

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

DATE: April 16, 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 (By Phone)

Officials Present

Councilmember Celina Benitez (Vice Mayor)
Councilmember Luke Chesek (Phone)
Councilmember Bryan Knedler
Councilmember Shivali Shah

Staff Present

City Manager Miranda Braatz
Acting City Clerk John Hoatson

Minutes provided by:

Acting City Clerk John Hoatson

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Reading of Agenda into Record by Councilmember Celina Benitez

Motion to Approve the Agenda: Mayor Malinda Miles Move: Councilmember Shivali Shah Second: Councilmember Bryan Knedler Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed

Cochran George Washington University Engagement Lab Communication Project

The Lead Professor and students from the Engagement Lab presented to the Mayor and Council. The students would come to the City interview stakeholders and conduct research to create a communication strategy for the City. They will focus on person to person interactions in the City between residents and government. They would provide feedback to the City. This would be a free service, but they need an MOU, a place to hold meetings, and time from staff for interviews. Fall2019 and Spring2019 will be the length of the project with the final report given in June or July 2020. Mayor Malinda Miles said this is an opportunity to see what residents want from the City government in terms

of communication and how digital tools are or can be used to interact with residents better. It will not produce branding plan. Phase One will be interviews. In Nov./Dec. and in the Spring they students will present a status report on the project to the City and residents.

INTERMISSION

MOU was discussed along with the timeline, surveys, and meeting space. Process for recording data was discussed. The Engagement Lab take notes and they do person on the street interviews. Mayor Malinda Miles told Cochran Team to comeback with an MOU draft with all necessary process information and legal information.

Homeowners Present to Mayor and Council and a Variance Request

Alma of Code Enforcement joined the table.

- **3716** - Anthony Frazier Architect and homeowner's son presented. They pushed the home back 25ft. They may ask for variance for a porch which will bring the house back to 18ft. Mr. Frazier said they have not decided on the porch yet. Other changes to the house design were discussed. Councilmember Bryan Knedler said if they want a variance, they will have to meet with Design Review Board (DRB) first.
Public Comment – Nathan from Design Review Board (DRB) stressed that they need to come to them first for porch variance before zoning and to do it ahead of time.
- 36th Street Property – Mr. Lopez, the homeowner, will add a second level with 3 rooms and make other changes within the house. He asked why his house has to go back 6ft. He re-designed the house to accommodate the 6ft. He is concerned it will make the house look very different from his neighbors. There was discussion of whether the 6ft back was an actual requirement and who told him it is. Councilmember Bryan Knedler said that he will contact the County to see if there is an issue where he needs a variance. Code Enforcement, Alma, will get back to Mr. Lopez on how to move forward. He wants to move forward ASAP!
- 34th Street Property - Mayor and Council approved the permit.
- Variance Request – Nathan, DRB Rep, said the house contributes to the historic district although there has been some work done to it. DRB is concerned that the remodel will change the historical character of the house. However, they met with homeowners to try and come up with a joint solution so not to cause undue financial stress to the family. DRB recommended to approve as altered, but we don't want this house approval to be precedent. Mayor and Council will need a drawing of proposed redraw for the County. Councilmember Bryan Knedler will draft letter to County and share with Mayor and Council.

Code Enforcement Update

City Manager Miranda Braatz said the best financial option for moving Code Enforcement is to move them into the insurance company location. The rent the insurance company pays does not cover utilities. WMATA will be asked for 10K yearly for their bus drivers to have access to the bathroom,

kitchen, etc. City Manager Miranda Braatz said the upper level has monies allocated to bring it up to code in FY20 Budget. The Code Enforcement staff will have secure space that is separate from the bus drivers. Mayor and Council approved moving forward with WMATA and moving Code Enforcement to Insurance Office.

Review of Changes Ordinance 4 Vacant Property Due to Disaster or Tragedy

Mayor and Council approved changes. It will go to vote next Council Meeting.

