

COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT

February 20, 2008

5:15 PM

Chairman Garrity called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Garrity, Shea, O'Neil, Smith

Absent: Alderman Gatsas

Messrs: K. Sheppard, R. MacKenzie, F. Robinson

Chairman Garrity addressed item 3 of the agenda:

3. Communication from Kevin Sheppard, Public Works Director, requesting approval of revisions to the Annual ROW Reconstruction and Storm Drain Infrastructure projects.

On motion of Alderman O'Neil, duly seconded by Alderman Shea, it was voted to approve this item.

Chairman Garrity addressed item 4 of the agenda:

4. Communication from Charles DePrima, Acting Director, Parks, Recreation & Cemeteries, requesting replacement of a 1995 Pontiac Bonneville with a 2004 Crown Victoria recycled cruiser.

Alderman Shea moved to approve this item. Alderman Smith duly seconded the motion.

Alderman O'Neil stated that car was the Mayor's car at one point. Is that thing in pretty good shape? It looks in pretty good shape. It doesn't look like it's rusting. I guess that would be up to Kevin Sheppard if we had another place to put it.

Chairman Garrity stated according to the letter, it's pretty rusted.

Mr. Kevin Sheppard, Public Works Director, stated typically we ask people to go the CIP Committee and the CIP Committee typically refers it to the budget, because that's where the equipment comes from.

Alderman O'Neil asked do you have a recycled cruiser to give him?

Mr. Sheppard stated the police are buying new cruisers now and we're actually getting some recycled ones.

Alderman O'Neil asked and this Bonneville is gone, to the best of our knowledge?

Mr. Sheppard responded yes.

Chairman Garrity called for a vote on the motion. There being none opposed, the motion carried.

Chairman Garrity addressed item 5 of the agenda:

5. Communication from Robert MacKenzie, Director of Planning & Community Development, submitting a report prepared by the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority and recommending a review of City policy on housing, particularly as it relates to Federal housing funds.

On motion of Alderman Shea, duly seconded by Alderman Smith, it was voted to discuss this item.

Alderman Shea asked Mr. MacKenzie to discuss the parameters.

Mr. Robert MacKenzie, Planning Director, stated we've heard a lot on TV about the housing issues, the sub-prime and the foreclosures around the country. This is the first report that I had seen that really talked about it in New Hampshire. We are having difficulties. We're having foreclosures. We're beginning to see some vacant houses, which is somewhat disturbingly similar to 1990, 1991 and 1992. I just wanted to bring this one to the Board's attention because it was the first local analysis. In essence they're saying that New Hampshire and Manchester will probably be better off than many of the housing markets that are in trouble around the country. But we are still going to have foreclosure issues. We have declining values of rental housing. Homeownership also has an impact on our tax base. And at some point the Committee may want to look at its current housing program. We've done a lot of affordable housing in the last seven years. I'm just nervous that significant new housing projects may make our current housing situation worse. So at some point, either now or at a future meeting, I think the

Committee should talk about this in terms of whether we really want to encourage brand new affordable housing projects with our housing funds.

Alderman Shea stated I know that in our conversation you had indicated that there are waves of people who own property now but are probably at a level where it's difficult for them to actually make improvements. I think that you could indicate to the Committee why that's significant. I know you hit upon it quickly here, but I think that you made reference the last time that there were problems with the housing situation, probably ten or twelve years ago, or whenever. So I guess that would be helpful for the Committee to know.

Mr. MacKenzie stated sure, and I'm a little bit concerned because I know we've started hearing about some of the vacant properties. Some cities are really having to take a proactive role and go out and board them up, make sure they're protected. I know Sam Maranto has been checking on cities like Lowell where they actually have a lot more vacant housing than we do. But this trend is going to continue probably for about two years before we're out of this down cycle. One of the options we could explore that I was talking to Alderman Shea about was taking a larger chunk of our federal funds. We get about \$800,000 a year of home funds from HUD, and that could go more toward existing homeowners, home repair programs, energy efficiency programs, and healthy-house programs like lead paint abatement. Now the energy efficiency programs...we've just had a small one in the City that the staff has worked on, but that has an added bonus. That helps low and moderate income families for the next ten to twenty years afford their energy bills better. So that type of energy efficiency program is real useful in a down economy.

