

**MANAGER'S REPORT**  
**City Council Meeting**  
**Tuesday, June 15, 2010**

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

**FROM:** Joseph J. Slocum, City Manager

**DATE:** Friday, June 11, 2010

**Non- Agenda Item:**

Handicapped access at the Belfast Free Library.

Two meetings ago I was talking about the new sidewalk in front of the library and noted that the only handicapped entrance was through the front door. I was mistaken. There is indeed a second handicapped access point at the rear of the building, which is located in the rear garden area. My apologies to everyone and anyone who was concerned about the access options to this wonderful resource.

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

**10.B Discussion and possible action on permitting the Celtic Celebration having an off premises liquor permit at a City Park as part of the Celtic Celebration.**

The Council's policy is to review these request on a case-by-case basis. We have had no problems with this in the past but we seek approval because there are new council members who have not addressed this issue before.

**10.C Request by The Lane Construction Corporation to pave the Route One bypass at night and impose on the City's Noise Ordinance.**

The State is repaving Route 1 from the bridge to the Northport Town Line. The best time to do this with the least imposition is at night. Paving equipment with back up beepers will need to be used and they seek a waiver of our noise ordinance during this paving. Every construction work inconveniences somebody and this is the least intrusive way to do this work and I recommend Council approve a waiver of our noise ordinance for Lane Construction and its subcontractors during this work.

**10.D Discussion and possible action on a request from the Recycling Committee to support a food waste digester pilot program in the City of Belfast.**

A regional distributor of a food waste digester that people locate in their gardens has approached the Recycling Committee. The distributor has offered to supply the City with 40 free units known in the marketplace as "Green Cone" for this demonstration project. The Recycling Committee will look for homes in Belfast who will volunteer to be part of this project with hopes that it will be successful and attract a lot of attention from the broader Belfast community. If this were successful, the Recycling Committee would look to find a way to have the City purchase a quantity of these cones and resell to

homeowners these "Green Cone" digesters at a good price. By accepting the gift of the Cones the City is not obligating itself to anything.

We can do the demonstration project, wait and see on its success and then measure community interest before going further in the future. At this point in time the City would need to agree to accept the gift of 40 "green cones" and to authorize the Recycling Committee to proceed with this demonstration project with the understanding that they will come back to City Council with a full report on their progress in one year.

**10.E An updated request from Brooks Preservation Society seeking permission to allow the railroad to bring the train back into the downtown area of Belfast in 2011.**

Last December, the Brooks Preservation Society approached the City with a request to return our train service back to the downtown area. They discussed this issue with many downtown merchants and secured support for the idea. Since then there has been a discussion with a private property owner seeking permission to cross their property in order to access the downtown area. It now appears there is the potential to secure that permission, but in fairness to that owner Brooks wants to know first whether or not the City itself is interested in allowing the railroad back into the downtown area.

This is a continuing discussion and the railroad is not seeking an answer from the City at this meeting.

Ideally the railroad would like to eventually get to be able to bring the train right to the parking lot constructed on Front Street. The railroad is also aware that the City is working on a Master Plan for the waterfront and the downtown area and is asking the City to consider integrating the railroad into that planning effort.

The Brooks Preservation Society is also announcing that on Father's Day, June 20<sup>th</sup>, they will be running a free train up and down the rail line to the border of Penobscot McCrum line and they invite all to participate. They will be loading people at the former site of the Upper Bridge. They anticipate they can park 35 to 40 cars in that vicinity and they are offering an opportunity for people to come forward and take a free ride on the train. They of course are pleased to accept donations should anyone like to make them.

**10.F Discussion of the City of Belfast possibly purchasing the railroad line and track, which extends from Penobscot McCrum facility to the Waldo town line.**

For several years there has been discussion about the possibility of acquiring the rail line from inside the bypass out to the Town of Waldo. Coastal Mountain Land Trust held public meetings at the Boathouse in the Fall of 2007 gathering neighbors, stakeholders, interested citizens, and community leaders to discuss the possibility of creating a rail and a trail corridor along this route. The Republican Journal wrote it up.

In March of 2008 the City Council authorized me to send a letter of support to the Land for Maine's Future Board to encourage them to provide financial contribution for the acquisition of this resource. Coastal Mountain Land Trust has provided regular updates on the pursuit of this opportunity. The City has maintained an excellent relationship with Coastal Mountain Land Trust for many years. Presently

they manage and maintain trails on quite a few pieces of land within the City. In my three years here I have found them to be knowledgeable, trustworthy, responsible and resourceful.

In looking over this idea, there has always been a notion that the City would provide some financial support to make this rail-trail corridor a possibility. Coastal Mountain Land Trust has agreed to partner with the City to help make this project happen.

To be very clear - the idea is to have both Rail and Trail along this corridor

Presently, I have secured for the City an option to purchase this corridor for \$200,000. Such a purchase is contingent upon Belfast City Council approval. We have until July 2<sup>nd</sup> to close on this property. There is no one asking the Council to extend approval at your meeting of June 15.

