

MANAGER'S REPORT

City Council Meeting

Tuesday, December 7, 2010

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

FROM: Joseph J. Slocum, City Manager

DATE: Friday, December 3, 2010

Agenda items:

10.B Discussion and consideration of a proposed one year lease extension with the Brooks Preservation Society for the City owned railroad tracks.

This time last year the City did not own the rail line running from Penobscot McCrum to the Town of Waldo line. The former owner, Unity Property Management entered into a one-year lease with Brooks Preservation Society for the maintenance and operation of the line. During the year the City acquired the rail line and we have had an open dialogue with Brooks Preservation Society about the lines continued use and maintenance.

I recommend the City extend the lease with the Brooks Preservation Society for a period of an additional year. The Master Plan for the Waterfront and Downtown Area is currently underway. We are also embarking on the creation of a trail or path along this rail line for public access. A one-year extension with Brooks maintains our current efforts while keeping our options open for the future.

During the last 6 months the Brooks Preservation Society has made a variety of proposals to the City for their 2011 operations. I have asked the Brooks Preservation Society to come back to your December 21st meeting to bring their latest proposals to you so that we can address any issues we need to and permit the railroad to pursue their plans for the upcoming year.

10.C Discussion and consideration of a proposal to create a new City committee, which will focus on the creation and maintenance of a trail/path along the City owned railroad line.

When the City Council elected to purchase the rail line this past summer it was very much with a view that over time the City would work to build a trail/path along the river and the rail line for public access. It has been contemplated that this would be a phased-in process over a period of time. Regardless, it is important to move this forward with some initial planning and development of this new trail. A planning and construction effort like this- call for broad consideration and perspective that a City created committee can provide.

I would suggest a five to seven-member Committee. I would suggest a representative from the City's existing Hiking, Biking and Pedestrian Committee, -perhaps an abutting landowner and a representative

of Coastal Mountain Land Trust whose time, resources and efforts in this endeavor have been significant. We could also incorporate a rail representative as a start. We're asking the Council to approve the creation of the Committee and to provide input on ideas for membership upon it.

The mission of this Rail and Trail Committee would be to evaluate, identify and work to create a trail alongside the railroad over its entire course and to make recommendations to the City Council on all matters relating to the trail and rail line. The committee would report directly to Belfast City Council to whom they would make their recommendations. The committee would work with the City Manager, Planning Department, Public Works Department and Economic Development Departments as needed.

10.D Consideration of a request from Goose River Partners to accept their project's entrance road as a City road.

Tom Pendleton is a representative of Goose River Partners an entity that is working to build a low-income elderly housing project on Swan Lake Avenue. He has brought details of the project to the City Council in the past and is presently working to the permit the project before the Planning Board. In an effort to make this development work, the Goose River Partners has requested that the City accept the entrance road as a City road provided that it meets City construction specifications. Mr. Pendleton will be at the meeting to discuss this with you in detail and there are attachments in your packet that help clarify this request. There is also a memo from Wayne Marshall, City Planner, identifying how the City has treated such requests in the past.

10.E Report from the Recycling Committee on recommendations for our transfer station operations.

Last year the Council appointed a three-person committee to review our process at the transfer station and asked them to make recommendations to the City and how we might improve for the future. The Committee has concluded its report would like to present it to the Council in person at the meeting. Once we have the written report we will make arrangements to have it posted on the City Web Site.

10.F Discussion and consideration of a recommendation by the City Manager to outsource the rental of the Boat House

The City's rental experience of the Boat House at Steamboat Landing Park has come of age. It was initially donated to the City by MBNA and then it was remodeled for public use. Today the uses range from nonprofit meetings; mini trade shows to major weddings and events. It is essentially a mini Event Center. The size of the facility is irrelevant to the amount of time it takes to field all the inquiries and coordinate all of the rentals. Over the last three years I have been impressed by the amount of time that is consumed by the general public's inquiries and rental arrangements.

Generally we have a policy of doing whatever we can in house ourselves as long as we are doing it in the least expensive way. When it is cheaper to outsource the task we do so. The Boat House budget is approximately \$21,000 a year and it generates approximately \$21,000 a year in revenue. The Boat House budget however, does not reflect the huge amount of time that is required to coordinate and arrange for its rental. One rental can consume an hour while another similar rental can consume five to

ten times that amount. Different people have different questions and different needs and different concerns. Since we rent the building out, the public expects that we will have all the time needed to respond to their inquiries and concerns. What was once a public service is now expected to be a drop whatever you are doing and make that sale type of enterprise. We have attempted to make that time but in doing so we have pulled time away from other important City responsibilities on a daily basis.

For almost a year we have been quietly talking to a local person, Cindy Harnden, who has a professional background in event management. We would like to enter into a temporary agreement to have her manage all rentals of the Boat House for the City for the remainder of the fiscal year at a rate of \$300 per month. She will be available 7 days a week for this task. There's no doubt in my mind that we presently spend more money than this in dealing with Boat House inquiries.

