

Official Minutes of the City of Mount Rainier
MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING / LEGISLATIVE MEETING
DATE: April 7, 2020
ZOOM MEETING

Call to Order

7:00 PM, ZOOM MEETING

Presiding Officer

Mayor Malinda Miles

Officials Present

Councilmember Celina Benitez
Councilmember Scott Cecil
Councilmember Luke Chesek
Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Staff Present

Interim City Manager Latasha C. Gatling
City Clerk John Hoatson

Minutes provided by:

City Clerk

Call to order was made by Mayor Malinda Miles at 7:00 PM.

Mayor Miles read the agenda into the record.

Motion to Add a Closed Session to discuss personnel matters: Mayor Malinda Miles

Move: Councilmember Councilmember Celina Benitez

Second: Councilmember Luke Chesek

Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed

Motion to Approve Amended Agenda: Mayor Malinda Miles

Move: Councilmember Celina Benitez

Second: Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed

Public Hearing:

Interim City Manager Latasha C. Gatling read the press release into the record.

As of 3/25/2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MOUNT RAINIER, MD- The City of Mount Rainier is announcing its closing on the sale of approximately 33,000 square feet of vacant land located at 3200 Rhode Island Avenue for \$1.5 million to IFG Group Development and Construction. IFG Group is a well-known, well-respected entity with headquarters in Washington, DC and New York with diverse business interests. The 3200 Rhode Island Avenue property was listed on the open market in January 2019 when the City recognized its need to attract national and international real estate developers and enhance the Rhode Island Avenue corridor.

The land parcel is located on the corner of Rhode Island Avenue and Eastern Avenue. IFG Group intends to develop the parcel as a mixed-use multi-unit apartment complex with retail outlets on the ground level.

For more information about the project, visit <http://ifggroup.us/project/3200-rhode-island-ave-mount-rainier-md-20712/>

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling stated there were no public comment.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler stated point is there was an emergency ordinance for this. Closing date was less than two weeks from the reading. This was a financial emergency. This requires a special public hearing to explain why this was done by Mayor & City Council.

Motion to Adjourn Public Hearing – Mayor Malinda Miles

Moved: Councilmember Celina Benitez

Seconded: Councilmember Luke Chesek

Motion Passed - 4-0-0

Mayor Miles then called the legislative meeting to order and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor and Councilmember then each took turns and provided their event announcements.

Councilmember Celina Benitez – World Central Kitchen provided 500 meals to Rainier Manor 1 & 2 and Artists Lofts. Kaywood also received some of the meals. This is a partnership with World Central Kitchen, Latino Advisory Board, County Executive Office and Sardis. They provided chicken, rice and vegetable. Looking forward to continuing the partnership.

Youth Scholarship deadline will be extended by Mayor & City Council and hopefully moving it to next month.

Census 2020 – 39.9% at present with Census count. Going to amp up the information. Goal is 80%. Going to have a virtual party in the next two weeks. Finalized banners out in the community. Couple people have been big advocates and created door hangers to help increase numbers. Please get it done.

Councilmember Luke Cheseck – 31st Street Pocket Park and planting trees that was going to happen in April / May. Social gatherings are canceled. Trees will still be dropped off there. Working on a planting schedule where one person will go to the park for planting the trees. Forest walk that connects 31st Street Pocket Park run through to Rainier Avenue. Highly recommend taking that walk through the forest as opposed to walking on concrete.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler – None

Councilmember Scott Cecil - Hopefully no one has any events scheduled because people need to be staying at home. Seen upsetting of posts of people hanging out together. Virtual events coming up. Accidental fatal overdoses. Series of online trainings in April and May on how to use Narcan. People are practicing social distancing are alone and many accidentally overdose. Information regarding trainings will be made available on the community listserv.

Mayor Malinda Miles – Thanked CERT Team, Robin Bliss & Mount Rainier Police Department. Thanked the residents for donating items to CERT Team during the pandemic. Thanked Kathy for setting up a food pantry on the North end of Mount Rainier.

