

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

**DATE: March 17, 2020
Teleconference Meeting**

Call to Order

7:00 PM Zoom Teleconference 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

Motion to Approve Agenda: Mayor Malinda Miles

Move: Councilmember Celina Benitez

Second: Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed

Agenda Read by Latasha C. Gatling

Discussion of COVID 19 State of Emergency Declared by Mayor & City Council

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling: Press release has gone out. City Hall is operating on limited services. Encouraging citizens to conduct business online. Deliveries and metro bus drivers can use City Hall. Trying to protect City staff. Someone is answering the phone 9:00 am until 5:00 pm. Licensing and permitting has been put on hold. Call Alma and she will keep you posted on how to proceed further.

Mayor Malinda Miles:

Declaring a local state of emergency for City of Mount Rainier. Other municipalities have already done it. Any money expended while in this moment of time, they have a document with signature to show FEMA and MEMA to get some reimbursement on those funds. We need to make sure we are in compliance.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler:

Emergency declaration should be done and employees should have sick leave to deal with it if they get COVID-19. City should cover employees.

Councilmember Luke Chesek:

Declare a state of emergency. Staff should be allowed leave that they need. Also accept recommendations from the CERT team.

Councilmember Celina Benitez:

Celina agrees that City should declare a start of emergency. Library is waiving all fees for late library books.

Councilmember Scott Cecil:

State of emergency should be declared. May take a while to make it happen if Mayor & City Council have to do it. With council manager form of government. Couldn't City Manager just declare a State of Emergency?

Mayor Malinda Miles:

Mayor and Council are the decision makers. City Manager does not have the authority to do so. Mayor & City Council make policy. It can be voted on at next meeting.

Councilmember Scott Cecil:

Stated City Manager should declare a start of emergency.

Councilmember Luke Chesek:

Elissa Levin, City Attorney stated City Manager does have authority to declare an emergency.

Actions: Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling will write the Ordinance / Press Release that as of March 17, 2020 and declare a start of emergency for the City of Mount Rainier. Located in Section 13 of the City Code. Council should send anything to be included into the Ordinance / Press Release by tomorrow.

Challenge to Chuck's Liquor License:

Councilmember Celina Benitez: Thank you for coming and thank you for being respectful. Assuming the liquor board hearing will be postponed because of COVID -19

Councilmember Luke Chesek:

Thank you for coming and really appreciated everyone's input. Does not have much more to say. Does not want to get the City further involved in this issue.

Councilmember Scott Cecil:

Very excellent arguments on both sides. Worried that closing the liquor store would not solve all the problems. Needs a more comprehensive plan for urination and homelessness.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler:

Problem you have is the bus stop and liquor store. People come from the homeless shelter to right there. Encourage City Council to write a letter to the liquor board to ask for conditions on the license. Security guard and change of hours. City Council needs to have a meeting with the owner. Inside the store is OK. Have not heard owners take any responsibility outside. Want a meeting with the owners to see what solutions to come up with. Assume liquor board meeting will be postponed.

Mayor Malinda Miles:

Mayor and City Council would be able to hold a meeting. Concerned to get into the middle of. There are conditions that could be put in place. WMATA should be at the table. Former councilmembers were put on a committee but never heard anything back. Never got a report.

Councilmember Scott Cecil:

One person who spoke at the hearing gave the number of police calls to the business. One worry is that if something bad does happen are the owners going to resist calling the police.

Chief Anthony Morgan:

Both cameras record for 30 days. After that it is deleted unless saved. Going forward there is a plan in place to cover the bus stops on foot patrol. PG County has a security guard in the library before COVID-19. Did not get a number of complaints about the bus stop until November.

Mayor Malinda Miles:

Money was put in the budget to have someone on foot patrol walking around. '

Former Councilmember Shivali Shah:

2016 there was a committee to deal with these issues. No one could sleep on the bus benches. Great time to have this committee again.

Actions:

Discussion of Mayor and Council between Chuck's Liquor Store and WMATA in mid April. Report from Police Chief to Mayor & City Council with police calls made to the business. Ask liquor board to put conditions on license to add a security guard or change hours.

Clean Energy Resolution:

Joseph Jakuta spoke about the Clean Energy Resolution. Resolution is to put a policy in place. Replacing any HVAC systems. Requires Department Heads to make a report and provide to Mayor & City Council one a year.

Actions:

Resolution from Joseph will be sent to Mayor & City Council ASAP for review.

Composting Plan:

Public works would pick up compost on regular basis. They would take that directly to a facility. Cost the City \$5,000. Contract with someone else. \$19,000 annually. Central location for compost. Some issues. How would you have access after hours? Make sense for PW to take it on. 117 responded to survey. Lots of support from residents.