This is not something I would put to bid, as it is a professional service. With any professional service price is still important but quality and reliability are equally important. A professional rental agent can coordinate and earn income based upon all the elements associated with events such as lodging, catering, refreshment, decorating, entertainment etc. These additional opportunities can help to justify the great volume of time this work requires.

I would like to start this immediately and run it through the end of the fiscal year. The money would come from the City Manager's budget in the overtime account line 100-503 which was set up, in part, to help cover the extra time we needed to get our other work done because this activity took so much time in-house.

If you approve of this trial effort we will bring Ms. Harnden to the December 21st Council meeting with our joint recommendations on our fee schedule for 2011. She has industry knowledge that is beneficial to all of us. We want to maintain an ability for nonprofits with limited resources to have reasonable access to the Boat House while also maximizing our income by potential fee adjustments.

No part of this proposal will remove the City from our continuing responsibility to clean and maintain this facility. We would really like to give this a try and see if the time saved at City Hall will allow us to do a much better job at our other tasks.

10.G Consideration of a request from the Harbor Master and Harbor Committee to accept their recommendations for 2011 Harbor fees and associated amendments to the City's Harbor Ordinance.

The recommended fee schedule is attached and is based upon a review of the rates from other comparable harbors and boatyards. There are two significant changes.

First, they propose to charge riparian mooring owners (20% of all mooring owners) the same fee they charge all other mooring owners. These waterfront property owners traditionally paid nothing. This was a Belfast Policy and with the growth of these free permits against the decline in other moorings for people who don't own shorefront, the Committee recommended that it was time to treat the shore owners the same as everyone else. I note that mooring permits are issued for use of State submerged

land and not for land that is privately owned. A shorefront owner does not own the land under the water in front of their property.

The second change is to the Ordinance, which essentially is redefining who is a "Shorefront Owner " who would get a preference on mooring location in front of their property. Under State Law the shorefront owner should have 100 feet of waterfront to qualify and the Committee is recommending we amend our current ordinance, which currently allows for such a privilege for less than 100 feet of waterfront-to match the same State 100 foot definition.

10.H Consideration of a Council policy statement supporting and encouraging the enhancement of handicap accessibility in Belfast.

Council member Marina Delune has requested that the City issue a policy statement encouraging our local businesses to do everything they can do to promote handicap accessibility. She has identified a variety of options whereby temporary wheelchair ramps can be put down and taken back up within minutes. The City is always trying to promote accessibility and she seeks this policy statement on behalf of the Council to encourage all efforts at enhance handicap accessibility in the City.

10.I Request from Belfast Shrine Club for blanket letter of approval for games of chance at the Shrine Club.

The Shrine Club is an exemplary community asset. Several times a year they hold events, which involve games of chance and thereby need to come to the City for approval so that they can get the need authority from the State. Aside from the repetitive work it takes to approve this at the City level there is a fee each time the Shrine makes such an application. To date the Shrine has demonstrated great responsibility in conducting these events. There is a mechanism whereby the City can write a letter giving the Shrine a "blanket letter of approval to conduct games of chance which would save time and money all around. I would recommend we issue such a letter to the Shrine on a one or two year basis.

Non- Agenda:

That's it now. Everyone have a great weekend and keep your spirits up. A very special thank you to the Fire Chief and the Fire Department for their wind swept efforts to get the holiday lights up downtown. This is a true community service.

Tonight, Friday there is an Arts walk downtown and a wine tasting at the Coop.

Tomorrow night –Saturday- is the Christmas tree lighting, which starts at 5:00 at City Hall (High Street).

Sunday morning the Lions Club is hosting a breakfast with Santa and photographer at the Shrine Club on Northport Avenue from 8 am to 11a.m.

On Sunday we hope to see as many of our citizens as we can lining Route #1 around 2:00 p.m. as the "Wreaths Across America" find their way through the City and head to Arlington National Cemetery where these Maine greens will adorn the graves of some of our fallen National hero's.

It is also a shopping season and everything each of us can do to support our local stores and businesses is really very important. We need to look to ourselves to address our economic worries to the greatest possible degree. As Belfast and other communities recover the State will recover etc. If you can afford to spend or buy then do so locally and help your City out as much as you can.

If you need help with a house project, property project or anything that calls you to pay someone local for some temporary work then do it. There are many who need the work and the money. You can go to a local business and buy windows and doors- made right here in Belfast- and get an energy credit on your 2010 taxes. You have to buy them (not install) before the end of the year. Go to Mathews Brothers web site and you can find out more.

The holidays unfortunately are not always joyous for everyone. For many this is a very tough time a year. If you have an hour or a day to help make someone's life a little more special then give it a try. There is plenty of opportunity within reach.

Be safe, have fun and look out for one another.