

COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATION/INFORMATION SYSTEMS

November 24, 2008

6:00 PM

Chairman O'Neil called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen O'Neil, Osborne, Pinard, Murphy

Absent: Alderman Garrity

Messrs: M. Salomone-Abood, B. Stanley, T. Clark

Chairman O'Neil addressed item 3 of the agenda:

3. Communication from Mindy Salomone-Abood, Public Works Purchasing Agent, submitting an update on the activities of the Purchasing Division.

Chairman O'Neil stated I was just explaining to Alderman Pinard that Lisa Thibeault works with Mindy.

Ms. Mindy Salomone-Abood, Public Works Purchasing Agent, stated we had that conversation a couple of nights ago or last week.

Alderman Pinard stated I just don't understand why we had Lisa Thibeault as a purchasing agent. Then you came and you are the purchasing agent. What is Lisa doing?

Alderman O'Neil replied Lisa helps Mindy with the coordinated purchasing in the City. It is a two person job.

Ms. Salomone-Abood stated it has been a while since I have been in front of you guys so I figure it's about time to update you on what we have been doing. The rollout of the new website gave us the ability to do quite a few updates to our website. In our email notification system, we were able to categorize our vendors so now they only get specific emails that are related to their business rather than every notification that we send out. We also received a number of phone calls from different towns and cities who have heard about our system and wanted more

information because they want to implement a system similar to ours. Also with the website, we have been able to make our bids available to download. We put our contract information and our bid results on our website so we are cutting down on mailing supplies and postage cards to send this information out. We also don't need to field as many phone calls from our vendors because the information is available to them on our website. We also collaborated with the Finance Department and the Internal Auditor. In previous years, our external auditors had expressed that we should actually number our bids and this number should not only go with our bids but should go with any corresponding information, contracts and further PO's so that there is something that carries through the whole system. With the new website and the beginning of the fiscal year, we have been able to implement that. We have been able to capture a year's worth of purchases for office supplies, paper and toner. This will assist us in further negotiating and constructing our bids in the future. Obviously, we may not be able to capture a financial savings to report, but we certainly have stretched our department dollars and will have a price point to base future contracts on. New citywide bids are bids that when we first started we sent out a number of surveys to departments. We found that people were paying different prices for the same service so now with these citywide bids that we have implemented departments are paying the same price for the same service. The same products are also available to everybody at the same price. We have done the leg work. It is consistent services for all departments. Such bids are duplicating. We negotiate pricing for services. It also includes pick up, delivery and express services. We collaborated with our Information Systems on digital copiers. All machines have faxing and scanning capabilities and these things can be done right from our desktops as well. Again, this helps Information Systems set up, especially with it being networked, because it is the same system that they are working with. It is the same vendor system, and same models of machines so their set up of the machines is easier. With stationary we were able to standardize letterhead, envelopes and business cards throughout the departments. We were able to make templates for departments so they can do their own printing of letterhead and envelopes. It is not being bought at a printing company. We worked out pricing with our office supplier for the paper and envelopes that were needed. We have also awarded our printing of window envelopes, envelopes and business cards because we found that those were the hardest to print on our own printers. They do not come out as nice. What is also new, and some of you have probably heard about it, is the energy products. We signed a contract with a consultant who developed energy fuel consumption and a procurement strategy for us. We brought it before the Board and the Energy Committee and since then, we have started to negotiate and execute some contracts. Not all of them are in place but this is for our electricity and our natural gas procurement.

Alderman Pinard asked is it too early for you to tell us if we are going to be saving money on some of these purchases? If every department thinks back, in the long run, are we going to be showing a savings or is this going to be a cost? Is there going to be an increase or are we going to be saving?

Ms. Salomone-Abood replied it is hard to see savings in products because we are all over the board. People were buying from different places and to capture that there was no history. Now at least when we go back out to contract for these products we can base our pricing on what the City has paid this past year or so to what we are going to be paying in the future.

Alderman Pinard asked was that part of the deal when we decided to go with the Purchasing Department a few years back?

Alderman O'Neil replied I think Mindy and Lisa and Public Works in general have done a great job trying to get their arms around all of this, but it is going to take a little bit of time to get everything brought in. I think it is important if you can, at some point, provide the Board with what the potential savings may be. I know that is hard because everything was all over the place. Mindy, regarding bid contract availability, are you seeing 100% department cooperation or are there some departments that need to provide you that information.

Ms. Salomone-Abood replied yes, for the most part. If we didn't get it right away, we did eventually. I would say we have 98% compliance.

Alderman O'Neil asked should we be sending a recommendation? I will ask some other questions related to that issue. Could some departments use a reminder on that?

