

MINUTES: SEPTEMBER 14, 2020
FINANCE & PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
7:00 p.m.

Members in Attendance via Videoconference: Sam Crowl, Chair
Jeff Risner, Vice-Chair
Peter Kotses, Member
Arian Smedley, Member

Administrators and/or

Other Elected Officials via Videoconference: President Knisely
Mayor Patterson

ITEMS DISCUSSED:

- Pumper Truck (note renewal)
 - Crowl – one-year note is due on October 16 – total owed is \$226,650 -- \$100,000 is already appropriated for this payment -- \$50,000 of which comes from Ohio University

- CDBG Transfers (to departments administering grants)
 - Crowl – as part of the CDBG grant funding there are funds included to administer these grant dollars – in the past, the City has maintained the administration portion in the CDBG Fund to be used toward other projects, however, during a recent audit the City was advised that those administration funds should be transferred to the departments that actually administer the grants – this is simply an accounting mechanism

- Appropriations/Transfers
 - Crowl – the Community Center will need an additional transfer of \$20,000 from the APR Income Tax Fund to the Community Center Fund to continue operations – revenue, during the pandemic, has decreased due to the closing of certain programming – \$60,000 has been transferred since May, not including this transfer

 - Smedley – asked, specifically, how this transfer will be used
 - President – believes these are basic, ongoing operating costs, including salaries – can confirm with the Auditor

 - Crowl – an appropriation is also needed in our Internal Service Fund, 865

-Smedley – asked how this fund is used
-Risner – the City shares internal services, and there is a formula used to calculate how much each department is charged, i.e. through the number of computers, vehicles – it is a significant part of the budget that is set aside in the annual budget

- HAPCAP (amendment to utility relief agreement)
-Crowl – for clarification, HAPCAP has requested rewording of Section 17, Compensation, to change “direct” expense to “actual” expense, not to exceed 7% of the total grant award

-Grace – questioned whether the City is shutting off water for past due payments
-Mayor – the City is not shutting off water to any resident due to the consequences of COVID-19 – many residents are struggling to meet utility payments

-Smedley – asked if Council could get a periodic status update on both the rent/mortgage emergency relief and the utility assistance relief grants
-Mayor – can provide monthly reports when available on the utility assistance relief, and he will check with HAPCAP and provide an update on the rent/mortgage emergency relief next Monday at Council’s Regular Session – just learned that the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has declared a moratorium on evictions, which will be helpful

- 2021 Public Defender Agreement
-Crowl – this is an annual contract – the City authorized \$100,000 for calendar year 2020 and will expend \$77,425 – will need to determine whether in 2021 to stay with the \$100,000 appropriation, or appropriate a lower amount, possibly \$90,000 – would like additional information on past years’ expenses and how this cost is calculated

- ARTS/West (update)
-Mayor – due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the corresponding Directives from Governor DeWine’s Office in terms of closures for various businesses/operations, ARTS/West was closed – on August 25 the Interim Health Director rescinded that particular Order for entertainment venues, but still under very strict guidelines, with only 15% fixed seating capacity – ARTS/West does not have fixed seating, but will likely use some percentage of the fire code capacity that will be able to provide proper social distancing – he has given direction to the Director of Arts, Parks & Recreation – as the City’s number of cases for the coronavirus continue to increase he has been exploring an opportunity under the CARES Act to install fiber-optic cable from the City Building to the ARTS/West facility which will allow the ability to offer virtual programming – reliable broadband access could open up the possibility for community Wi-Fi in the parking lot area to complement the City School District’s ability to assist

students who don't have internet access in their homes – he will be asking Director Moore to address City Council at the next Committee evening to discuss the possible reopening of ARTS/West

-Smedley – understands how difficult it is to manage the City under a pandemic and its financial impact on the City's budget – recent outreach by community members shows the value of ARTS/West – questioned the timeline for the reopening of ARTS/West and whether the reopening would restore the position of the Program Specialist, understanding that earlier in this meeting additional funds have been transferred in Arts, Parks & Recreation to provide salaries due to struggling finances

-Mayor – the reopening could happen soon, but it will require Director Moore to look at the staffing – the City recognized early in the pandemic that finances were going to be tight for Arts, Parks, & Recreation; revenue that is dependent upon programming

-Smedley – asked that Director Moore come with a plan for addressing ARTS/West – a road map moving forward would be helpful – also, she has seen announcements from the Community Center for the return of in-person activities and questioned whether that can be done at ARTS/West as well – she looks forward to Director Moore's outline of the future of ARTS/West

-Mayor – he has instructed Director Moore, upon her return, that ARTS/West is at the top of the list to get things going again

Question/Comment from Cheryl Cesta (see attached)

ITEMS NEEDED ON THE NEXT CITY COUNCIL AGENDA:

1. Pumper Truck Note
2. CDBG Transfer
3. Appropriations/Transfers
4. HAPCAP Amend
5. 2021 Public Defender Contract

MINUTES
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
SEPTEMBER 14, 2020
7:00 p.m.