Ordinance 2019 – Budget Amendment 3

City Manager Miranda Braatz discussed the budget amendment of 225K for street and sidewalks. Councilmember Bryan Knedler wants to include the alleys. City Manager Miranda Braatz said the monies can cover alleys. Councilmember Luke Chesek wants to prioritize Newton Alley. Councilmember Shivali Shah was concerned the road behind the Police Dept. needs work asap. She wants Bunker Hill crosswalks added as priority. Mayor Malinda Miles said City Manager Miranda Braatz need priorities and preference from Council on which streets and alleys are priority. Mayor Malinda Miles asked City Manager to look at the costs of fixing alleys (those mentioned) too and come back to Mayor Council.

Homestead Tax Credit

Jimmy Tarlau joined Mayor and Council at the table to discuss this matter. City's Homestead Tax Credit is set at 10%. The proposal is that City's Homestead Tax will be between 3% to 8% to help owner occupied homes. Director of Finance discussed how lowering the tax may affect revenue in the City. For example, 316K would need to be cut to give 5% tax relief down from 10%. Luke wants a diagram that show current tax rate and what it will be with various tax cuts. Along, with how much of the budget will have to be cut so the tax cut can be made.

Buy and Sale of Public Property

City Manager Miranda Braatz shared a list of public property to be disposed of. She also asked for guidance on financial policy for disposal of public property in the future. She is asking for a number amount for what items need to come to Council. For example, any property worth over 5K would come to Council. Chief of Police joined the table and he discussed vehicles that are idle in his Dept. The vehicles would be costly to repair, or parts are hard to find. There is an auction company that can sell them, and some residents are interested. FY20 budget has document on the buying, maintaining, and disposing police property. Mayor and Council want a book with pictures, age, and mileage of the all the City's vehicles, like the one Department of Works does. They gave City Manager approval to move forward with requested information. They asked the disposal of Humvee to be added to the list.

Discussion of Parking Meter Installation

City Manager Miranda Braatz discussed the program to replace meters in city with smart meters. The new Police Chief reviewed the current plan. He presented an alternative vendor to Mayor and Council that he thought would be better vendor than current one suggested. His vendor can install all meters in a year, technology is better, and there is cost savings. They can also install speed and stop sign camera. The vendor takes a cut of profit for violations or charges for meters. Councilmembers want everything in writing from the vendor. Everyone discussed where speed cameras can be placed. Police Chief said the vendor has done research on the City and where and how to place new meters. The City will have to put up poles or existing poles can be used, but they do everything else. They must come up to the City at least four times a year to City to answer questions. They do yearly maintenance for all meters and they as needed. Meter is smart and let's company know if its defective. These are no coin meters and they can use the old poles. It would be five-year contract. Mayor and Council want to know what other localities are using this vendor and see the contract. Mayor and Council said it can go to vote next meeting. The vendor is Sensyo Gatso.

Presentation FSC First Economic Development Fund Update

Director of Economic Development Ronald Hopkins and a Rep. from FSC First presented to Mayor and Council. Dawn Medley for FSC First is a consultant that was hired to create a transparent and fair process for the City's Economic Development Fund. She was hired to address concerns expressed by the City's business owners and Mount Rainier Business Association. She discussed FSC First expertise and work in managing loans and fund. She discussed working with the City of Bowie and New Carrollton. FSC has developed business assistance grant for purple line businesses with Councilmember Taveras. FSC also has green loans. City Manager Miranda Braatz expressed her excitement is working with FSC. Director of Economic Development said he will hold information sessions and make sure all local businesses have hard application in English and Spanish. They can apply online or with help with his office. Then applicants will be screened by FSC to determine them as viable business. If they are viable, FSC will move the application to the City for consideration for the funding. The business owner is given feedback. FSC internal staff does reviews, but they have a team of reviewers that can be accessed as well. Mayor Malinda Miles likes the process, but she wants to know how local business can access these monies. Councilmember Shivali Shah said her concerns about staffing and accounting have been addressed by hiring of Director of Economic Development Mr. Hopkins and consultancy of FSC. She is still concerned how most small businesses in Mount Rainier will access the fund versus the same 12 in the City that meet the criteria. She is concerned about policy and outreach. She wants body of local businesses involved. Director of Economic Development Mr. Hopkins has partnered with Mount Rainier Business Association to reach local business. Councilmember Celina Benitez wants to make sure that the City Newsletter, social media, and MRTV are used to announce the program. She wants ways for local businesses to up their skills or have extra support to apply and qualify for the monies.

