

MANAGER'S REPORT

City Council Meeting @ 7 p.m.

Tuesday, April 20, 2010

TO: Mayor Walter Ash Jr. and Honorable Members of Belfast City Council

FROM: Joseph J. Slocum, City Manager

DATE: Friday, March 12, 2010

Agenda items:

10.B Update from the Downtown Business Group on Belfast becoming a "Main Street Maine" community.

For years merchants in the downtown area have formed themselves into what has become known as the Downtown Business Group. They have organized activities, decorations, plantings and events in order to promote the economy of the downtown area and in doing so having a positive effect on the local greater economy. Downtowns are crucial economic centers in all communities.

Recently they have elected to transform themselves into what is called a "Main Street" program. This is a national membership program that 2500 American Downtowns have previously joined and incorporated into their community. You need to apply to be admitted. There are limits of the number municipalities they will accept. One of the chief membership advantages is the immediate access to all information, studies, plans, projects and strategies that have been done by all of these various American downtown's to grow themselves as vibrant economic commercial centers.

Representatives of the Downtown Business Group will be at the meeting to present to the Council their plans for the future. To become a "Main Street" Maine Community a downtown must retain a full-time year-round Director. They have selected Lorain Brown as their interim Director and she will be at the meeting to introduce herself and layout the next steps toward making Belfast become a "Main Street" Maine Community. There is an attachment in your packet that provides some additional information.

10.C Discussion and possible action on the potential development of a 21-unit elderly low-income housing development on Swan Lake Avenue.

The City has been approached by a developer who is interested in building a 21-unit elderly low-income housing facility in Belfast. They have identified a site on Swan Lake Avenue that is served by public sewer. They have provided us with some documentation that you will find in your packet to help provide some detail on the proposed project. The narrative is stamped confidential but I have been given permission to release this information to you and to the general public.

This matter comes to City Council at this time the first to inform the City that this project is being proposed. Secondly, the project is on the verge of making formal application to Maine State Housing Authority for favorable financial assistance to help make this project become a reality. The developers

are seeking all financial assistance opportunities in order to bring this project into existence. One of the potential funding sources they are asking the City to consider is to use its staff and its standing to apply for and if successful –administer- a Community Development Block Grant that would help finance the cost of some infrastructure associated with this project.

The City has indeed in the past utilized staff resources to apply for and administer Community Development Block Grant applications and awards. This is a time-consuming task but it is one that has realized benefits to a couple of developments over the last 10 years.

There are limited opportunities to secure Community Development Block Grants. Generally a municipality may receive (1) three times within a five-year window. The City is presently hiring an Economic Development Director and one of the responsibilities of this individual will be to apply for and secure grants to the City's economic benefit. There's been some recent discussion about the need for additional funding on the Waterfront Walkway Project and other infrastructure projects.

The next round of funding Block Grant program will not be until the late fall. There is plenty of time to decide which grants the City would like to apply for and to see what different options the City would have relating to these potential block grants.

At this time it is perfectly appropriate for the City to communicate to Maine State Housing Authority that the City:

1. Supports the development of a 21-unit elderly housing facility in the City;
2. Supports the application of this developer for financial assistance from Maine State Housing Authority and;
3. The City would give serious consideration of this project as a potential candidate for a City application for a Community Development Block Grant.

This sends a positive message to Maine State Housing Authority without restricting the City's future options on where it would like its Community Development Block Grant applications to be directed.

10.D Request from the Hiking, Biking and Pedestrian Committee to pursue a Planning Grant for improvements to biking and pedestrian resources on Route 3.

This is a last minute item. It is somewhat self-explanatory. Improving pedestrian and biking amenities along Route 3 is a priority of the Committee and they are asking for staff resources to apply for and administer a planning grant to facilitate improvements to this area.

10.E Discussion on Crosswalks, Pedestrian signs and parking in and around High Street and Waldo Avenue. Councilor Hurley raises the following concerns:

- Install more permanent crosswalk painting methods
- Move crosswalk signs to the edge of the road

- Move the centerline on High Street in front of the Church

I add that I plan to either move the center double line on Waldo Avenue closer to the eastside of the road to permit safer parking on the Westside (no parking on the east side) or to eliminate any double yellow line altogether.

I do note that I do not support moving the crosswalk signs to the side of the road. I drive around them every day without a problem and they do slow traffic down. Coming down Main Street from Alto Street, North or South on High Street people are driving too fast. Crosswalks and signs are for pedestrian safety not driver convenience. Its springtime and these crosswalk signs just went back out. Every spring people forget to adjust – the same way they need to adjust to winter. We might repair one or two per year early in the spring and then people slow down like they are supposed to and we have very few problems. We are not wasting money replacing these signs regularly.

There is a memo from Mike attached and this is on the agenda because this is a policy matter.

10.F Discussion and action of possibly creating a manufacturing/distribution incubator for Belfast.
(Hurley)

One the Council's economic goals for the year was to pursue the idea of creating a business incubator that would cater to businesses in need of sharing a loading dock and far less space than large warehouse type buildings might contain. The idea is to offer opportunities to newer growing businesses to start in smaller spaces and expand as their business prospers. This also encourages redirecting the use of a large building for one tenant into a divided building that can support many tenants. Financially more tenants might be a quicker and more lucrative opportunity. Councilor Hurley initiated this idea and we solicited a financial proposal from a consultant to help bring such an incubator to Belfast. Attached is the consultant's proposal supporting general information to this item.

