

**Official Minutes of the City of Mount Rainier**

**MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**

**DATE: January 22, 2019**

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS, UPPER-LEVEL CITY HALL**

**Call to Order**

7:00 PM, Council Chambers, City Hall, One Municipal Place, Mount Rainier MD

**Presiding Officer**

Mayor Malinda Miles

**Officials Present**

Councilmember Celina Benitez (Vice Mayor)

Councilmember Luke Chesek

Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Councilmember Shivali Shah

**Staff Present**

City Manager Miranda Braatz

City Clerk Da'rrell Belton

**Minutes provided by:**

City Clerk

**Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance**

**Reading of Agenda into Record by Councilmember Celina Benitez**

**PEPCO Policy of Trees on Private Property in City of Mount Rainier**

Jerry Pasterneck, Regional VP, and Tony Ruffin, Government Affairs, MD, of PEPCO were in attendance to explain PEPCO's policy of cutting trees on private property in City of Mount Rainier to Council and residents. PEPCO is regulated by Public Service Commission's Rulemaking Proceeding 43 or RM43 Standards section for vegetation management and that guides how utilities make sure electric lines are clear by tree trimming and removal. These are rules sent 2012. RM43 includes rules on notifying residents and planner to review lines and tress with the City. If the PEPCO Planner sees a problematic tree on private property, they will knock on the owner door to seek written permission. PEPCO cannot remove a tree on private property without written permission. They can prune tree limbs that are accessible, but if deep pruning is needed, they will still try contact the customer. If they cannot reach the customer, they will go ahead with the pruning. If 25% of the crown needs to pruned, PEPCO removes the tree because it most likely survive. Tree trimming standard is not for beauty, but to clear the electrical lines. Trees can be pruned, cut, or removed.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler said that there are complaints that the owners of the homes are not necessarily contacted. He wants to make sure owners are contacted, not renters. He also said if owners are out of town they only short period to respond. PEPCO said they can prune, but they must reach customer to take a tree down. If owner objects, PEPCO comes to meet the customer to work out a solution. However, the owner can just say no and this is noted in the record. Councilmember Shivali Shah said resident want to know if they are liable if they refuse to cut a tree. PEPCO that no one to feel pressured. Customers can say know and let me think about it. Customer resources are Tree Commission and PEPCO Planners. Mayor Malinda Miles wants 7 days notices changed to two weeks. Resident – Explained her tree case. She happy PEPCO will come and remove the tree now, the tree should have been removed because more 25% of canopy was taken. PEPCO reps took addresses of trees that need to be removed. Mayor and Council thanked them for being good partners with the City.

### **University of Maryland Memorial Park Project**

University of Maryland Coleman Institute and Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture Team presented on their design for City of Mount Rainier Memorial Park. They have received response from their survey to the Mount Rainier Community and assembled information on the history of the Memorial Park that have informed their ideas for design and function. They presented three design alternatives that they hope will be condensed for one plan in several weeks. They looking to create a sustainable gathering space for the City with proper storm water management. Ideas presented included the Park being flexible space for play and stage and seating for art performances; improving tree canopy that does not interfere with power lines; adding rain garden, green walls, and Perry Street hosting food truck and market space; and basing the design on look of old trolley. They have run some feasibility test on the designs. Councilmember Luke Chesek is the lead on the project and was pleased with the design ideas.

### **FY 20 Proposed Budget Calendar**

Director of Finance provided a summary the FY 20 Proposed Budget Calendar. Mayor and Council suggested amendments to it. It will be voted on next Council Meeting.

### **Homestead Tax Credit**

Councilmember Bryan Knedler said he would like threshold lowered for Homestead Tax Credit and more residents need to sign up for it for the Credit. Mayor and Council discussed the issue. It was decided that more discussion is needed on this subject along with looking at the restructuring of the taxes. Mayor Malinda Miles asked if the Council was in possible support of lowering the Homestead Tax Credit. They are interested. Next step is for Director of Finance to provide numbers showing the affect of lowering the Tax Credit below 8%, how many homeowners are in the City, and how much is the City put in the reserve in the last four or five years.

### *Public Comment*

Resident – Please look at duplicate taxes. Homestead Tax Credit will not provide a lot of relief, but City tax rate cut will.

## **City Tax Rate**

Councilmember Luke Chesek there is several ways we tax property the City. Director of Finance said the City taxes residential, apartments, commercial, industrial, and townhouses based on the County tax classes. City made 4.3 million of its 7 million budgets from the property taxes. He and City Manager Miranda Braatz reviewed some scenarios for changing the tax rate or Homestead Tax Credit for Mayor and Council. She said that to raise apartment tax rate it has to be justifiable in court. 9 to 14 rate increase in justifiable, and on the high side a 17% increase.

### **Public Comment**

- Charette Resident - How much is apartment paying per unit? Councilmember Bryan Knedler said City does not make money in license fee because staff must do inspection and license. What happens if there is recession? Council said the rate is set for three years and it will increase. Resident asked about tax differential payment from the County. City Manager Miranda Braatz has sent in challenge to County to pay the City for services they pay for from County that County does not provide. It is .32 cent on the dollar.
- Scott Cecil Resident – He is a renter and concerned about raising taxes. He feels the tax increase will be passed on to the renters. He suggested rent control. Mayor Malinda Miles said they will raise the rent and there is no rent control in the City. The Kaywood also says they do street and side walk repair and cleaning and should not pay more taxes. Scott Cecil made plea for renters to come to the Council Meetings.
- Mark Possard Resident Email read by City Clerk – He said apartments in Mount Rainier are owned by out of state investment bankers and they should be taxed higher rate.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler said we can do separate tax rate on rental property, but how can we identify them. Councilmember Luke Chesek said we must address tax issue because it is becoming hard to live in Mount Rainier. City Manager Miranda Bratz said she thinks Mount Rainier should not be flat across tax classification. Councilmember Shivali Shah said we need conversation over personal taxes versus affordable housing for the whole City. She would like a community conversation on this issue. Mayor Malinda Miles is interested cutting the taxes and looking at different rate on tax assessment and appraisal.