2017 Audit

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling announced that the 2017 Audit is finalized, completed and on the website. Mayor & City Council each were provided a copy. This information is solely on the 2017 fiscal year. Some of the information is outdated. Residents can request a copy of the 2017 audit by sending an email to City Clerk, John Hoatson. Hope is that 2018, 2019 audits done by the end of summer. Hope auditors can come present the 2019, 2020 audits.

Vice Mayor Bryan Knedler Read the Closed Session Summary From March 3, 2020 & March 17, 2020 into the record.

COVID-19 Emergency Preparations

Mayor Miles – Wants funds allocated for the Police Department, CERT Team to purchase food, toilet paper and handle needs of the City during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Ring Cameras decided to allow City to keep \$10,000.00. There was another \$20,000 for training. Mayor would like \$10,000.00 allocated for a COVID-19 Emergency Preparation Fund.

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling: Police did spend some of the money on training. 7K left is training. There is 12K available in community policing.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler read the list provided by Mayor Miles.

1. Purchase large quantities of toilet paper and paper towels.
2. Set up emergency food fund – up to \$5,000.00
3. Increase patrolling to interrupt and stop congregating of 10 or more people
4. Purchase large quantities of masks – Work with CERT Team to distribute to residents
5. Bring back power shift patrol to knock on doors of vulnerable seniors

Mayor Miles stated that County Executive Office will interview the seniors at Rainier Manor 1 and Rainier Manor 2 to see what the needs is.

Found a distributor for toilet paper. 96 rolls for \$55.00. Can be delivered tomorrow.

Cottage City YMCA provided food and produce to Artist Lofts, Rainier Manor 1 and Rainier Manor 2.

CERT Team held two food drives. Collected quite a bit of can goods. Chicken, burgers and produce.

Pantry and found so many needs in Queens Manor that they just stated giving out bags of food themselves.

Thursday they will be opening the pantry in Queens Manor. Doing it in conjunction with CERT.

Councilmember Benitez – Meals are going very quickly. Closing down some of the businesses in town. Kids 17 & 18 are not covered. Need is definitely there. As a City we need to have a recovery plan. There are going to be businesses that will not open again and jobs lost. Need to become ahead of the pace by having a recovery plan.

Mayor Miles – Structure for the recovery plan and the need. County Executive Office recommended putting a recovery plan in place. City Manager and Police Chief could lead the recovery plan. CERT Team would like a place to store meat and things. Mediterranean Café has allows them to store food there. Purchase a large freezer for the basement of the Police Station to keep food that is being handed out. Would recommend the purchase of one large freezer, maybe 2.

Councilmember Knedler - Suggested looking into leasing two freezers. Once this is done does not know what the City will do with them.

Councilmember Scott Cecil – Appreciated the work that has been done. Agrees with moving \$10K to where there is a need. Unprecedented emergency. Worried about Mayor & City Council becoming a bottleneck. Need someone to be a point person to speed the process. Anything we can do to help folks have food is top priority.

Mayor Miles – Police and Cert Team must document all expenses. FEMA and MEMA has said they will reimburse expenses to the maximum that is allowed. Spoken to Senator Cardin and Governor and was assured of that.

Councilmember Luke Chesek – Thanked everyone for the work they are doing. Spoke to folks in Rainier Manor yesterday. Need to put the money into a budget amendment. If there is anything that can be done to make this process easier, that would be great. Thanked the CERT Team. Have Ronald Hopkins, Director of Economic Development work with the local businesses.

Mayor Miles has been meeting with small businesses in the area. Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling and Ronald Hopkins, Director of Economic Development need to assist small businesses with application and funding sources. Assist people who need to file for unemployment.

Employ Prince George's is giving out \$200.00 VISA cards to people who make \$19.00 an hour or less. Documented or undocumented citizens can apply for this.

These types of things are not going to help seniors. Senior don't have bed pads.

Other areas of residents lives and we have to look beyond food.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler - Bunker Hill Fire Station may have refrigerator space.