Members in Attendance via Videoconference: Chris Fahl, Chair
Jeff Risner, Vice-Chair
Sarah Grace, Member
Arian Smedley, Member

Administrators and/or Other Elected Officials
via Videoconference: President Knisely
Mayor Patterson
Planner Logue

Items Discussed:

- University Estates (TIF for Woods Edge development)
 - Fahl – similar tax incremental financing (TIF) was used on East State Street – this University Estates’ development is included in the Affordable Housing Commission’s Plan that was adopted by City Council last year
 - Planner – infrastructure borne by the developer (streets, curbs, sidewalks, guttering, water, sewer) is challenging and adds to the cost of housing – the Affordable Housing Commission recommends using tax incremental financing (TIF) in which a portion of the increased value in property tax is put into the TIF District to cover the cost of the infrastructure so that cost is not carried through to the homeowner – the TIF agreement is a 75% tax exemption for a period of 10 years – it is important to note that this 75% tax exemption, that will be transferred into the TIF District, is only on the increased value of the property
 - Grace – the TIF is a valuable tool for affordable housing to increase the number and availability of affordable housing units in our area – there is no loss to any entity that would be receiving these property tax dollars and, in fact, they will be receiving 25% of any increased property value due to the development – at the completion of the 10 years they will see a significant increase
 - Fahl – added, these units will be universal design for accessibility

-Risner – asked about the number of units
-Logue – about 50 units – these units cannot be converted into rental housing for the first five years

-Smedley – asked about a map of the parcels this would capture
-Planner – will provide one

-Mayor – if this non-traditional TIF is successful, it can be used elsewhere in the City where there is developable land by defraying the cost of building out infrastructure costs to the developer

-Clodfelter – asked about the square footage of these townhomes
-Fahl – these are two bedrooms, 2.5 baths (1780 sq. ft.), and three bedrooms, 3 baths (2160 sq. ft.) with a single car garage

- Local Historic Designation (Seaman's Cardinal Super Market)
-Fahl – this was brought forward by the Historic Preservation Commission and recommended by the Planning Commission

-John Valentour, Member of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)
– Seaman's is an early 1950's building and is worthy of preserving – any future modifications of this building will need to come through the HPC for review to make sure the change is not out of character with what is historically significant for Athens

-Fahl – clarified that this designation is supported by the Seaman family

-Smedley – asked about the benefits of a DRD and what this 10-acres looks like

-Planner – the Downtown Redevelopment District (DRD) is an economic development tool under the Ohio Revised Code and has a similar financing concept as a TIF – a DRD must be 10 acres or less, the real estate needs to be contiguous, and must have a local, state or national historic designation in order to protect historic buildings within municipalities – existing value of a property, again similar to a TIF, will continue to be distributed as usual to the taxing authorities with any increase in value set aside for the DRD for a period of 10 years – this 10-acre area will incorporate the Seaman's property and real estate to the immediate East (O'Bleness and Diles Hearing Clinic) – any new development can use revenue from the DRD to assist in covering the cost of infrastructure, signage, landscaping, etc.

-Mayor – a DRD can be used to leverage grant funding for historic building renovation or expansion, and is used to incentivize future economic development in the area

-Kotses – asked if there was any discussion of crossing over the street and taking in the Athens County Fairgrounds property
-Mayor – this area is already at 9.78 acres and roadway is counted in the overall acreage, so even though it was explored no additional property could be a part of this DRD

- Local Historic Designation (Athens Downtown)

-Fahl – the Historic Preservation Commission has been diligently working on this and it is now being recommended by the Planning Commission – this is our traditional uptown area

-Valentour – this local historic designation is the same area as the National Historic Register – again, this will allow the HPC oversight and local review of the exterior of the buildings in this district – this review will not create delays in construction schedules, but will provide assistance about the exterior architecture – these buildings are from different periods of architecture – this local designation is to protect and preserve the character of Athens

-Clodfelter – asked about the parameters expected of new businesses coming into the area

-Valentour – if there are no exterior modifications there would be no need for review

-Clodfelter – asked if certain paint colors would be discouraged

-Planner – the standard for review is that of the U.S. Department of Interior standards for historic preservation – those guidelines offer a lot of flexibility, adding that paint colors are not part of those guidelines – the HPC can advise of traditional paint colors for types of architecture, with some control if there are local guidelines in place – studies have shown that historic districts that have local control over design review have higher value and higher rents and that they are more advantageous to businesses and drawing tourists, and incredibly important to the surrounding community – makes the City more attractive, more competitive, and more economically viable

-Kotses – as with other communities, we're trying to preserve the brand or look of our community in this area

-Smedley – asked whether there is currently a process in place for businesses wanting to make exterior changes based on the National Designation, or will the local designation create that

-Valentour – currently there is none – the HPC has no authorization, no requirement unless asked by a local property owner – making the process easy and understandable is important – any kind of review will be expedited by HPC – believes HPC's participation will be very beneficial to the property owner

- Planner – clarified that a building on the National Registry is essentially recognizing what is historic – any modifications can be made to a historic building and still be recognized on the National Registry – the Federal Government puts the requirements for review of historic properties on municipal governments – a building or district could lose its historic status if so many changes have been made that the historical integrity is gone – when making major building changes, there are financial benefits to property owners to keep the historic integrity through historic preservation tax credits from the State and the U.S. Department of the Interior
- Solar Zoning Changes
 - Fahl – zoning modifications were presented by the Environment & Sustainability Commission and recommended by the Planning Commission to assist the City with the recognition of a SolSmart Silver designation – a definition of “Solar Energy System” is being added, solar energy systems will be permitted in R-1, Residential Zones, as an accessory use to a permitted principal use, along with changes in height regulations
 - Crowl – this will continue to make our community very solar friendly
 - Athens City Code (amend Chapter 9.10, cutting weeds)
 - Fahl – would like to add a definition of “Noxious Weeds” to this Chapter, increase the cutting height from 8” to 10”, and add a height exemption for pollinator-friendly yards
 - Smedley – expressed concern with increasing the cutting height from 8” to 10” for non-designated pollinator-friendly yards for those who have a problematic yard in their neighborhood
 - Risner – as our climate becomes dryer is concerned about fire with the planting of pampas grasses
 - Fahl – cannot regulate unless it is considered an invasive species by the State of Ohio

ITEMS NEEDED ON THE NEXT CITY COUNCIL AGENDA:

1. TIF
2. Seaman’s
3. Downtown Historic Designation
4. Solar Zoning