



## *City of Mount Rainier*

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### **CITY MANAGER REPORT JANUARY 5, 2010**

The following activities occurred during the month of November 2009:

#### **Engineer Inspections**

The city's engineer consultant inspected one property for water intrusion and the Eastern Star building to determine whether there was any evidence of structural deficiencies.

#### **Meetings/Trainings**

The management team participated in the CDBG sponsored focus group meeting on the 5-year consolidated plan. The city manager sits on the panel with Lloyd Baskin from CDBG, Bea Tignor, Administrator for the City of Glenarden, and Jan Townshend of the Neighborhood Design Center. The next 5-year plan for the period 2011-2015 will attempt to focus on municipal priorities and developing additional funding mechanisms for cities and towns.

The management team also participated in a two-day training with the Department of Housing and Community Development Main Street Programs. The significant information gleaned from this training was shared with board members of the Mount Rainier Business Association.

Representatives from PEPCO met with management to discuss needs relative to lighting issues for possible parking uses at the former Bass property. Since that meeting, the council has directed staff to pursue federal funding for the former Blue Bird Cab lot as an alternative kiss and ride lot for bus riders. No response has been received to date from the Federal Transit Administration regarding this request despite two contacts. The federal requirements regarding property acquisition is a lengthy process. Follow-up with Congressman Van Hollen's office is anticipated in late 2009 or early 2010.

Chief Michael Scott scheduled a traffic safety meeting regarding the traffic circle at the request of the city manager. While the meeting allowed citizens to voice concerns, the management team from State Highway Administration was unable to attend due to illness. Subsequent to this meeting, a resident from the city has forwarded follow-up correspondence concerning the

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dissatisfaction of Mount Rainier residents about requests for improvements through a pedestrian signal, lighting within the crosswalk, or other safety enhancements.

The management team also met with County Council member Will Campos concerning funding for the Market Study which was completed in March 2009. Kevin Malachi, Senior Vice President of Prince George's Economic Development Corporation (EDC) indicated that due to a communication problem, the funding was not awarded to the city. Both Mr. Malachi and Council member Campos felt that the matter could be easily resolved with a re-draft of the MOU between the city and EDC.

The following represents significant activities during the month of December 2009:

**Meetings**

The Prince George's Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) met with the city's management team to discuss the possibility of a bus layover in the 3500 block of Rhode Island Avenue. DPWT was informed that State Highway Administration would have to be contacted and approve the request and then the city council would have to approve the installation of bus layover signs.

**Property Acquisition**

The city successfully closed on the purchase of the former Dudley Funeral Home located at 3200 Rhode Island Avenue and the adjacent house located 3701 Eastern Avenue, Mount Rainier, MD. This brings the total sf. available for development to approximately 33,000sf. The city intends to aggressively pursue development interests in this area.

The Mayor and management staff attended the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds in 2010. The next grant application is due January 22, 2010 and city management has requested a priority list from the council.

**Grant Project Funding**

The Storm Drain Improvement Project for 32<sup>nd</sup> and Rainier Avenue is underway. The contract has been signed for \$100,000 reimbursable funding through DPWT.

Management received no responses to the RFP for the weatherization improvements to the Rainier Manor Apartment Complex. The Maryland Department of Energy requires that the contract award must be given to an Energy Star Certified contractor. The city will re-issue the advertisement for this project within the next 2 weeks.

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CDBG PY 34 grant application is currently under the County's administrative review board. The city has been notified that funding in the amount of \$300,000 should be awarded soon. The project request was for the following projects:

- Four (4) bridge repairs
- Kaywood Lighting Improvement
- Curb and gutter replacement at Buchannan Street and Chillum Road
- Curb replacement at Joe's Movement Emporium on Bunker Hill Road
- Curb replacement 4000 block of 31<sup>st</sup>, 3800 block of 31<sup>st</sup>, and 3800 block of 30<sup>th</sup> 35<sup>th</sup> Street Alley re-pavement

The city did not receive a direct award for CDBG PY 35. The city was awarded through CDBG-R (Recovery stimulus funds) \$98,000 for curb, gutter and sidewalk repairs in Kaywood Garden Apartments. A pre-construction conference will be scheduled mid-January 2010 and the project should commence relatively quickly following the conference within a 30-45 day time frame.

Management has drafted a letter to Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) and submitted it for review by the Community Legacy Program Manager. MHT must approve the project for 3409 Rhode Island Avenue (the LibraryProject) before moving forward.

**Finance Department**

The Fiscal Year Audit for the period ending June 30, 2009 was conducted and went smoothly. The city submitted the required Uniform Financial Report (UFR) to the Office of Legislative Reference on time November 1, 2009.

The office is aware that property tax revenue will be reduced for FY 2011 however the figures won't be available until much later in the fiscal year. Contact with the Office of Assessment and Taxation has revealed that the County Council will not adopt the property assessments until June 2010. We are hopeful that figures will be available to us sometime in mid-March prior to the FY 2011 budget adoption.

**Public Works/Snow Removal**

By now it is apparent that the snow removal during the snowfall in mid-December did not go as planned. Management has accepted full responsibility for the problems incurred and has put measures in place to prevent or at the least minimize the problems experienced.