Ms. Salomone-Abood replied no, again, I think we are hitting it pretty well.

Alderman O'Neil asked regarding duplicating, copiers, and stationary, I know I am still seeing some various letterhead out there, is that because it is old letterhead?

Ms. Salomone-Abood replied yes, it could be old. It could be leftover. I know there is still some out there.

Alderman O'Neil asked what do you feel the compliance is on those items?

Ms. Salomone-Abood replied it is hard to report from our standpoint because we don't know and perhaps it is something that we need to collaborate with the Finance Department. We don't see if they are buying stationary some place else or if they are having printing done somewhere else. That might be something that we should work with Finance on in the future.

Alderman O'Neil stated maybe the Committee could ask departments to provide you a report on what they are doing. The intent here, and Alderman Pinard touched on this, is to try to get as many people doing the same things as soon as possible. I am glad to hear that it is going very well but if there is something we can do to take it to a higher level I think the Board is committed on that.

Ms. Salomone-Abood stated we also get reports from our vendors to see who is using it and who is not. Again not having that history captured...

Alderman O'Neil interjected maybe we can work on that. The Committee can pass a general recommendation and we can work out the wording.

Alderman Pinard stated keep us posted on just about everything and I think we should also know the vendors that you are going to be dealing with. I think that would give this Committee a better chance to help you out. I know it is brand new. I worked in the Purchasing Department many years ago. It can work if it is done properly.

Alderman O'Neil asked can we get the Committee just to confirm that we are going to send out a reminder, regarding providing information to her so that she is not chasing it? You can have Mindy work with Matt on the wording.

On motion of Alderman Pinard, duly seconded by Alderman Osborne, it was voted that a reminder would be sent out to departments to instruct them to provide purchasing information to Mindy Salomone-Abood.

Alderman Pinard stated if you contact these departments and you don't get any return back within seven days, make a note and report back to this Committee. That way you get every department to work on this.

Chairman O'Neil addressed item 4 of the agenda:

4. Communication from Barbara Potvin, New England Sampler, requesting the City hold a public forum to discuss the process of closing off city streets and the impact that these closings have on local small businesses as well as the benefits drawn by the City of Manchester and its local citizens.
(Note: Referred by the Board of Mayor and Aldermen on 10/21/08.)

Alderman O'Neil stated we will yield to the Deputy City Clerk because I know he has been part of some staff discussions on this.

Deputy City Clerk Matthew Normand stated in early September right after a series of events occurred on Hanover Street, including a Palace Theater event on the street as well as another business the following weekend, a complaint was sent to the Mayor's office and that complaint was regarding the process by which licenses are granted and the notice given to area businesses that might be affected. I think the larger stress was on the lack of policy that the City had. The Mayor's office called a meeting with staff which included the City Clerk's office, the Police Department, the Highway Department, the Parking Division and of course the Mayor's office. We hashed out these issues. The best way is to hold a public forum and lay out exactly what the policy would be. The general consensus is that it would come to the Committee on Administration because there are licensing issues in most cases and as applicants apply for an event that would include a street closure, the staff would continue their process, but the ultimate approval would come from the Committee on Administration as to whether they should grant the permit that would include a street closure. This would also involve an access for the public to have a public forum and discuss any issues for or against the issuance of the permit.

Alderman O'Neil asked Matt, the only new thing would be that it would be filtered through the Committee on Administration?

Deputy City Clerk Normand replied correct.

Alderman O'Neil stated we wouldn't necessarily be holding a public hearing but each item would come up and the public would be able to discuss it.

Deputy City Clerk Normand stated if the Committee wanted to entertain public comment on it, they certainly could. I think anything that would involve street closure in a licensed event we would send it to the Committee on Administration as a part of the process. Once that was granted we could then issue the license. That process would allow the public to comment.

Alderman O'Neil stated I guess the downfall would be if there was a short gap it may not allow the Committee to meet. Maybe the only way we do that is by adopting the policy and saying there will be no street closures unless forwarded to the Committee on Administration.

Deputy City Clerk Normand stated there were a couple of things that came up during that meeting. How often are the street closures granted? How do you make that determination? I think that was what the staff had concerns about. That is really a policy decision. It is a decision that should be made by the Board rather than one department over another as to who gets a license or street closure.

Alderman O'Neil asked for a future Committee meeting would you be able to provide a written recommendation as well as some historical background on how many of these occur? I am guessing there are some parades or regular, predictable events.

Deputy City Clerk Normand replied yes, we can put that list together. I think this really affects Hanover Street the most. We can give you a list of the others.

Alderman O'Neil stated I am not aware of any problems. Occasionally you hear some grumbling about issues when there are parades downtown or special events such as the car show in the spring time that brings tens of thousands of people downtown.

Deputy City Clerk Normand stated I think generally they are spread out so it doesn't always hit the radar as being a problem. I think in this case there were at least two events that I am aware of that were essentially back to back. I think the businesses on Hanover Street are pretty frustrated with that and rightfully so.

Alderman O'Neil asked is Hanover Street the concern?

Deputy City Clerk Normand replied that is where the concern was generated. From my perspective seeing the events that come through our office, the most problems that we get come out of that little corridor between Chestnut Street and Elm Street. When the St. Patrick's Day parade comes through or the car show as you mentioned, it is a big deal, yes, but those events bring a lot of people. I know that the last event that really sparked the interest of the Hanover Street merchants, our licensing person went through it and there were twelve people standing in the street. Certainly not all of those businesses are open at night but it is still a big deal to close the street for the weekend for a small amount of people.

Alderman O'Neil stated I am thinking that if we get into all the walk-a-thons and road races, we could have full agendas. Would we be better to just concentrate on the problem of Hanover Street?

Deputy City Clerk Normand replied yes, I think staff and Brandy were here during that discussion. I don't know if she feels differently, but certainly I think the general consensus of the staff was that Hanover Street was primarily the problem.

Ms. Brandy Stanley, Parking Manager, stated I think for the most part it is centered around Hanover Street but I have heard from some of the Elm Street businesses, too, about some of the parades and some of the other things. I think one of the reasons for this letter that you received was that there really isn't any notification system that is out there for Elm Street or any of the area businesses. A lot of this stuff catches people by complete and total surprise because there is no email list or anything else. We talked about using Intown Manchester's database to establish a notification system whenever streets are going to be closed. I think that would go a long way but it is not just Hanover Street it is some of the Elm Street businesses too.

Alderman O'Neil stated maybe staff can come up with a recommendation for us at a future meeting. I really think if we try to come up with a boiler plate for everything our meetings are going to be very lengthy with the amount of parades, walk-a-thons and the marathon. There are some days we have a road race and walk-a-thon going on the same Sunday. I think those are good things for the City. I think the parades are great for the City. I wouldn't want to make it burdensome on any of the event sponsors to try to do those but if we can help out on the communication item that would be great.

Alderman Osborne stated I know that Hanover Street is probably where they have their problem. If you notice over the years, we didn't have too many side streets closed off, outside of the parades. Parades have been around since Abraham Lincoln so I guess everybody knows when there is going to be a parade so I don't think that is a problem. I can see the problem here with the other businesses on Hanover Street. I had my business on Hanover Street so I know Hanover Street quite well. I think the main thing is that their parking is cut off to these other businesses and there seems to be quite a few. There are thirteen signatures here of little businesses that are on Hanover Street where years ago there were only a few. Probably half a dozen and there are probably twice as many businesses on Hanover Street now so they all have to make their living somehow. Cutting off their traffic of retail is quite hard on them. I guess you have to get somebody like the Chamber of Commerce to get together. We should go over these concerns that are down here. These four concerns are the main ones that they have here. They are not informed and things of that sort. I think we should get something with that

like Alderman O'Neil has said. I think Hanover Street is the main thing here. As far as Elm Street I think the only things that do happen there is the Easter Seals or walk-a-thons and things of that sort so everybody knows that. I guess we can take it from there.

Alderman O'Neil stated we will have staff come up with some policies. Some of these bullets, the public safety aspect, Police and Fire are involved in every street closure in the City of Manchester so that is already going on. It is not correct to say they are not informed. Regarding loss of revenue, many of these events happen on Sundays. We don't charge for parking on Sundays anyway. The whole idea is to get people downtown. I think we can come up with something that will help the Hanover Street situation. Maybe we can come up with a better way to inform people, but I also don't want to make this an issue for the event sponsors whether they are putting on a parade, walk-a-thon or the marathon. Those are good things for our City.

Alderman Osborne stated maybe we should invite some of these people to explain what their concerns are instead of writing it to us.

Alderman O'Neil stated we can invite them to the next meeting.

On motion of Alderman Pinard, duly seconded by Alderman Osborne, it was voted to table this item and ask staff to prepare recommendations for a future meeting.

Chairman O'Neil addressed item 5 of the agenda:

5. Ratify and confirm phone poll unanimously granting permission for Peter Ramsey of the Palace Theatre to hang a banner across Hanover Street Starting after November 7, 2008 and through December 2008, to advertise upcoming events at the discretion of the Committee.