Councilmember Luke Chesek:

Loves the proposal and supports it. Neighbors will be happy to stop rats in the yard.

Councilmember Celina Benitez: Step it up. More opportunity to have a cleaner planet. Students, teachers and rec committee could get more involved in it. Have to get a different bin to put it in.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Spoke about partnering with Takoma Park.

Councilmember Mayor Miles:

Never formalized moving composting from the backyard to a central location.

Councilmember Scott Cecil:

Really want to do this. Few different options you can do this with. County compost Center would like a field trip to visit facility. Have more Work Session conversations on this. Thank you Julia and Green Team for work on this.

Actions:

Would like for Julia to take a leadership on this. Look at a private company that could do this. They have companies they looked at in the report. Council needs to decide what steps they want to take. Proposal uses 5 gallon bucket with a screw top. Counter top bins. Weekly residents would put out 5 gallon bucket and take it. Want Latasha to add \$6,000 to budget for composting.

3709 34th Street & 3101 Arundel Road Discussion:

Councilmember Bryan Knedler: Need to know if variance is required for this?

Needs to let zoning review board know that he has a new plan. He currently has an open case with the Board of appeals.

Actions: Homeowner needs to speak to County

3602 Oak Lane DPIE Permit #SDFG 51698-2019

Councilmember Luke Chesek:

By Otis Street person who owns the lot next to the community garden. Has no intention on touching the creek. It is a running water habitat. There are snakes and turtles. Stormwater management wanted daylighting even more. They wanted to make sure creek was not touch. DPIE stated they need to channel it. Take open air creek and turn it into a tunnel.

Councilmember Chesek wants to protect it.

Councilmember Scott Cecil:

Project cannot be completed unless they channel it? It was a certain length that it would have to be channelized.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler:

Wait for Daniel Sams. They have to follow their stormwater rules. Not a zoning issue you can appeal.

Councilmember Celina Benitez:

Wait on getting an answer. Very little City can do. Put it on the next agenda to make sure it does not drop

Actions: Daniel Sams needs to get back to Luke. Bryan would like Luke to reach out to the homeowner first and then Mayor also made a suggestion to write a letter from Mayor & Council to MNCPPC to reconsider. The letter should get out there now.

Artists Lofts:

Mayor Malinda Miles:

Structural issues in the Artist Lofts. Rent is being raised and structural damage has not been fixed. Feels it is an unsafe building. Mayor would like to send a letter to have them come before Mayor & City Council.

Mayor heard that they are trying to sell the building. Wants to know what they will do with the structural damage.

15 year use of the building is up. This is the time for them to get out of it.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler: Need to ask them what the requirements are?

Mayor Malinda Miles: Sent an email to Latasha to look into the structural damage. Are they trying to sell it? What will happen to their tenants? Why are they getting rid of the building? Poor construction?

Councilmember Scott Cecil:

Tax credits are going to expire. Art Space does not do this.

Councilmember Celina Benitez:
Have a video conference to speak with management. Need clarification.

Actions:

Mayor & Council would like Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling look into the structural issues. Also want to see if they are planning to sell it? City Manager needs details. Report on what was done for the past two years. Mr. Kamali may provide additional information. Engineer was sent there.

Bike Co-op:

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling: Has been moving forward. We are moving forward with them. Drawing has been complete.

Austin (from Bike CO-OP):

Engineer saw some problems on the drawings. Ally has been going back and forth with the engineer to scale down the drawing.

Neighborhood design center is currently speaking with the engineer.

POD is still costing money. Cannot move anything further. Carpenter Union wants to move forward.

Actions: Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling will stay on top of this issue.

EV Charging Stations:

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling:

Place them in the two parking spaces by City Hall. Latasha will send an email to see if they are OK with location.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler is concerned about losing a parking space by City Hall. Better limit the amount of time cars can sit there.

Councilmember Luke Cheseck:

Move bike rack to capital bike share.

Actions: Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling will follow-up to see if they are OK with location. Place charging stations on 34th Street and Arundel. Latasha will invite them out for a site visit. Need to pull report and send to Mayor & City Council again.

Memorandum of Understanding Spring Park / Peace Park

Councilmember Scott Cecil: Worried that timing needs to be spoken about it now. It could be to late.

Mayor Malinda Miles: Have a special meeting to discuss.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler: Looked into parks and playground money to pay for this?

Actions: Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling will look into parks and playground money – dates and timelines to do the match. Latasha will speak to Former Councilmember Shivali Shah to get some guidance. Add to March 24th meeting agenda.

