

**Official Minutes of the City of Mount Rainier
MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**

DATE: April 21, 2020

Wedex Meeting

Call to Order

7:00 PM Webex Meeting

Presiding Officer

Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Officials Present

Councilmember Celina Benitez

Councilmember Scott Cecil

Councilmember Luke Chesek

Staff Present

Interim City Manager Latasha C. Gatling

City Clerk John Hoatson

Minutes provided by:

City Clerk

Call to Order

Agenda Read by Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Motion to Approve Agenda: Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Move: Councilmember Luke Chesek

Second: Councilmember Celina Benitez

Vote Recorded: 3-0-0, Motion Passed

State of Emergency Update

Interim City Manager Latasha C. Gatling stated continuously receiving donations from the community to the emergency fund. Providing food from World Central Kitchen. (Councilmember Deni Taveras and Councilmember Celina Benitez) Feeding 500 people per day. Waiting on masks to come in for residents that need them. Working with Sew Creative and sewing club to obtain some cloth masks. Chuck's Liquors donated \$2,000.00 to the Emergency fund. Was put into a press release last week. Also received a donation from Rachel Bush of \$800.00. Also Lions Club reached out to provide gifts cards to three families in need. They received 100.00 gift

cards to Aldi's Grocery Store. Any resident who may need help should call Michel Rosario, Social Services Coordinator at the Police Station.

If you feel you have COVID-19, please reach out to your doctor and the Prince George's County Health Department.

Economic Development Director Ronald Hopkins reached out to all businesses to see what they need. They are also assisting with completing funding applications. CERT team is sponsoring a food drive this weekend. Stop by Police Station between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM.

CERT Team is sponsoring another food drive on Saturday from 10:00 am until 4:00 pm at the Police Station. If you have ability to donate, please stop by Police Station. 3249 Rhode Island Avenue.

Councilmember Celina Benitez Actively being on calls regarding COVID-19 - reported that 44 cases of COVID-19 in the City of Mount Rainier. Asking people not to panic. If you know people who have it wear your mask. Make sure you are washing your hands. 500 meals are being provided per day and working in conjunction with a bunch of people. County Executive is working very hard to find funding for small businesses. Today Governor Hogan spoke about obtaining more COVID-19 tests from South Korea.

COVID-19 Contingency Planning

Councilmember Scott Cecil stated council could talk about the emergency fund.

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling stated that 10,000 was allocated from contingency to the emergency fund. People could also make monetary donations to it. So far \$2,000.00 was donated from Chuck's Liquor Store and \$800.00 from Rachel Bush. Mayor and City Council would receive a report in the coming weeks about the fund.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler - Question that is being asked, is it tax deductible?

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling stated that yes it is.

Councilmember Scott Cecil would like a mechanism to move money from contingency into the fund if need be without holding it up.

Councilmember Celina Benitez stated that various donations have been coming through to allow the funds to stretch. Fruits, vegetables, chicken, fish and other things. If food and supplies not come through City would have blown through the \$10,000.00.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler mentioned Michel Rosario, Social Services Coordinator and information on the City website regarding COVID resources.

Councilmember Luke Chesek stated he sent to Mayor and Council what Riverdale is doing to help small businesses. Information was sent from Jimmy Tarlau.

Would like a discussion at a future work session to discuss how the City could address this. County has a lot of resources.

Councilmember Scott Cecil stated that there is an existing Economic Incentive Fund. Would like to see if some of those funds could be reallocated to help small businesses within the City. Help to cover the payroll.

Has mixed feelings about municipalities taking the lead on these types of programs. Need to have options on the table.

Councilmember Celina Benitez stated that the City is going to be hit with a lot of uncertainty in the next few months. May need to take care of some of the residents as well. \$6,000 to \$8,000 is a lot to pay in taxes and will be hard to pay without working.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler stated that there might be a process issue since money was not allocated that way. May need to amend the Ordinance. Problem is we have a bank partner that is vetting recipients of that money. Don't want to give money to a business that goes bankrupt. It is tax payers money.