However, it is time to bring this matter forward for serious consideration. The \$200,000 is a negotiated price based upon years of discussion and assessments of value. We anticipate that Coastal Mountain Land Trust will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the City, which would result in helping the City finance half of this purchase price, as well as provide financial support to develop the trail. We would create a long-term partnership to maintain these resources for the local community, the regional community and work to make them an attraction that would bring people to Belfast.

I have not been neutral on this subject. Here is a quote from my manager's report of June 2, 2009:

"In the two years since I began working for the City there has been a continuous call for economic development, local recreational opportunity, improvement of East-West Belfast relations and enhancement of our social, cultural and natural opportunities. Having worked all over the state, I have seen firsthand the increasing demand and clear economic and social benefit of having quality-based pedestrian and bicycling opportunities in your community. The vision of this railroad corridor, with the potential of connecting the downtown waterfront walkway and the Footbridge to the upper natural regions of the Passagasawaukeag River will carve out for Belfast one of the most unique social, natural and cultural recreational opportunities in the State. It is the type of thing that our residents will use regularly and the type of thing that will draw people here from all over Maine and well beyond. I can think of no other possible enhancement that would have a greater long-term impact to our quality of life here than this project. The scale of the potential benefits to this community is huge."

We are now at a point where there is real opportunity to take this incredible idea and carry it forward to creation. As City Manager I am repeatedly told by outsiders what a great place this is to come and walk or ride a bike. There isn't a doctor or healthcare provider out there who isn't recommending that their patients of all ages regularly walk and get exercise to improve the quality of their health.

The seller here is Unity Property Management, which is associated with the Unity Foundation; The Unity Foundation has been a tremendous benefactor to the City of Belfast for some time. They are significant contributors to the Hospital, the YMCA, Waterfall Arts, the Hutchinson Center and many civic and cultural activities in the City I believe that the price here reflects that same generous and beneficent posture.

When we talk about economic development we always talk in terms of both short-term strategies and long-term strategies. The opportunity to acquire this property and to commit to developing a rail and a trail along it will first preserve the railroad use for the City while at the same time offering a new and wondrous opportunity for our future. It has taken us years to get to this point and we are fortunate to have a solid partner in Coastal Mountain Land Trust and an acquisition price that is within reach. There will be plenty of opportunity in the days and years ahead for individuals, groups, etc. to help participate in the development of this opportunity.

These are indeed difficult economic times but given the size and duration of the benefit the cost seems very reasonable.

This is more than a decision to acquire. It is also a decision to develop. If we purchase there will be an ongoing commitment to do everything we have to do to make this opportunity come to fruition. Like any large projects, there will be challenges. However, with a solid partner and a fervent resolve this is something that could really add to Belfast.

#### **10.G Discussion on the regulation of chickens within the City of Belfast.**

The City of Belfast does regulate and prohibit the housing of chickens in areas not zoned for agricultural uses. Historically there have been some situations where this has happened and has not been a significant problem. A couple of years ago a problem was created and the City did step in to stop the raising of these birds in one of the prohibited areas.

Council members have asked that we bring this matter forward for discussion to see where we're going on this issue. Wayne Marshall will be at the Council meeting and will bring with him a map showing you the areas in the City where the raising of chickens is permitted and where it is presently prohibited. He will also bring forward multiple ordinances from other communities to see how they deal with this issue.

#### **10.H Discussion of minor renovation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor of Belfast City Hall.**

We need an office for the new Economic Development Director. I propose we locate that directly across from the Planning Office in what is now a "Break Room". The break room contains an energy efficient refrigerator, sink and a microwave along with some seating.

My goal would be to minimize any change to this historic structure, and not damage any molding, ceiling etc. The hallway in one section opens up from 7 feet to over 14 feet. I propose to install a partition wall that maintains the 7-foot wide hallway but carves out a 12.5 by 7 foot area where the essentials of the break room can be relocated. I have attached a map for your consideration and taped the floor so you can better visualize this work. The partition wall will not go to the ceiling and we will not have to make any changes in lighting or ventilation. I want to use a slider door to maximize the utility of the space. We will look for molding, and doors to match existing patterns.

#### **10.I Discussion on a Downtown Street Party. (Councilor Hurley)**

We do our best to work with all groups to facilitate their request to use public facilities for their promotional or recreational events. We have established both a checklist form to fill out because often these groups have not thought out all the issues that may impact the City and we have also streamlined our process by assigning one person to guide a requesting party through the process and efficiently cover all the bases. This usually means a lot of communication and coordination.

A council member called and asked to put this on the agenda. I have no information to report to you but we can discuss this at our meeting.

**10.J Further discussion of Council Chamber chairs. (Mayor Ash)**

We have an alternative for the Council to consider.

That's it for now. Have a safe, hopefully dry and enjoyable weekend. As always don't forget to support all our local businesses.