First and foremost, there were major equipment problems. The equipment was serviced in November and December 2009. However, during the attempts to adequately remove snow and

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ice, the public works staff continued to experience problems with the equipment. Management found out just today that previous preventive maintenance on both of the salt spreaders and snow plows was not done according to specifications, or at a minimum the mechanics assigned to perform the work did not perform the necessary repairs in order for the equipment to operate properly. There were electrical wire shortages which caused one spreader to work intermittently. The spreader on the dump truck was operating sufficiently but the truck experienced a tire outage on a perfectly good tire. Subsequent repairs on the same equipment after the snow storm revealed this information.

From discussions with the management and staff there were also communication problems. The public works staff did not pre-treat the surface areas prior to the snow fall even though this is the normal procedure. Salting began at approximately 11:00 pm almost 3 hours after the snow fall began. It has also been confirmed that we need to pre-treat prior to accumulation and even without the equipment failures, back-up equipment and at least one other truck to provide adequate snow plowing and salt spreading capability is needed. In this area there was a judgment error on the part of management partially because of the lack of experience in dealing with a significant amount of snow fall. The last time this occurred was in 2003 when most of the city's snow equipment had not been replaced in almost a decade. The city currently has a 7 man crew with six drivers. However, the current equipment enables two drivers to operate the equipment at the same time and other personnel to operate the snow blowers, shovels, etc., to clear city owned property.

This is what we have learned and subsequently put in place: We have a stand-by contractor that we used in 2003 and again in 2009 to assist with snow removal should the need arise. This contractor has the equipment, manpower and capability to remove whatever amount falls on the city's roadway with a two (2) hour lead time notice for a spreader and plow with one staff person and four (4) hour notice for additional personnel or equipment including plows, spreaders and bobcats. Discussions as to whether the city should invest in a bobcat was negative due to the infrequency of major snow accumulations and it was felt that the purchase was cost prohibitive (approximately \$65,000 for a new machine and \$25,000 for a used or rebuilt one).

Consultations with DPWT confirmed that the salt the city is using (Sodium Chloride) is the same mixture that the County is utilizing and comes from the same manufacturer. The City manager and PW Director Smith confirmed with the DPWT Highway Maintenance Division that the salt (pre-treatment) of roadway surfaces should occur just prior to accumulation. We have further determined that the city will pre-treat simultaneously when the County pre-treats.

The snow removal plan that has been in place for over 15 years still appears to be adequate. Snow emergency routes are cleared first. Followed by side streets (particularly those that seem to have "cold spots" i.e., ice up prior to other areas. All street leading into 34<sup>th</sup> Street clearly ice up at the sloping areas into 34<sup>th</sup>. Those will be cleared early with an emphasis on 30<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup>,

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Shepherd, and 36<sup>th</sup> and Shepherd, Rainier Avenue etc. All side streets will be cleared followed by the streets in Kaywood with an early emphasis on Upshur, Kaywood Drive and Russell Avenue which appear to accumulate ice first.

The analysis of what public works refers to as the “small side” of town by city hall appeared to have much less difficulty in terms of clearing than did the areas west of Rhode Island Avenue. The sun rises on the small side and provides an early thawing on warmer days. The other side has more shade covering and late sun which may attribute to increased freezing on that side of the city. Therefore, attention will be given to clearing roadways on the more difficult side first. Alley ways are cleared last.

Public works will submit for its 2011 budget submission a request for an additional heavy duty truck to provide salting and spreading capability. This will enable the city to have three drivers operating equipment during one 8-10 hour shift. While this shift rests or goes home, the second three-man shift will be ready to operate.

Additionally, all salt spreaders have been adequately repaired, snow plow blades sharpened, and two additional spreaders and plows have been ordered as back up in case the other equipment malfunctions. The public works director along with the Assistant City manager is researching the possibility of retrofitting one of the older trash trucks with plowing capability.

Luther Smith has also been directed to look into developing a MOU with neighboring jurisdictions similar to the city’s police department MOU for back up support during emergencies.

Two other points I think need mentioning here. The city has a small staff but one that is dedicated to this city. While that may not have appeared to be the case, management was on hand 12-16 hours each day physically in the city, or on the phone with one another making suggestions, calling contractors, driving through the city to personally observe the work be done by the contractor and PW staff, and riding the snow plows directing the contractor along with PW on the streets to clear.

Secondly, many residents feel that snow removal is a simple and easy task considering that the city is only a little over one square mile. The one square mile is a misnomer as the city has 15.6 miles of roadway surface inside its borders according to Maryland State Highway Administration. Snow plowing particularly has to be done with much precision to avoid damage to residential as well as city property and vehicles. I know now first hand about that precision after being on the snow plow for 4 hours. Oftentimes the same streets have to be cleared several times because of shoveling snow back into the street as opposed to the tree box as required by city code. This was a significant amount of snow fall; so much so that Governor O’Malley declared the State an emergency. The Federal Government saw the need to close. As a result, the city is eligible for recuperating much of the equipment repair costs through Maryland

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Emergency Management Administration (MEMA). The request for reimbursement was due today, and the city's request was submitted yesterday.

Additionally, we may also be able to recoup some of our losses associated with equipment repair through our insurance provider Local Government Insurance Trust (LGIT). No one was injured, no one was hurt, and thankfully no emergency equipment was called and could not get through the city's streets. The Mount Rainier Police Department used our two four wheel vehicles to ensure no one was trapped and to issue 82 tickets to vehicles abandoned on the city's snow emergency routes. These tickets if paid on time will render \$8,200. That's the good news

All in all we could have and should have done a better job. We apologize for inconveniences and frustrations experienced by everyone. We pledge to you our sincere dedication and a concerted effort perform better in the future.

**End of Report**