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling stated that Ronald Hopkins has reach out to the various businesses and assisting them with applications. Information is being provided to businesses where they can apply for assistance. Conversations have been had with landlords about evictions.

Need to be placed on the agenda for the Special Work Session next week. Speak to FSC First and have Ronald Hopkins give an update on the businesses.

Councilmember Scott Cecil had a question: To be clear – When will Mayor & City Council be getting a report of donations?

Interim City Manager Latasha C. Gatling will have receipts and report next week. Working with Finance Department on this.

Census 2020 Update

Councilmember Celina Benitez provided an update on Census 2020.

Federal money will help the City. 80-85% level at the County level.

Census Logo was developed –

Currently Mount Rainier is 43.8 & and currently at 44.2%

County still needs some work.

3 areas Kaywood 36.7% (37%), Queenstown 37.4%, Residential Area

Have not hit 50% yet. Want to get to 80%

What is City doing on the 2nd phase –

Pushing phone number and website. English and Spanish where people can call and get their Census done.

Most homes have received brochure – have numbers to complete their Census.

Door hangers are being used in apartments. Door hangers have also been given out with food deliveries.

Working on putting a virtual party together – provide prizes.

Census got extended. Moved from August to October.

Remind your residents to complete the Census. Continue to push.

Councilmember Scott Cecil – ask a question – Census Committee –

Has the Census committee been meeting since the current crisis? Has requested to be invited.

Councilmember Celina Benitez responded that the Census Committee has been meeting on and off. A lot of one on one since the plan had to be redone. Priorities have changed.

Councilmember Scott Cecil would like to offer his assistance and be invited to future meetings. All hands on deck is better than one hand on deck.

Councilmember Luke Chesek -Thanked Celina for all the work and reminded residents to complete their Census.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler stated to give Celina some support and complete their Census.

Mount Rainier Arts Commission Mural Project

Councilmember Luke Chesek - Arts Commission has gotten a partner in the business community who wants a mural. Put an RFP out. About ready to sign the contract with Yulia for 3300 Rhode Island Avenue Pennyroyal Station.

Have some contingency planning in case it has to be moved to next fiscal year.

This will be a powerful sign to the community that Mount Rainier is resilient. Demonstrates an investment in the community.

Alex Kozen, Chairman of Arts Commission – Thanked Mayor & City Council for allowing them to come and discuss their projects.

Provide community engagement with the arts.

Mission is to create capital projects for regional visibility and bring awareness to City of Mount Rainier.

Leads to improving business district and diversifying tax base.

2020 – 2 mural projects - 3310 Rhode Island Avenue Pennyroyal Station

Other project is 3840 34th Street – In planning stages.

Pennyroyal Station – was 9 month project working with community members and other partners.

Pending some final design changes – looking for feedback from Mayor & City Council & Community.

Smaller project for 3840 34th Street – \$3,750.00 - the money will go to a local artist in the DMV area with a strong preference for artist in the Gateway District.

26 Applicants applied from the Gateway District for the Mural at Pennyroyal Station. Want to work with local artists and give one project to a local artist.

Been speaking with Rhonda Dallas – Director of the Arts Council.

Ready to implement other murals. Yulia is planning to come in June to work on the mural at Pennyroyal Station. Tentative due to COVID-19.

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling stated that the person who is offering services will prepare the contract, then be provided to the City Attorney for any changes and then they get signatures.

Councilmember Luke Chesek stated that they worked with former City Attorney Ken Sigman to prepare the contract. They are now working with Elissa Levan.

Interim City Manager stated she would like Elissa Levan to look at the contract. Does not want her blindsided by it.

Councilmember Luke Chesek stated that Elissa has seen the contract.

Councilmember Celina Benitez stated that the mural is definitely needed during these times and thanked the committee for their hard work. This will brighten up the community.

Councilmember Scott Cecil stated no reason to delay the work to be done. Move forward with the mural project you have selected. No reason to delay process.

Councilmember Byran Knedler stated he was queasy about spending this money. Entire process is basically done.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler stated there is a majority for the first art project, but not for the 2nd. Wants it placed on the next Work Session.

Alex Kozen stated Arts Commission have not told Mayor & City Council about the second project. Have not done a call for artists yet. Final three selectees will be presented to Mayor & Council once the artist is selected. Project has not been discussed with MUTC.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler stated that it is the Lightbound Building and probably needs to go before the MUTC. Councilmember Bryan Knedler stated it needs to be added to the next Work Session on Tuesday, April 28, 2020.

Toni George provided public comment to express that the mural project should be placed on hold until after the pandemic.

Letters of support were presented to Mayor & City Council by Mark Rengel: Menkiti, Shivali Shah, Margaret Boozer: Red Dirt Studios, Krista Schlyer.

34th Street mural presentation would be added to April 28, 2020 Work Session Agenda.

Native Plant Network Presentation

Councilmember Luke Chesek presented the Native Plant Network. Create a pathway of native plants in the community. Encourage homes to plant native plants. So important for local ecosystem. Excitement is building for the idea. Sierra Club is also excited about this and wants Councilmember Chesek to come and present about this.

Idea may grow to other towns.

Native Plant Network is a way to acknowledge people who are planting native plants. It is a way to save the planet and be good stewards. This is also a way for people to connect.

Ways City can help - 3 core areas – help in branding, publicizing and support

Representatives of Tree Commission, Green Team and other volunteers: what would it look like to qualify as part of a Native Plant Network as a member.

Questions need to be answered by Mayor & City Council.

Use Google Maps to show what it would look like – Hold another event at Joe's Movement.

Publicizing – Working with private entities such as Sierra Club and residents from other Cities and Towns. Helping to build a native plant culture. Enter into "America in Bloom" Contest.

Not a lot of pressure on City Staff.

Support from City – 1. Idea to halt new sidewalk construction – several locations residents would support native plants in the easements.

What value would City get from this? Cost savings and improve stormwater management.

City can brand itself as the Mount Rainier Native Plant Network.

Next steps, drafting resolution creating Native Plant Network. Need to look at membership idea.

Should this be a resolution or ordinance

Councilmember Scott Cecil stated thanks for the presentation. Very supportive of work.

1. In favor to an open membership as opposed to a closed one.
2. Native plants in easements – need to build sidewalks because we need one. Need to be creative.
3. Resolution or Ordinance – It would be a resolution. Proponent to codify things in the City Code. Overlap of some things from the community garden.

Councilmember Celina Benitez stated it is tied together with a lot of what Mount Rainier is already doing.

Work with Green Team and Tree Commission to get something done.

Going in the right perspective.

Tours would allow people to get to know the City.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler stated how do you create agreements when people come and go. Suppose to be a walkable City.

Charles – lives on one of the possible streets. City has never put a sidewalk in. Willing to put time and money into supporting it. Loves the tier level for membership.

Next steps: Luke will work on drafting resolution.

Councilmember Scott Cecil stated that Rogers Park should also be included in this. It would be an improvement.

Public comment - Against making sidewalks illegal on both sides of the same block.

Councilmember Luke Chesek stated it would not be taking away a sidewalk. It would be a native plant habitat.

Youth Scholarship Timeline

Councilmember Celina Benitez stated deadline is already here. Needs another month for the Youth Scholarship.

Allows time for participants to be able to submit the credentials they need.

Includes extending deadline to May 15, 2020.

Letters of recommendation could be sent to City Clerk.

Applications will be scanned and coded and sent to the committee members.

Applicants will be scheduled for an interview with the committee members.

Students will be struggling for tuition.

Awardees will be named before the end of the fiscal year.

Volunteer commitment will be a two week process.

Councilmember Luke Cheseck stated no comments and appreciated the hard work.

Councilmember Scott Cecil asked if their was an ask of Mayor & City Council.

Councilmember Celina Benitez stated that just to move the deadline to May 15, 2020.

