetings.

Ms. Bourne also asked if the City would be hiring a 3rd party consultant to assist with the update of the Comprehensive Plan and if so, would they be involved in the Public Workshops. She suggested that the City may want to bring on the consultant before proceeding with community engagement. She recommended utilizing Grow Smart and Housing Works as resources.

Mr. Pezzullo expressed that a third party consultant would be beneficial for this process but that the City cannot hold up the Public Workshops in order to wait for funding approval.

Pauline DiRosa, 97 Cypress Drive, stated that even though the Garden City shopping center had been recently sold, Joe Koechel is still currently the property manager and would be a good contact for a key stakeholder interview. She also stated that the Cranston Public Library would be an appropriate venue for the Ward 6 Public Workshop.

Ms. Patten expressed the importance of a 3rd party consultant as well as explaining to the public in very basic verbiage how important community engagement is to the update of the Comprehensive Plan.

Doug Doe, 78 Lippit Avenue, stated that land use and conservation is critical for future planning. Mr. Doe offered the West Bay Land Trust as a resource and mentioned the importance of the Pawtuxet River.

Councilman McAuley asked if the City had a contact for other municipalities that have recently updated and received State approval for their 10-Year Comprehensive Plan and asked if it would it be possible to reach out to get ideas of how they went about obtaining community input.

Mr. Pezzullo Stated that yes the City has a contact for North Kingstown, RI

Councilman McAuley expressed that his main focus for the Public Workshop for Ward 2 would be the revitalization of Rolfe Square as well as affordable housing and ensuring his Ward maintains adequate open space areas. And that in addition he would be willing to seek grant money so that the burden of this funding does not fall entirely on the taxpayers.

Chairman Smith asked if any Council or Commission members had comments for Mr. Pezzullo or the Planning Department Staff regarding the presentation.

Ms. Maccarone agreed that providing the public with language interpreter services would be imperative to maintain inclusivity.

Mr. DiStefano stated that the Comprehensive Plan should articulate target goals for renewable energy.

Councilman Brady also expressed his concerns for protecting green space as well as finishing sidewalk projects within his Ward, updates to the ice rink and the possibility of proposing a dog park. Mr. Brady also asked if the Planning Staff had decided to include a 3rd party consultant in their budget proposal for fiscal year 2021.

Mr. Pezzullo stated that yes, a 3rd party consultant has been included in the budget proposal but that they did intend to continue with the Public Workshops in the meantime.

Chairman Smith recommended re-reading the Comprehensive Plan for all of the portions which are not often utilized and asked that the Planning website include a link to the State’s comprehensive plan requirements.

Councilman McAuley asked when the clock starts for the 10-year expiration.

Mr. Pezzullo replied that the clock starts when the state approves the plan.

Councilman Brady asked if the costs for consulting could be phased.

Ms. Lanphear asked how Mr. Pezzullo and his staff had planned to notify the community of these Workshops.

Mr. Pezzullo stated that was the reason for this kickoff meeting, to get ideas and feedback on the best way to approach these issues.

Mr. McLean offered that the City’s Facebook page or a newspaper advertisement would be a good way to inform the community.

Mr. DiStefano stated as would announcing the upcoming Workshop at the monthly Plan Commission Meetings. Mr. Distefano also added that a way to generate public interest would be to educate in basic terms.

Gretchen Bingle stated that schools would be a great way to get word out.

Jessica Marino, 799 Natick Avenue, stated that the Public Library is a great resource to get the word out.

Ms. Bourne announced that the Community Development Department was in the process of updating their 5-year consolidation for HUD and Stephanie Susi would be a good contact.

Ms. DiRosa would like to see a brief description of the City’s Comprehensive Plan attached to the Public Notice to further reiterate the importance of community involvement.

Councilman McAuley asked if the Planning Department Staff would be able to create this type of flyer.

Mr. Pezzullo, and his staff agreed that, yes they would be able to produce this type of flyer.

Mr. Berry asked to clarify the expectation of when a consultant could be brought on. Mr. Pezzullo answered that the budget would be approved in July.

Ms. Bourne stated that the 2021 Census is about to kickoff and recommended to push the 10-Year Comp Plan timeline up six months in order to be able to use the 2020 Census information.

Mr. Pezzullo assured Mr. Bourne that the 2020 Census information would be used in this process but that it, nor 3rd party consultant funding, should hold up the Public Workshops.

Caitlyn Blankenship stated that the City should not start without a consultant as repeating outreach can engender mistrust.

Mr. Pezzullo stated that the City is already too far behind to hold up beginning the process.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Upon a motion by Ms. Lanphear and seconded by Mr. DiStefano, Chairman Smith called the Special Council Meeting – Joint Public Workshop to an end at 7:38pm

**NEXT REGULAR MEETING – Ward** 2March 25th **-** 6:30PM City Hall Council Chamber