## **Bond Bill Application**

Mayor and Council discussed 1 million bond bill package for Potts Hall. It was due Dec. 11, but City can still submit. Council and Mayor want City Manager Miranda Braatz to update later year package. Updates to last year package are the date, amount, and new cover letter with update.

## **Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) Collective Bargaining**

FOP wants to start negotiations in March for salary and rest negotiated in July. Mayor and Council agreed with this timeline except Councilmember Shivali Shah wants all negotiations at once. There was discussion of the negotiation team. Councilmember Celina Benitez asked for Close Session to discuss the team and Mayor wants guidelines. Council will have Closed Session on this issue Thurs., Jan. 24 at 7.30 pm and Open Session afterward for vote.

## **Bus Lane Purchase**

City was to purchase WMATA bus lane near City and Potts Hall over 10 Years ago. Today it will cost 110K to buy it. City can go to Open Space program and apply for money owed for taxes paid into the program. Councilmember Bryan Knedler said City Manager to review the program and get guidelines and City Real Estate Agent can help. Councilmember Bryan Knedler there is other land owned by WMATA that City should own. Mayor Malinda Miles suggested the City approach Maryland Park and Planning. City Manager Miranda Braatz is happy this is on the agenda and will move this forward.

## **Mount Rainier Youth Scholarship**

Councilmember Celina Benitez reviewed a draft scholarship application for youth resident in City. There will be seven scholarship at \$1000 each. The criteria, selection, and administration of the scholarship need to be worked out. Council to review application and give her feedback. City Manager Miranda Braatz will be staff support. Deadline to have this ready is Feb. 4.

## **City Arts Commission**

Councilmember Luke Chesek has taken lead in creating an Arts Commission for City of Mount Rainier. The Commission will have five members that are artists or work in arts field. They will serve 2 year terms or longer. Mission is to create vibrant spaces that show the community's love of art. The Commission would have budget to place public art spaces in the City in areas that need uplift or where the City would like to create a space. The proposed budget for the Commission is 25K - 50K a year to have one to two mural or public art pieces a year. Solicitation, site determination, legal agreements with private owners, request for proposal (could be limited to Mount Rainier resident), selection of artist, agreement between artist and landowner and City, payment schedule with artists, and maintenance agreement with landowner. Councilmember Bryan Knedler said the City has not taken care of its art so we need Commission to come up with art preservation plan and insurance plan for art if damaged. Also, the Commission will need way to do with art controversy. Councilmember Shivali Shah asked the City can get a public art grant that the Commission can execute.

## **Public Comment**

- Charnette Resident – She is grateful for attempt to get the Art Commission. She also would like the City to paint some areas in vibrant colors and hang plants. Also, the artist in the arts building that have subsidized rent should be doing public project for the City.
- Scott Resident – Artist are not great at follow-thru so have nonartist on the Commission. Also, look at having a youth and culinary arts professional on the Commission.

## **Google Apps for City Departments and Staff**

Councilmember Shivali Shah said the City is moving toward shared system for Department files. This allow for better sharing and continuity for when staff leaves and new staff on board. To do this the City has selected Google Apps for Government Platform, which all City employees will use. They will use Google Drive, Gmail, Calendar, and Project Management. This will be up in running in April with staff

training. There will be Alexa integration and blue tooth capability as well. The new platform will provide more security.

### **Police Chief Update**

City Manager Miranda Braatz said the City has selected a candidate that will be announced on Feb. 1, 2019 by press release. Candidate will begin mid-Feb and swearing in March 5.

### **Committee Appointment**

Mayor and Council discussed better advertising in “The Message” and social media open slot on committees for transparency and diversity.

### **Website**

City Manager Miranda Braatz talked to the vendor today. She has also talked to Dept. Head and Director of Administrative Services to make sure content migration is on track. The Police Dept. is behind in migration, so she is working to get them up to speed. The Website will Go Live in end of Feb/March. Each Dept. is reviewing the content to be migrated and new content. Dept. Head and employees will be trained to make updates. Vendor will be at the next Council Work Session. Apps and forms are being integrated as well. Electronic Payment may not be ready by March. Council would like a link to review the Website for feedback.

### **Community Calendar**

Councilmember Shivali Shah will send the Community Calendar the City Committees so they can review and add events. Then the City Manager Miranda Braatz will post it. The new Website will have an interactive Community Calendar.

### **Rolling Agenda**

Councilmember Bryan Knedler needs to update the agenda will be reviewed later session.

**Closed Session Meeting Summaries were read by Councilmember Celina Benitez.**

### **Meeting Minutes**

Four set of minutes were presented please review and give City Manager Miranda Braatz any feedback. They voted on in Feb.

Motion to Adjourn Meeting: Councilmember Celina Benitez Move: Councilmember Luke Chesek Second: Councilmember Bryan Knedler Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed
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