City Manager Latasha Gatling stated that people can submit applications at City Hall through the mail slot.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler ask if this was advertised yet. He was fine with the extension.

Councilmember Scott Cecil stated thank you for making it available virtually. Wants to make sure the May 15, 2020 deadline will not mess up applicants and their schedule.

Councilmember Celina Benitez stated that Mayor & City Council need to decide who will represent them on the Youth Scholarship Committee. Needs the names before the 15th.

Schedule of Fees – Dumpster & Home Business Licenses

Lt. Col Alston asked to look at fee schedule and provide recommendations for Construction Dumpster and Home Business License.

\$75.00 currently for Homes Business License Occupancy – recommendation is to lower to \$25.00 per year.

\$50.00 per dumpster maximum of three months / 2 dumpsters per site – recommendation is \$50.00 per dumpster on private property for max of three months not to exceed 6 months. 2 dumpsters per site at \$125 on public roadways.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler wanted to know if that is the current definition of the home occupancy license.

Lt. Col Alston stated that it is

Councilmember Luke Cheseck liked the distinction of private property and public roadway. Fine with dropping down the home business license to \$25.00.

Councilmember Scott Cecil stated 100% on the Home Occupancy License Fee at \$25.00. Public Roadway Dumpster Fee is low. Thinks it should be \$250.00. Wants to see if higher. Wants to know what is the penalty if they exceed 6 months?

Lt. Col Alston stated he would look into it and get back to Mayor & Council.

Councilmember Celina Benitez stated she is in agreement with both of these. Appreciated the work on this.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler stated so maximum of 6 months. Does the ordinance define the size of the dumpster.

Lt. Col Alston stated they could look into sizes.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler asked if we have guidelines on to where dumpsters can be placed?

Lt. Col Alston stated he would make notes on that.

Councilmember Scott Cecil asked Lt. Col Alston to get back on what the fines would be.

Remaining Uses of the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget

Councilmember Bryan Knedler asked if they needed to do an official freeze on hiring. Are we certain about the revenue that is coming in.

Latasha Gatling, City Manager stated if you give her a week or two, she will be able to provide a more accurate outlook on revenue.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler asked if she thought they may need to do a budget amendment.

Latasha Gatling, City Manager responded no.

Councilmember Scott Cecil requested updated actuals for May meetings.

Councilmember Celina Benitez mentioned the franchise checks.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler mentioned snow removal which was not spent.

Latasha Gatling City Manager mentioned there is a Code position available, janitor position. That person would clean City Hall, Police and Public Works. There is an actual position that needs to be filled.

Councilmember Scott Cecil asked if the Janitor position was under Public Works?

Latasha Gatling confirmed that position was under Public Works.

Latasha Gatling also mentioned that two checks have come in from Comcast for the franchise agreement.

Cooperation Agreement Regarding Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Urban County Qualification - Federal FY 2021

Latasha Gatling stated they received the Grant Application. There was a letter directed to Mayor & City Council. There was a mention on a call that CDBG, City would be eligible for the Grant. Have to do a corporate agreement which is a resolution. Need to apply for Grant through County. On agenda for next Legislative Meeting of Mayor & City Council.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler stated that we need to fill this out to qualify? What is the deadline for actual projects?

June 7th is to send the resolution back. They have not updated the dates. October, 2020 possible deadline.

Councilmember Celina Benitez has learned that some of the Towns did not previously qualify.

Councilmember Celina Benitez needs to be on the May agenda. 1st come 1st serve.

Final Comments:

Councilmember Bryan Knedler advised residents that elected officials and City staff are listening on COVID calls to gain important information to assist residents.

Latasha Gatling thanked Mayor & City Council for the support they provide.

Councilmember Celina Benitez thanked Code, Police and Social Worker.

If you need help, please call the CERT hotline.

Councilmember thanked staff for all the hard work.

Motion to Adjourn Meeting: Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Move: Councilmember Scott Cecil

Second: Councilmember Celina Benitez

Vote Recorded: 3-0-0, Motion Passed