

MANAGER'S REPORT

Belfast City Council Meeting

Tuesday, February 1, 2011

7:00 P.M.

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

FROM: Joseph J. Slocum, City Manager

DATE: Friday, January 28th, 2011

Reminder: A Library Trustee applicant will be present at 6:45 to meet with the Council and answer any questions regarding his application.

Agenda items:

10.B Presentation on both the need and availability of low-cost handicap access improvements. (Delune)

For several months Council member Marina Delune has been in discussions with a group of concerned citizens led by Neva Allen, whom have identified both an increasing need for improved handicapped accessibility as well as the availability of relatively low-cost measures that can be taken to improve accessibility for all. Neva Allen will be at the meeting to address the Council directly. We hope to provide a quick demonstration of a portable ramp.

In your packet there are a series of documents that this group has collected. These documents recognize that because of the two wars that the country is currently involved in we are seeing ever-increasing numbers of veterans having to adjust to handicapped living. They also have a chart indicating that 15.7% of Maine people report having a disability. Included in your packet is an information sheet that can be made available here at City Hall as well as on our website to help educate property owners, tenants and building managers on where/how to obtain a portable threshold ramp. Finally, this group has asked that the Council support a Resolution supporting the efforts of their group to encourage those Belfast businesses, which can be made handicapped accessible to do so. They note that accessibility is a win-win for everyone.

10.C Update on the creation of a Rail and Trail Committee.

About a month ago the Council decided to form a Trail and Rail Committee to help develop a new trail along the City own rail line.

The mission of the Committee is to evaluate, identify and work to create a trail along side the railroad over its entire course and to make recommendations to the City Council on all matters relating to the trail and rail line

At that time we were looking to have the committee be composed of seven people with two of the members be from the Council. We need to identify which Council members will serve on it and to confirm which groups or individuals we should approach to be on this committee.

10.D Consideration of the Manager's proposed process for addressing the 2011-2012 City Budget.

1. Next year's budget will be a very difficult task to grapple with. We are surely going to lose more State revenue on top of the \$250,000 we lost last year. At this point I see a budget gap between \$500,000 and \$600,000.

I further note that it bothers City officials that people have trouble understanding that when they get their tax bill, only 35% of it comes from the City. The remaining 65% comes from the School and the County. What money the City has in surplus, none of it was put there by either the School Union or the County. For example if a taxpayer has a \$100,000 property their total tax bill the last 2 years was about \$1,810. Of that bill only \$634 was for City taxes. The remaining tax bill of \$1,176 is for the County and the School system.

I mention this now for two reasons:

First, there are still two Belfast vacancies on the School Union Board. The City pays about 40% of the total local dollars needed to support the schools. If we don't have Belfast Citizens willing to help keep Belfast School expenses down then I think that is a mistake that could lead to school tax increases that the City Government simply can't control. We need to fill those seats or risk having other smaller communities dictating how big our 40% is going to be.

Secondly, for the last 2 years to help the taxpayers bills stay low because of School expenses the City has paid \$178,000 from surplus to help cushion the tax impact that would otherwise have occurred because of School financial needs. I will not recommend that this happen again. If we want the public to understand that the City really has no control over School expenses then we should not use City tax dollars to subsidize the impact of School budgets.

2. The Council has provided me with some general expectations and in order to meet those expectations I will not be able to recommend any new spending, new positions, new or expanded services or facilities. Everyone needs to realize early that there will be cuts in this budget.

Because this budget will be so difficult I want to give the Council the greatest amount of time to address the difficult decisions that lie ahead. To do this I am looking to start the budget process early with delivery of the Manager's proposed budget by March 8th. I propose that the Council review all Budget

requests no later than April 30th. This will give us a little room for more research and analysis. I ask the Council that we agree to target Memorial Day as the end of our budget deliberations.

The Charter requires that the City Manager submit the proposed budget "which shall be compiled from information furnished by the administrative department heads and Boards on forms which may be designated by the City Manager."

To meet this timetable I will need to do the following:

First, directly prepared Department Budgets with the Department heads rather than have them go off and do them themselves.

Secondly, I will ask all Committee's and Boards to give me their thoughts in the next two weeks. These committees can still provide further input directly to the Council when the Department they are interested in is scheduled for Council discussion. I do not want to wait for the usual cyclical turn of Committee meetings to take place. I do not plan on having any debate with Committees on plans or desired expenditures. My direction from the Council calls for cuts and I will make my recommendations with that in mind.

Third, I propose several changes associated with Social Service Agencies and City Promotional expenditures.

A. Improve the consistency of what we designate as Social Service Agencies and what we designate as City Promotional matters.

B. Cap expenditures to these groups and make appropriations to them within the confines of that preset Cap.

C. Cut non-City entities at a rate of 2 times what we consider cutting individual Departments. If we seek to cut Departments 5% then we cut these groups 10% and the Cap should reflect this. City cuts may cut City positions that are here every day delivering City Services directly to the public. There is a difference between delivering an actual City Service and delivering a service that benefits the City or some portion of its citizenry.

D. Create and send out to each outside entity that wants money from the City a Standard form to respond to avoid individual presentations from each group. We can review their responses to these forms and other documentation they submit to make funding decisions. Most of these groups are familiar to the Council. In this economy we should expect requests from more groups so it is important to create consistency in the process without having it consume an inordinate amount of time.

Proposed Form Questions

1. Name and purpose of Group
2. How the Group specifically benefits Belfast

3. Annual Budget and Percentage of annual Budget spent on Administration
4. Names and amounts of other Waldo County municipalities who donate to them
5. Names and amounts of other regional Municipalities like Rockland, Camden Bucksport that contribute to them
6. What will be the effect on their Program or Mission if the City reduces Support or fails to provide financial support?
7. What new programs that cost real money has this entity initiated in the last three

Years.

I am certainly open to any further suggestions from the Council.

10.E Discussion and possible authorization to apply for a Community Development Block Grant in the amount of \$200,000 to assist with the development of the Front Street Shipyard.

The Stinson property is dead the Front Street Shipyard is alive. We are working almost daily with its owners to develop a large-scale boat servicing and construction facility. The Community Development Block Grant program offers a variety of opportunities to seek financial contribution to assist with the development of new economic enterprises.

At this time Economic Development Director Thomas Kittredge is requesting authority from the Council to file what is called "A letter of intent" which notifies the Community Development Block Grant program that we intend to pursue this Grant with a more formal application down the road. There is no City match involved. The cost to the City is our internal staff time and effort. I note that takes much more time to administer a grant than to apply for one.

The City presently is applying for several grants through our Economic Development Department. The first is a "Brownfield's Grant" from the in federal Environmental Protection Agency. That Grant will pay to help local property owners identify any environmental concerns that need to be addressed on their property before redevelopment or new development can occur. A property with an environmental cloud does not sell and will not be financed by a lending institution. Having this information resolved for a particular piece of property enables us to get that property redeveloped more quickly. The second grant is an "Economic Development Enterprise Grant" which provides money to enhance the streetscape along the Front Street. The third grant is a "Housing Assistance Grant" that would provide funding for the upgrade and repair of multifamily housing of the City.

Each of these grants comes from different funding pools and therefore if we received one Grant it will not affect our ability to secure the other. We have the potential to secure all of these grants.

10.F Discussion on the availability of ice skating opportunities in the City. (Hurley)

Councilor Hurley has asked to put this on the agenda. We have had several discussions over the last month and a half about the difficulty associated with keeping snow off the surface of the Muck. The City has indeed made infrastructure improvements at the Muck over the last few years in hopes to continue its long history as a local skating pond. With warmer winters we have had mixed success.

Traditionally the Muck was hand shoveled by those who wished to use it. The City has made an effort to improve upon that situation and in the process has submerged just about every piece of equipment you can imagine in trying to accomplish the snow removal. (As a reminder seeing someone on the ice does not make it safe and we follow state guidelines for ice thickness safety.)

We have had some success in past years with a snow blower but when you have a combination of slush and ice this device will not work. Underground springs and stream runoff feed the Muck, both of these things attack the ice.

Last week, before the onslaught of the subzero weather we had almost an inch of rain mixed with snow, which ruined the ice from above and below.

The City is struggling to keep up with roads, sidewalks, downtown areas and Airport runways. We do not have the staff to shovel or maintain the ice so we contract out this maintenance. Last Saturday the Contractor tried to plow it off with a 4 wheeler and almost lost it, as there was a combination of recent snow, slush, water and one inch wide cracks in the ice.

There have been discussions in past years about the creation of a different skating rink that would not be impacted by winter rain runoff or springs from underneath. City Parks & Recreation Director Jim Bell had recently remarked that he was in discussion with the YMCA to see if there might be some way to revive the former skating rank at Troy Howard Middle School or to create a new skating rank somewhere else. Assistant to the City Manager, Jennika Lundy has included in your packet some bullet points she discovered when talking to a person who helped maintain the former ice rink at Troy Howard Middle School.

I note the Fire Department is not a likely option here. They are part time volunteers who have a limited amount of time for training and fighting fires. They can't assume this additional weekly work.

10.G Update on the installation of Weight Scales at the Transfer Station.

In December the Recycling Committee provided a report to the Council that recommended the installation of scales at the Transfer Station to help with the proper identification of fees needed to cover the cost of such things as demolition waste.

We have actively tried to find a way to get these scales up and running as soon as possible. There are only two scale providers in the State. The key problem to quick installation is the concrete and groundwork associated with installation. I have spoken directly to a concrete company that has installed many of these scale foundations and they are recommending that we wait until March or April for the installation. We can indeed install the concrete in this weather but there will be more risk associated with this timetable.

The scales we are looking at are not flush with the ground. A vehicle approaches a small ramp and goes up about 10 inches onto a scale and then descends a small ramp on the opposite side. As noted the entire scale sits on top of a concrete foundation piers and as such if we ever relocate the Transfer Station scales can be relocated with it.

We are still evaluating comparisons between the two proposals submitted but we may have enough information by your meeting to make a recommendation as to which scale to buy.

The location is also a bit of a challenge between pre-existing underground infrastructure and drainage. We are asking the concrete person to come for a site visit and the soonest he is available will be next week.

I am looking at a 40-foot scale with a 10-foot ramp on either side of it. This will allow us to weigh a pickup truck and trailer behind it at the same time. The money for this will come from the Transfer Station Capital Reserve Account set up by the former City Manager and Councils with anticipation that one day the City would indeed need to own its own scales.

I bring this update to the Council because we can either move right away with more risk or wait a couple of months with less risk. We are all in a hurry to get the scales so we can know whether or not the rates we are charging are appropriate for the cost we are incurring. I ask direction from the Council as to their thoughts on how soon the scale should be installed. I include some information at the packet to help you visualize what we're talking about. It is likely that the expense will be \$35,000-\$45,000.

10.H Consideration of the City Manager's recommendation to send a uniform communication to all members of City Committees, Boards and Commissions.

Belfast is blessed with many fine volunteers who donate time to serve on a broad variety of boards and committees. We have seen many new Council members come forward to serve the City in the last couple of years. The role of boards and committees and their relationship to the Council can be a gray area for the elected official, the board member and certainly staff. With so many meetings it is hard to have time to clearly communicate on these things and I suggest the Council consider sending a uniform letter to all committee and board members to help clarify relationships and to encourage a process of communication and resolution. I've attached a draft letter to this packet for your consideration. If you approve a draft we can also post it on the website. This is not a time sensitive matter so if the Council needs additional time to consider this that's fine.

10.I Request from the City Manager for guidance on an \$80 demolition disposal fee.

On December 23rd I received a call from Habitat for Humanity asking if their clean up waste from the new home they were providing by Christmas Eve could be accepted by the City without charge. I checked with the Transfer Station and found out that the delivery so far amounted to \$25. I had to make a quick decision and I advised the Transfer Station operator to hold off on the charges but to let me know what the total was.

I made this decision without the clear authority to spend City dollars as such and at my own risk, fully willing to pay the cost if necessary. When I took this job I said that I would treat peoples tax dollars as their money. The total debris bill came to \$80 and I seek your guidance as to how this bill gets paid. I am glad to pay it out of my pocket as a personal contribution to this really amazing community achievement.

10.J Discussion on City Manager's recommendation to delay construction of a new runway apron at the City Airport until 2012 due to a decrease in Federal funding for the project.

The is self-explanatory. We are following the multi year Airport Master Plan. We are at the stage were the next priority was to expand the apron to create more space for tie downs for larger planes because we are seeing an increase in 6 to 12 seat passenger planes visiting Belfast. The Federal Government pays 95%, and the City and State each pay 2 and 1/2%were awarded. The federal allotment is about \$150,000 a year and we have this accumulate until we have enough to do the work. The Feds sometimes do not release the money when we expect as it currently the case. They have released \$343,000 and not the \$420,000 we expected. Rather than reduce the size of the proposed work we think it best to get the design finished and do the full project next year. We do not want to do it in 2 sections, as that will just cost more to mobilize twice and cause more disruption. I ask the Council to agree with this recommendation.

10.K Request to go into Executive Session to discuss a real Estate matter under 1M.R.S.A 405 (6)(C).

10.L Request to go into Executive Session to discuss an Economic Development matter 1 M.R.S.A 405 (6) (C).

10.M Request to go into executive session to discuss some personnel matters 1 M.R.S.A 405 (6)(A)

Adjourn.

*****There will be a Work Session on Council Goals to immediately follow the conclusion of the Council meeting.***