On motion of Alderman Osborne, duly seconded by Alderman Pinard, it was voted to ratify and confirm the phone poll.

Chairman O'Neil addressed item 6 of the agenda:

6. Communication from Bryan Christiansen from Comcast with notification of certain price increases for cable services and equipment starting in December 2008.

(Note: Referred by the Board of Mayor and Aldermen on 11/12/08.)

Alderman Pinard asked is there a way to find out if the Public Utility Commission should get involved in this? It seems that they keep rising.

Alderman O'Neil stated let me turn this over to Attorney Arnold. Having served on the Committee and negotiated these things, there are two things we can't control: content and rates. I will let Attorney Arnold confirm that.

Mr. Thomas Arnold, Deputy City Solicitor, stated essentially Alderman O'Neil is correct. Pursuant to federal law this is under the jurisdiction of the Federal Communication Commission. The City is not allowed to regulate either content or rates for cable television.

Alderman O'Neil stated there is not much we can do. I guess the only thing we have had issues with in the past is asking Comcast that when they send out the information to their customers that they do provide the lowest tier absolutely possible and then let the customer decide. Maybe we can send a communication to them reminding them to do that. There has been some confusion in the past, where there are actually lower tiers than what they call a basic tier.

Alderman Pinard stated the ones getting hurt again, not counting the property taxpayers, are the senior citizens.

Alderman O'Neil stated you are absolutely right. That is where there has been some confusion over this basic tier in the past. There are actually tiers of service lower than that. Am I correct Tom?

Mr. Arnold stated there are certainly several tiers. The very basic tier is a very limited service consisting of broadcast stations and a couple others. I couldn't recall off the top of my head. Beyond that, there are various levels of extended service.

Alderman O'Neil asked Tom, how does this affect our agreements with MCTV or MCAM?

Mr. Arnold replied with both of those agreements, they call for a percentage of the franchise fee to be paid over to the respective organizations. When Comcast

increased their rate, the amount we collected for the franchise fee went up and consequently, the amount that is paid to either MCAM or MCTV also increased.

Alderman Murphy asked is standard and basic the same thing?

Alderman O'Neil stated no. I know in the past years there has been some confusion, especially with the senior citizens. Basic was at X dollars per month. Many seniors went into that thinking it was the lowest when in fact there were lower levels.

Alderman Murphy asked what is this standard cable service that will no longer be available effective January 1, 2008?

Alderman O'Neil replied that is about Comcast. That is an industry thing regarding transitioning over to digital.

Alderman Murphy stated I don't think that has anything to do with standard cable. That has to do with antennas. That is a different type of broadcasting.

Alderman O'Neil stated that is a very good question. We should probably ask someone to come in from Comcast for our next meeting. I think we're meeting next week to primarily take up the budget consolidation.

On motion of Alderman Murphy, duly seconded by Alderman Pinard, it was voted to table this item until a representative from Comcast could attend the next meeting of the Committee on Administration.

Alderman Pinard stated Public Service and the telephone company have to go to the PUC when they have a hike. Why doesn't Comcast?

Mr. Arnold replied there is a federal law, but I need to be careful because obviously Comcast has agreements through the PUC for stringing cables on poles, but in terms of price regulations or the service that they offer that is a matter of federal law from the Federal Communications Commission.

TABLED ITEMS

7. Proposal of new Department of Facilities, Grounds & Recreation submitted by Mayor Guinta.

Note:

(Note: At the 9/16/08 BMA meeting it was voted to approve this item. Tabled 2/5/08; Information requested from Parks & Recreation and Highway/Facilities enclosed.)

On motion of Alderman Osborne, duly seconded by Alderman Murphy, it was voted to remove this item from the table.

On motion of Alderman Osborne, duly seconded by Alderman Pinard, it was voted to receive and file this item.

8. Proposal for new Community Development Department submitted by Mayor Guinta.

(Note: The Committee is awaiting reports from the Human Resources Director, analysis of the salary structure and the organizational chart of the proposed department; the Facilities Division Director to provide a summary of proposed reconstruction of the Annex, 2nd floor to accommodate the proposed department; and from the three Department Heads effected by the proposal, including a copy of the current organizational chart for the departments and a listing of positions with salary grades. Tabled 4/1/08)

On motion of Alderman Osborne, duly seconded by Alderman Murphy, it was voted to remove this item from the table.

On motion of Alderman Osborne, duly seconded by Alderman Pinard, it was voted to receive and file this item.

There being no further business, on motion of Alderman Pinard, duly seconded by Alderman Murphy, it was voted to adjourn.

A True Record. Attest.

Clerk of Committee