Alderman Shea stated I think that one of the concerns that we all should be made aware of is the fact that there has to be publicity so that people who would be able to take advantage of such a program in the future were notified somehow. In other words, some people don't always have access to the same kind of information that others might have, and I think that's something that should be considered at the due time, of course, not at this time.

Alderman O'Neil asked Bob, would you be willing to put together some type of recommendation for us, at least items for us to think about?

Mr. MacKenzie responded yes, I'd be happy to do that, and I know the Mayor has talked a little bit about a housing task force to look at these specific issues and maybe some other ones. But I'd be happy to do that and report back.

Alderman O'Neil stated either specific recommendations or if you just want to lay out some options for us to consider, that would be great.

Alderman Smith stated Bob, you well know that I've discussed this with you many times about the vacant three tenement houses over in my Ward. What I'm concerned about is now they're vacant, and there's vandalism, and there's drug people in them. A lot of the places next door to them are not being rented because of the location. I'm talking about the Granite Street area. Anything you can do, I'd certainly appreciate it.

Mr. MacKenzie stated we will take a look at that issue too and come up with some suggestions for the Committee.

Chairman Garrity stated I think it's important, Mr. MacKenzie, when we get into the CIP process that we have those recommendations and highlight the issues or projects that we should be looking at.

On motion of Alderman O'Neil, duly seconded by Alderman Shea, it was voted to receive and file this item.

Chairman Garrity addressed item 6 of the agenda:

6. Amending Resolution and Budget Authorization providing for establishing and expending CDBG funds in the amount of \$18,000 for New Horizon's Capital Improvement Project.

Alderman O'Neil moved to approve this item. Alderman Shea duly seconded the motion.

Chairman Garrity asked Mr. Robinson if this was part of the homeless plan.

Mr. Fred Robinson, Executive Director of New Horizons, replied that it was.

Alderman Shea asked are there any matching funds at all?

Mr. Robinson responded no, debt covers the entire project.

Chairman Garrity addressed item 7 of the agenda:

7. Amending Resolution and Budget Authorization providing for acceptance and expenditure of \$5,000 in funds from the Triangle Credit Union to be used for the Rockingham Rail Trail under the Parks Improvement Project.

On motion of Alderman Smith, duly seconded by Alderman O'Neil, it was voted to approve this item.

Chairman Garrity addressed item 8 of the agenda, noting that he was looking for a motion to table the item since Mr. DePrima was not present.

8. Communication from Charles DePrima, Acting Director, Parks, Recreation & Cemetery Department, requesting additional funds totaling \$83,815.50 for the City portion of the Piscataqua River Park Pedestrian Bridge.

Alderman O'Neil stated I thought we had taken care of funding for that project.

Chairman Garrity stated I'm pretty frustrated about all the Parks projects at this point. They seem to be under-funded and over-funded.

Alderman O'Neil stated this dollar amount looks familiar too for some reason.

Chairman Garrity stated we haven't taken this up at this Committee level.

On motion of Alderman O'Neil, duly seconded by Alderman Smith, it was voted to table item 8, due to the absence of Mr. DePrima.

Alderman Smith stated I would request that we find out who the engineer was that did the job or the consulting engineer who estimated the job, and what the problems were, because these are just figures down here. We need to know the cost overrun. I think we did get a letter, but I don't know who the engineering firm was or the consulting firm was.

Chairman Garrity stated and that's why I think we need Mr. DePrima here. This has been on more than one occasion that a Parks project either has been under-budget or over-budget, so something is broken and needs to be fixed.

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

A True Record. Attest.

Clerk of Committee