Public Comment

- Robin Bliss chair of MUTC Committee – This can be a way for businesses to apply for funds to help with comply with sign code violations.
- Nathan DRB – Some businesses have years long issues with the City compliance. The fund would be great tool to help businesses meet their requirements.

- Justin Bobst – Have funds allocated to local resident/businesses to bring visibility to our businesses.
- Michelle Darden Lee – Give back to the businesses that have been here. They need resources to survive the changes to Mount Rainier.
- Sheri Lumpkin Owner Ragbaby Exchange in Media Arts Lab - She loves the community and she is open to any help to make her business thrive. If it does, she can move here.
- Jimmy Tarlau MRBA – Director of Economic Development has worked hard to work with MRBA. He is support of Councilmember Shivali Shah ideas for committee.
- Owner of Red Dirt – Our businesses are quirky and do not mesh with accessing funds. Don't forget them.
- Nicey's - The fund should help existing businesses and that has been here and were the seed. She read a part of a statement and will email the full statement to Mayor and Council.

Mayor Malinda Miles believes we are almost there in implementing this program. Councilmember Shivali Shah asked how FSC is paid. City Manager Braatz said 5% of deals done under the plan would be set aside for FSC. Hourly consulting fee is also paid to Dawn. Does City keep fund until disbursed? Yes.

Public Comment Continued

- Scott Cecil – He thinks people being cut off during comments is problem. He expressed dismay at time allotted each speaker.

Discussion of New Mount Rainier Small Business Advisory Committee

Councilmember Shivali Shah expressed concern that MRBA and MUTC cannot reach a lot of the businesses in Mount Rainier. She wants a committee or group that works on policy for small business that advises them how to access Economic Development Fund. For example, many arts businesses have special needs that are not being addressed. She feels there is not enough input from arts business and small businesses on City policies on code enforcement, economic development fund, and other issues. This group needs extra help and outreach then MRBA, MUTC, and City has been able to deliver. This group would have MRBA, MUTC, Gateway, and small business owners to help small businesses. Councilmember Luke Chesek agreed with Councilmember Shivali Shah. Councilmember Celina Benitez expressed concern about conflict of interest for those filling out the application themselves and then helping others. Dawn of FSC that FSC is the neutral reviewer and they have consulting arm for businesses that need help with application. Councilmember Shivali Shah is concerned that small businesses in the local community that will not put together application, so it makes it to FSC.

Public Comment

- Owner of Nicey's – She said we are losing business in the City. She wants people at MRBA to look at problems with applicants first before the get to FSC.
- Jimmy Tarlau MRBA – He suggested that MRBA can have one person dedicated to advisory role.

City of Mount Rainier Miranda Braatz said that she is behind using FSC. They have resources that addresses many of the community issues. Mayor and Council agreed to go with FSC. Advisory

Committee is another issue. Mayor and Council will take more time to figure out if an Advisory Committee is necessary. If so, how it will be formed and what it will do.

Closed Session Summary Read by Councilmember Celina Benitez

- Closed Session was held on April 2, 2019, following the Legislative Meeting of Mayor and City Council. Mayor Miles and Councilmember voted for a closed session with City Manager, Real Estate Agent, and Director of Economic Development. There were no votes taken. An update on sale of 3200 Rhode was given.
- Closed Session was held on April 10, 2019, at 7:00pm for the Review of the City Manager. Mayor Miles and Councilmembers voted for a closed session with the City Manager for job review. There were no votes taken.