31st Street Pocket Park:

Councilmember Luke Chesek:

Got an MOU with MNCPPC to work on this park. It is a blank piece of grass. Interested to see what they could do with this park. Team met and were interested to turn it into a native food forest. Set up a project plan. Brad volunteered to do the Landscape architecture. Community meeting on January 25th. All feedback from the community was incorporated into the design ideas. Tree commission received a \$500 grant. MNCPPA approved the project.

April 18th planting work day

May 16th Children planting day

Brad:

Thanked Mayor & City Council for taking this issue up. Left pathways for people to walk through.

Barry:

Nice way to get the community engaged. Good to think about this as an edible, medicinal plant garden. Allows people to come together to celebrate the harvest and other thing.

Councilmember Celina Benitez:

So excited about this project. Nice to keep up with Green mission. Thank you for thinking outside of the box.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler:

Happy to see field disappear. What is the maintenance plan?

Barry:

Maintenance free. Plants chosen are self maintenance. Plants are adapted over time. Low maintenance. Plants are planted close together to shade out weeds.

Going to phase in the garden. See how many people may be interested in the garden.

Councilmember Luke Chesek:

MNCPPC still does the mowing.

Councilmember Scott Cecil:

Leslie Rigby get people interesting in this project. Glad City is going this route.

Mayor Malinda Miles:

Wow you got something moving. Appreciate Mary Abe for helping with this project. Something else to add to City's green footprint.

Brad:

Mostly what will grow is nuts, berries, little fruit for humans.
Mostly for birds.

Barry:

Rats are more interesting in compost not the fresh items. This is not a once and done project. The intent of the food forest is to get the community involved. Interest and a vision for it.

Mayor Malinda Miles:

Plant items that may repel animals

Actions:

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling needs to put a date on the calendar to renew the MOU for the 31st street pocket park.

Native Plant Network:

Councilmember Luke Chesek:

Encourage residents to build a connected ecosystem. Native spaces have created islands. Biodiversity starts to decrease. Encourage residents to plan native. February 22nd meeting. People came from Hyattsville, DC and other municipalities. Other towns and cities want to do this. Does not foresee expenses. Work with tree commission. Can people start planning wild flowers. Are Mayor & City Council open to branding?

Councilmember Celina Benitez:

Great idea. Requires a lot of education. Creating green spaces especially in the easement. Only grown in limited space.

Councilmember Scott Cecil:

Glad they are doing this.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler:

Whatever is growing is blocking the sidewalk, they will receive a citation.

Mayor Malinda Miles:

Awesome idea. They are putting plants out there. They are taking over the sidewalk or parking spaces. What height can they grow. Think about how is that going to impact everything else.

Julia:

Nice clarification to replant if City is going to put a sidewalk in.

Actions: Luke will bring it to next work session and put in everyone's concerns and have something to present.

Mount Rainier Police Department Investigation:

Councilmember Scott Cecil:

This is regarding the Items missing from City Hall

Whole files missing from Code Compliance

Former City Manager waived millions of dollars in fees. If someone was willing to commit a crime.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler:

Not comfortable with own detective looking into this. Puts them into a bad position. Would like the states attorney to look into this.

Mayor Malinda Miles:

Never saw any files. If Councilmember Scott Cecil would like to proceed on this, then he should Councilmember Celina Benitez made a statement on what she saw and what she knew. Mayor Malinda Miles is not afraid for the detective to look into it. A dark shadow has been cast over this. Nobody is hiding anything. Just get it done.

Councilmember Luke Chesek:

Everyone to be mindful if something was missing. No one really knows anything.

Actions: Instruct Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling to launch investigation into the missing items from City Hall.

Schedule of Fees Dumpster & Home Business Licenses:

Actions: Staff should look at this and come up with something different. Wants to move to next Work Session. John will add to the rolling agenda. Need code section that deals with home businesses.

Civic Center Funding:

Councilmember Bryan Knedler:

Permit is almost done. RFP needs to go out. 4 million. No one knows how to put the funding together. Time is running out.

Mayor Malinda Miles:

Has not heard back from Jared with Ben Cardin's Office.

Mayor would not like to speak on these at the moment.

Councilmember Scott Cecil:

Is there anything we can do to make you feel better about this topic. Potentially going to lose tenant.

Councilmember Bryan Knedler:
Need to talk to DHCD, PEPCO. Are we ready to put RFP out?

Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling:
RFP is almost done. It is near finished. Interim City Manager Latasha Gatling wants time to get back to Council on this.

Resolution 06-2020 Census 2020

Mayor Malinda Miles:
Why do we need resolution?

Councilmember Celina Benitez:
Declares April 1, 2020 as Census Day in City of Mount Rainier. Raises awareness for schools.

Actions: Will create the proclamation.

Proposal To Go Into Closed Session:

Motion To Go Into Closed Session: Mayor Malinda Miles

Move: Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Second: Councilmember Luke Cheseck

Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed