

**City Manager's Report
City Council Meeting
Tuesday, January 5, 2010
City Hall at 7:00 p.m.**

TO: Mayor Walter Ash Jr. and Members of Belfast City Council
FROM: Joseph J. Slocum, City Manager
DATE: Thursday, December 31, 2009

Consent Agenda:

I have included in the consent agenda a request from the Parks and Recreation Commission to apply for two grants. These grants if awarded are intended to work with younger people on good nutrition, physical activity and health related issues. Since there is no match I assume you would approve this. I do want to give the commission or the department the opportunity to comment/advertise these grants under "Committee Reports".

10.B Proposal by Brooks Preservation Society to run tour trains from Downtown Belfast.

On the surface this looks like something that "could," appeal too many. The proposal is to run 2-tourist trains- I assume seasonally- from behind the parking lot on Front Street out to the Town of Waldo and back. There is no suggestion of freight possibilities, opportunities or interest. I did have a chance to meet with representatives of the Brooks Preservation Group who indicated that they are a volunteer organization and would likely have to hire employees for the first time to operate this service. I suggested to them that it would be important to identify a business plan as to how they thought this operation would run. A business plan would necessarily include an itemization of expected revenues and expenses- including such things as the cost of a ticket, projections on rider ship, operational cost etc.

I am unable to recommend this proposal for the following reasons:

1. The City made the decision to take back the railroad many years ago and since then has pursued alternative development plans in the general region including the redevelopment of the Stinson property- the #1 Council goal for 2008 and the development of the Coastal Walkway- one of the top goals for 2009. Anyone who works in economic development would say that having a railroad run twice a day through the middle of a 10 to 20 million-dollar Stinson redevelopment project would have an adverse effect of getting that property developed.
2. A critical link in this proposed line is privately owned. That means that if the City says yes, the private property owner can still say no to the crucial crossing of their privately owned section at any time. For the City to forgo other development plans and opportunities and favor this proposal, which can be extinguished by a current or future private owner at any time, is an unreasonable risk for an uncertain benefit. I specifically asked railroad representatives to see if they could get a long-term agreement to pass over this private property. Their response to date has been that the private owner wanted to see what the City would do first. In speaking with a

representative of the private owner, they wanted to see much of the same business plan that the City wanted to see. Is this something to benefit a few dozen-railroad enthusiasts or something that would have a major impact on the City? The current proposal dreams big but lacks reasoned financial analysis and economic benefit projection.

3. A very well financed and knowledgeable Railroad group who could not make this same idea economically feasible formerly ran this rail line.
4. If the Council said “no” Belfast still has rail line coming into the City for future freight or passenger opportunities- should they arise.

My grandfather worked all his life on the railroad and I personally love everything to do with trains. Nevertheless I can't recommend the City cripple other economic development opportunities on the nice aspirations of an entity that does not identify a reasoned business plan.

10.C Second and final reading of an amendment to the City Code, Article 5 Section 14-189, which would delete the prohibition on taxi cabs from standing for more than 10 minutes in a public place to attract fares.

We have eliminated special parking spaces for taxicabs and now seek to allow cabs to stand still for more than 10 minutes for the purpose of attracting fares. The City Clerk may have attachments on this item for your packet.

10.D Request to operate a Taxi Cab Company.

10.E Second and final reading on amendments to the City's Zoning laws, Chapter 98 Article VIII dealing with parking requirements.

This amendment will require less parking for various projects. Wayne Marshall, City Planner, will have an attachment for your review of this proposed amendment.

10.F Follow up on Council Workshops on Annual Goals for the City and on Economic Development.

The Council conducted two work sessions on December 8th and December 9th to openly talk about these issues. No votes were taken but there was a healthy and free discussion by all those who attended. I think it was clear that members were hesitant to identify every potential goal or thought on Economic Development in favor of keeping a narrow list that would be strongly attended to rather than an extended list, which would dilute resources.

I am attaching to this packet outlines of my imperfect notes of these two discussions. The Council needs to first decide whether these notes completely reflect their thoughts on these issues. If not they should be added to or deleted from as appropriate. Then I would ask the Council to separately approve its list of goals for the year and then approve an Economic Development Plan. It may well be that you will need some additional time to review these issues.