Proposal for Construction of Lower Level Police Department

Councilmember Bryan Knedler said this will fix the lower level of the Police Department for offices, meeting rooms, and storage with sprinklers. Speed camera money will pay for the construction. Mayor and Council are ready to move on this. The expenditure has already approved. The Police Chief will move forward immediately.

Hyattsville Dispatch Service

There are issues with Hyattsville Dispatch. The City of Mount Rainier pays the City of Hyattsville for a staff member to handle the City's dispatch. Councilmember Shivali Shah said residents feel there is a disconnect between residents and the dispatch. There needs to be a better communication. Police Chief has suggested there be a community meeting with Hyattsville Police and Dispatch to discuss the issues. Mayor Malinda Miles said there has not been a discussion with Mayor and Council about how dispatch with City of Hyattsville is working. She has issue with that. Councilmember Celina Benitez read the report and is happy the report asks for feedback for residents to City Council. Police Chief asked Council to let him know of any problem with Dispatch, he can talk directly to Police Chief of Hyattsville. Councilmember Bryan Knedler asked about emergency number. We need to get emergency number 301-985-6565 out to the public. If they call 911, the call can go to DC or other towers and delay help. City Manager Miranda Braatz wants the issues with Bladensburg to be in the past, we need focus on contract with Hyattsville. Councilmember Celina Benitez wants social media and MRTV campaign for emergency number 301-985-6565. Police is working on dates for a public meeting on these issues.

Summer Youth Employment Program

Summer Youth Employment Program via the County is happening. This year the youth will work with local businesses as interns. Councilmember Luke Chesek would like an article in newsletter about the program.

Awareness Letter to City Businesses to Make New Code Enforcement Rules

Mayor Malinda Miles said that new codes and laws be sent to local businesses, so they are aware. She sent a letter to City Manager Miranda Braatz and Mayor and Council that covers this. Councilmember Celina Benitez wants a paper record that the City has sent out this info to businesses. It should also be in newsletter. She wants new business to get a packet with code information. City Manager Miranda Braatz said that Code Enforcement has no outreach documents. They are working on it, but it's a long-term plan. Also, many businesses are not registered, so the City would not reach them. Mayor is helping with cover letters. Councilmember Shivali Shah is very much in favor of a public campaign to make businesses aware of codes.

Public Comment

- Jimmy Tarlau – MRBA is doing their own outreach on this. They are happy to work with Code Enforcement on awareness.
- Nathan – DRB would like to be included as a resource for Code Enforcement.

Apartment Rent Control

Councilmember Shivali Shah asked if Mayor and Council consider rent control. We considering tax hike for apartment owners, so should we consider rent control? Councilmember Luke Chesek said we should be educated and prepared to move on the issue. Councilmember Celina Benitez would like information as well. Mayor Malinda Miles served on a rent control task force. She will share information with Mayor and Council. Councilmembers Bryan Knedler and Luke Chesek said the small apartment renter will be hit hardest if tax hike happens. Mayor and Council want City staff to review local rent control laws and get back to them.

Public Comment

Scott Cecil – Will councilmembers publicly state if they have gotten money from companies that own from apartments? Mayor and Council publicly stated they have not and its public record.

Recess Resolution Discussion

Councilmember Luke Chesek said Council recess is an important time for staff to have time to implement Council directives and legislation and to plan. This issue will be moved for vote on next meeting.

Spring Park Update

Councilmember Shivali Shah said Little Friends for Peace has applied for a grant for Spring Park. Via a call we have been approved for a 50K grant for the Park. The City will put in 40K matching grant. She sought guidance on next steps. City Manager Miranda Braatz said the 40K match needs to be legislatively approved via amendment. She needs the formal letter from the State approving the grant. Councilmember Bryan Knedler asked if the match can be in-kind and/or cash. Councilmember Shivali Shah will ask the about in-kind for the match. She will have to do RFP for the work on the Park, host community conversations about the Park, and create a timeline for work.

Motion to Adjourn Meeting

Motion to Adjourn Meeting: Mayor Malinda Miles Move: Councilmember Celina Benitez Second: Councilmember Bryan Knedler Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed
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