St. Johns has adult diapers. Not providing easy access to their building. WMATA buses are down to 2 buses in the City. Tricky trying to get some of this stuff done.

Need is for a refrigerator and freezer. Remove 10K out of the contingency to place into the COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness Fund.

Wants Latasha to go through the budget and look through for additional money.

Motion to Approve Movement of Funds For COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness - Mayor Malinda Miles

Move: Councilmember Celina Benitez

Second: Councilmember Luke Chesek

Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed

Vice Mayor Knedler read the Closed Session Summaries from March 3, 2020 & March 17, 2020

Adoption of Minutes from Previous Meetings

February 4, 2020 Legislative Meeting

February 18, 2020 Work Session

February 25, 2020 Special Planning Work Session

March 3, 2020 Legislative Meeting

March 5, 2020 Public Hearing Regarding Chuck's Liquor License

March 17, 2020 Work Session

March 20, 2020 Emergency Meeting of Mayor & City Council

Motion to Approve Meeting Minutes - Mayor Malinda Miles

Move: Councilmember Celina Benitez

Second: Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed

New Business:

Resolution 06-2020: A Resolution To Support The Five-Year Designation of A State Enterprise Zone Focus Area Within Our Boundaries.

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling read Resolution 06-2020.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler – This was done before. They have broadened the boundaries. More businesses will be eligible.

Motion to Approve Resolution 06-2020: A Resolution To Support The Five-Year Designation of A State Enterprise Zone Focus Area Within Our Boundaries - Mayor Malinda Miles

Move: Councilmember Celina Benitez

Second: Councilmember Luke Chesek

Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed – Needed to be sent off tomorrow.

Resolution 07-2020: Appointing A New Member To The Mount Rainier Arts Commission

Councilmember Luke Chesek - Justin Bost is on the Design Review Board. Live in Mount Rainier. Arts Commission would like to add diversity to the group. He would be invaluable to the Arts Commission. Team is excited to approve of Justin's appointment.

Councilmember Celina Benitez - Helped a lot in the Artist's Lofts. Would be a great addition to the team.

Councilmember Luke Chesek said there are two more spots open on the Arts Commission

Motion to Approve Resolution 07-2020: - Appointing A New Member To The Mount Rainier Arts Commission - Mayor Malinda Miles

Move: Councilmember Councilmember Luke Chesek

Second: Councilmember Councilmember Celina Benitez

Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed

Mayor, Council & City Manager Reports

Councilmember Luke Chesek – Memorial Park 2 months ago – letter of intent for the Maryland Historic Trust to apply for a grant.

Grant application was turned into ATHA. Aaron will submit it to the State. No extra money needs to be use for this.

Thank you – Scott budget discussion

Bryan – City Manager Search

Celina – World Central Kitchen in town

Mayor – Hustling to get calls done for COVID-19

Thanked his wife who is a nurse.

Councilmember Celina Benitez – Continue serving meals in the City.

Thanked Deni Taveras and Danielle Carter –

Councilmember Scott Cecil – Grant Selector for the Maryland States Arts Council. Great experience. Reviewed 44 applications. Was happy to be paid for it. Municipalities can apply for grants through the Maryland State Arts Council.

Dealing with some family issues. Making it hard to do council duties.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler – Committees and boards are still meeting virtual meetings.

Thanked all staff for the work that is being done.

Mayor Miles – Thanked staff and residents. Surge will happen next week. We need to be ready.

Some normalcy with parking tickets. Going to get worse before it gets better. We will come out of this better than most.

Mount Rainier is at the table. Mayor will assemble a fact sheet to help residents.

Latasha Gatling – Mayor & City Council will receive reports of staff who are teleworking.

Thanked Public Works and Police Department. Thank you is not even enough.

Happy to work with a group of people who stand on the forefront no matter what.