There are many ways to proceed here. First, we can encourage an existing building owner to pursue "a divided option" as a possible marketing strategy. Secondly, the City could work with real estate brokers seeking to sell larger buildings by introducing them to businesses looking for smaller spaces. This empowers the broker to look for an investor who may wish to own the property for rental income. Thirdly, the City could go out and buy or build such a facility in an attempt to market its self. Lastly, another option is to employ a consultant to look for sources of potential funding to support one or more of these options.

Belfast has received inquiries in the last six months from several small and medium-sized businesses looking for such smaller spaces and loading dock infrastructure. This is a good time to bring your concerns, ideas, and thoughts on how to proceed with this item.

10.G Discussion of Federal Recovery Zone Bond Program as part of the Federal Stimulus Program.
(Hurley)

The federal government has earmarked some borrowing support for all counties in Maine. There is a limits set on the amount of borrowing for each county. Essentially the opportunity offers a lower

interest rate than would otherwise be available. The borrowing can be by a municipality or a private business. There is \$3.5 million dollars allocated to Waldo County. It will fall to Waldo County Commissioners to collect and review borrowing applications from both private businesses as well as government entities. If the amount sought to be borrowed exceeds \$3,500,000, then the Waldo County Commissioners will have to recommend which applications should be given positive consideration by the state and federal government. In your packets is an outline of this subsidized long program as well as an application outline that can be filled out by any interested party seeking this low interest money. Alan Hinsey from KWRED will collect applications as will I and get them to the Commissioners.

The deadline for submission to the County Commissioners is June 1, 2010. We are putting the application check off sheet on the City Hall web site, as well as having copies available at the City Planning Office.

10.H Update on Belfast's relationship with Eastern Maine Development Corporation.

This summer there will be a review on the future configuration of the 7 federally recognized Economic Development Zones in the State of Maine. Belfast will have the option- as will every town in the County- to decide which federal Economic Development Engine they wish to be attached to. We can stay with Eastern Maine Development Corporation or we can shift south to the Mid Coast Economic Development Zone, which includes Lincoln and Sagadahoc Counties and Brunswick. It is anticipated that the Governor will make a recommendation on this before September. It is important to be associated with a federal recognized district to be included in potential economic development funding opportunities financed by the federal government. There is a likelihood that there will be some kind of membership fee allocated to each County/City or Town. I will talk more about this at the meeting.

10.I Discussion and action on Walsh Fields Grounds Keeping/Maintenance Bid.

The City received one bid though we solicited other bidders and advertised. I am asking that the Council accept the bid but delay making a bid award, as there are some items I would like to review further. I have several concerns:

- Can the City employees cover the spring grounds clean up?
- Do we really need almost \$2,000 of garden maintenance at these two baseball fields?
- Can the city crew cover the dog park portion?
- What kind of fertilizer is being used in this child and pet intensive area?
- Is there some way we can get this done without spending over \$15,000 per year?

Walsh Fields is a wonderful place but the City would never have invested the dollars that a motivated national corporation was willing to spend. When BOA gave the facility to the City we just took over the expenses to maintain it. It was built to meet the standards of a well-financed company and unfortunately the City of Belfast is not a well-financed national company. I am aware that members of

the Parks and Recreation Commission have stated that we have an obligation to keep it maintained to those corporate standards.

The major users of these fields do some work in addition to what this bid calls for- including helping to keep the bathrooms clean. I think they give the City what they can.

I am just wondering if we can find a way to still have great facilities at Walsh Fields without trying to match corporate spending. I ask us to accept the bid but wait until the next meeting to consider making any award.

10.J Request to use \$5,240 of Transfer Station Equipment Reserve funds to pay for a major repair of one of the bailers.

Our budget does include basic repair funds on our equipment but not for unexpected major overhauls. We priced new against repair and it was smarter to put \$5,240 into repairs than to buy new. Since we did not budget for such a big incident we ask that you allow us to draw down this cost from the existing Transfer Station Equipment Reserve, which is currently about \$50,000.

That's it for now. Fiscal year budget books will be given to you by the end of next week. We can discuss the budget workshop schedule on Tuesday. I will insert a tentative schedule in the packet for your advance review and consideration.

I have enclosed a copy of my memo and a proposal from the city's FBO, which I sent to the Airport Advisory Committee in response to their research and conversations to possibly bringing an automatic fuel system up at the municipal airport.

It is Spring thank goodness! But it is also a time of the year when more people are out walking, on their bikes or playing near roads. I encourage everyone to talk about this so that it trickles up and down all the age groups and regions of the City. We don't need a single accident because someone would just not slow down. The quality of life here is everyone's responsibility. Every Spring I have forgotten to slow down and be a little more alert. This Spring I am trying to do better. All I can do is ask you to do the same.

Road safety is in our control and many accidents are preventable. Be safe and have a great weekend.