I am also preparing (**not attached**) a draft Belfast Economic Development Plan based upon these work sessions and upon all prior discussions on Economic Development over the past year. The holidays and a recent family loss prevented this from being ready by New Year's Eve but I do hope to present it to you on Tuesday evening. **I do plan to have this draft Economic Plan posted to the City's website, so the community can see what we are talking about.**

This draft Economic Plan will be for your review and amendment. A key thought within this plan is the creation of a City position of Economic Development Director. While there appears to be majority support for this action, it is not clear whether we would fund this position now or in the next budget. Once your Economic Development Plan is approved and I know when you want a Director of Economic Development on board, then I can finalize the job description and advertise the position. Anything underlined within the Draft Economic Development Plan is something I would incorporate within the job description of an Economic Development Director.

10.G Discussion and update on the Coastal Walkway Project and Waterfront Plan. (Lee)

The Coastal Walkway Project has caused us to take a hard look at all the small as well as big pieces of present and future activity from the Footbridge to the Boat House. While the walkway is seen by most as a fine and welcome enhancement to this area there are other significant changes that will be coming to this region of the City over the next 10 to 15 years that will have a dramatic impact upon the Waterfront, the Downtown and to the City owned property.

I am attaching to this packet a map that I asked the Planning office to generate which shows three things: City owned property, the Downtown core and all the property that I expect will change hands and draw significant investment to this part of the City over the next 10 to 15 years. Take a good look at what it looks like today because so much of it will be very different in a relatively short amount of time. The size of the privately owned area that will change warrants that the City think about what it wants. What makes me so sure? -because Belfast with its waterfront, cultural and recreational amenities, will continue to attract people who want to visit and to live here. This is not another coastal town. All of this new development or redevelopment will bring traffic, parking, pedestrian, recreational and cultural activity with it.

There are changes that have been considered and surely more to come. The Harbor Advisory Committee is looking into the idea of building additional resources – including a Harbor building. We have had several businesses contact us and inquire about leasing or procuring from the City some of its waterfront property. The Brooks Railroad Group is asking today to bring tour service back to this area. We have had people suggest that the City buy the Stinson property and use it for everything from affordable housing to retail, to industrial projects- to parks. The rangeways discussions have reinvigorated our citizen's interest in preserving, protecting and maintaining access to the water.

As a Manager I recommend that the City keep its eye on the big picture before small pieces of it are channeled away creating barriers on future possibilities and encouraging inconsistent development and the adverse impacts that can be generated by it.

The last Waterfront and Downtown Plan was the Renaissance Plan of 1994. At that time the continued presence of the chicken plants was fully anticipated. In the status report of that "Master Plan" for this area done in 2005 it was recognized that many of those recommendations no longer had any viability.

While we are indeed in a quiet period of development but our history suggests that this will not last for the long term. Strong economic and social change will come to these parcels of land and the transitional impact will be dramatic to everyone. This quiet period could offer the opportunity for the City to update its Master Plan for the Downtown and the Waterfront.

There are those who want to do things right away and see "Planning" as a waste of time and money. Others see planning as a restrictive imposition on land and landowners. There is plenty of room here to move the Coastal Walkway forward while thinking in a larger sense about the future of this crucial area of the City. I have had some discussions with some people about this for some time and Roger Lee suggested that we add this to the agenda for further consideration of the Council.

10.H Discussion on a new City website. (Hurley)

City Clerk Roberta Fogg is heading up the City's Website effort. We had planned to go to a local Webmaster and have them user us through this process.

We are looking for a very appealing format that focuses primarily on the City Government but which also has excellent linking ability to all the great local websites. Council Member Mike Hurley knows more about Websites than I will know in 20 years. He has suggested that we consider working with a Web Master that specializes in municipalities because if they have 500 municipal clients they are always updating for all of their clients and the City could benefit from this. We are trying to find out how much this could cost. Presently we have about \$5,200 budgeted for this. Mike has asked we put this on the agenda for further discussion with the Council.

That's it for this year.

Wherever 2010 leads us I hope as many of us as possible can go there together. Belfast is a special place and part of that special ness is in our willingness to listen and maybe learn from one another. Best wishes and health to everyone.