Items to discuss – Public Works – In FY 2020 Budget there was money allocated for the purchase of a dump truck. Just because something was in the budget does not mean you can spend it. Budget is just numbers. Numbers were inflated. Conversation with the dealer started in June / July when previous City Manager was there. Cost was \$75,000.00 over 4 years. Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling will not sign for it until it is approved by Mayor & City Council.

Mayor Miles- asked Councilmember Knedler to find it in the budget. It is located on page 81. In September Council made the decision to hold on spending and hiring. If City is not fully staffed, should City put a hold on the purchase? Can the truck be returned if in City's possession?

Councilmember Bryan Knedler – Yes. It says City will purchase vehicles. There is nothing in the Capital Improvement Plan. Did City already purchase 6 or 7 vehicles? Were police cars were being purchased from speed camera money?

Latasha Gatling – Police cars were purchased back in July. Not buying anymore vehicles. Code Compliance cars were already purchased. Not fully staffed and in the middle of a crisis.

Councilmember Luke Chesek – Read notes – Police Department vehicle purchases– FY 20 \$30,000.00 Capital Projects \$73,000.00. Purchase 1 lease 4 more and selling of old police cars. Must have been done. Notes show in Public Works – New DPW trucks lease of \$26,635.00 line item 5460.

Sell 2011 Peterbuilt \$50,000.00

Sell 2003 Dump Truck \$3,000.00

Trade in 2010 Bob Cat \$2,000.00

Buy new pick up truck and Bob Cat.

Mayor & Council did not approve any dump truck in the summary.

Mayor Miles stated that she agrees with City Manager. Just because it is in the budget does not mean it should be purchased. It needs to be approved by City Manager with authorization from Mayor & City Council.

Councilmember Luke Chesek stated if we don't need it now, then it needs to be put on hold.

Councilmember Benitez asked if it is in the City's possession?

Councilmember Scott Cecil recalled the meeting where some of this took place. Asked why the City needs one of these. Zero percent chance of voting yes on this.

Asked Interim City Manager Latasha C. Gatling to go through the tapes to see what was recorded.

Interim City Manager Latasha C. Gatling stated that there is a need for bulk pick-up.

It is currently at Public Works. Not sure if it can be returned. Been there for about 60 days.

1st dump truck was to big for the streets. They were trading it out for this new one.

FY 2020 budget on page 67 line item 5460 \$26,635.00 lease for DPW truck.

DeMornai Blackwell – FY2020 Former City Manager was going through lease negotiations back in September. Listed for Code, Police, Public Works lease agreements. They prepare the lease agreement once it is in City possession. City can choose not to finance it. City would then need to pay full amount of dump truck. Different twist on the way it was presented.

This should have been placed into Capital Improvement.

Motion for approval given to Interim City Manager to sign dump truck lease agreement – Any future large purchases must be approved from City Manager / Mayor & Council - Mayor Miles

Move: Councilmember Celina Benitez

Second: Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Vote Recorded: 3-0-0, Motion Passed

University of Maryland Peace Park Agreement for University of Maryland to do the design. Does Mayor & City Council want to approve taking money out of the budget to pay for the design? The MOU has been vetted from the attorney and UMD has signed it.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler – We will own the plan once it is done. Still need the students to work on the plan.

Councilmember Celina Benitez – Some of the work could be done from home. Gives us time to move it along. Don't see a reason to hold onto this.

Councilmember Luke Cheseck – Need to spend it now. Dr. Jack Sullivan is still working with his students now. Would make things easier for Little Friends for Peace. Don't hold up the project.

Councilmember Scott Cecil wants to know if we can wait two weeks and speak to Dr. Jack Sullivan? There are two different MOUs. One is with Little Friends For Peace and one is with UMD. Are the students going to work on this since it is the end of the semester?

Motion to sign agreement with University of Maryland 11K for Spring Park – Mayor Malinda Miles

Move: Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Second: Councilmember Celina Benitez

Vote Recorded: 3-0-0, Motion Passed Councilmember Scott Cecil abstained

Motion to Go Into Closed Session- Mayor Malinda Miles

Move: Councilmember Celina Benitez

Second: Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed