

MANAGER'S REPORT
City Council Meeting @ 7 p.m.
Tuesday, May 18, 2010

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

FROM: Joseph J. Slocum, City Manager

DATE: Friday, May 14, 2010

Agenda items:

10.B Discussion and consideration of Belfast Road Paving Bids.

This Manager's Report is being prepared on Wednesday May 12th, and we expect to receive bid openings on Thursday, May 13, 2010. Bob Richards will be at the meeting to make a recommendation as to which lowest responsible bidder. We would ask the Council to award the paving contract at that time. We hope to pave all or part of Doak Road, Marsh Road, Mill Lane and Rolerson Road.

10.C Report by the City Assessor Robert Whiteley on the Annual Audit of Sales activities.

While City Assessor Bob Whiteley is trying to get you a guesstimate on the total property valuation in the City, it occurred to me that one of his most recent reports on property valuation would also be of value to the elected representatives and the citizens of the City.

In your packets are a couple of charts and a report sheet that represents Bob's comparison of actual City sales to actual City assessments. In short the report shows that Belfast assessments trend to be lower than their actual sale price. Stated another way the City does not assess at 100% of value and sale price is likely to be higher than what the city assesses the value for tax purposes. Bob will be present if you have any questions. I also note that 33% of our taxes are paid by business, commercial and industrial enterprises. The more business we can grow the more relief we may be able to offer to the residential property tax payer.

11.D Consideration of a request of Midcoast Realtor Association to conduct a walk-a-thon in Belfast.

Attached in your materials you will see a request from the Midcoast Real Estate Association to conduct a walk-a-thon here in the City. The beneficiaries of this walk-a-thon will be Habitat for Humanity and other charities. Jim Bell has ushered this request through the City and is recommending approval subject to providing the City with appropriate insurance.

10.E Discussion and action on a request from " Our Town Belfast " for the City to act as Fiscal Sponsor for a possible Grant from the Maine Community Foundation.

The Downtown Business Group has reorganized itself to what is now called "Our Town Belfast". They are applying for a grant from the Maine Community Foundation that does not require a City funded match. The Community Foundation gets many grant applications and likes to see a local group have the financial administrative support of the City. This means that if the grant is approved the funds will come

to the City for deposit and we will oversee all payments and disbursements and retain proper financial records in keeping with State law. In effect we manage the account. This is a competitive situation and the funds are to be used to help the new business group grow and enhance the downtown.

Since all this asks the City to do is to act as "municipal banker" which we have done many times I have taken the liberty of signing this offer already because the deadline to file was four (4) days before your meeting. I am confident that in doing so I have not committed any City dollars other than those it takes to manage this account, which I gage as minimal. I respectfully ask that you permit the City to act as "Fiscal Sponsor" on this grant application.

10.F Consideration of a request from Waterfall Arts to continue with the EcoMotion Project to provide creative motion and artistic displays in the downtown area and in Heritage Park.

Elaine Bielenberg, Chair of the Board of Waterfall Arts will be present at the meeting to discuss this with you. As you may recall, over the past several years Belfast has been blessed with some creative bicycle art sculpture that Waterfall Arts has undertaken to oversee in terms of identifying artists and hiring them to create these crowd pleasers. Elaine will be asking the City Council for continued permission to display these in existing and in new areas in the downtown area. Since the City is funding this work and authorizing it to be displayed on City property with coordination and installation assistance from City Public Works then our insurance should cover this display.

11G. A presentation by Waterfall Arts on the display of public art as it interacts with walking paths and potential range ways.

Waterfall Arts has been interested in promoting the public display of art. They have done some research on examples of where this has been done and would like to give the Council some exposure to this type of activity to help develop an appreciation of its benefit to the larger community. It has been discussed that in the future Waterfall Arts may request an opportunity to display sculpture in areas where there are walking trails and potentially on or near City range ways. With respect to range ways we are making no commitment at this time and Waterfall Arts is not making any specific request at this time. The idea here is to simply get an idea of what this activity is all about and why it might be very beneficial to the City of Belfast. I expect that Waterfall Arts will make about a 10-minute presentation for educational purposes only. This is not an action item.

11.H Update from Dave Crabel on the activities of the Belfast Recycling Committee.

Dave Crabel will be at the meeting to provide the City Council with an update on committee activity over the last six months.

11.J Discussion and possible action on cleaning up Capital Projects and Capital Reserve accounts.

I have included in your packet an updated summary of existing Capital Reserves and Capital Projects. As a reminder, Capital reserves can't be spent without the prior approval of the Council. Capital Project money on the other hand can be accessed at any time.

These are funds that are put here by various City Council's over time for various reasons. Once placed here, these monies stay outside the annual operating budget and if unused or unneeded- do not return to the City's General Undesignated Fund Balance or "Surplus" without a specific vote of the Council.

There are several components to this agenda item:

First, I recommend we close the following Capital Projects and return the unused money to the General Undesignated Fund Account (Surplus). I believe our present Surplus is \$3,981,260.

Police Department Sprinkler System \$ 210
Waterfront Welcome Sign at Boathouse \$1,570
Building Improvements \$11,497
High Street Esplanade Project \$10,284.72
Waterfront Pathway \$ 320

\$23,881.72

Second, I recommend we move certain "General" Capital Project funds to corresponding "General" Reserves within the same departments. There is no reason to have a general capital project because it can be used for almost anything and can act as a slush fund that cannot be easily watched on an elected officials radar screen. We have plenty of options if there is an emergency need without maintaining unspecified open ended free ranging accounts. A capital project should have a specific purpose for a specific need that is approved by the City Council and not a rainy day option that can be exercised by a single individual or group. No one is saying this is happening but the present system surely would permit such activity. To properly oversee City finances I need to see the purpose of each fund.

I ask that you move the following General Capital Projects to the following Capital reserves.

Capital Projects Existing "General"

"General" Capital Reserves

Cemetery 962.80 \$22,494.00
Harbor 15,640.47 \$52,655.27
Parks 9,350.69 \$50,609.53

Once that is approved I also ask Council to then ask the committees or department heads to recommend how we can transform these "General" reserves into "Specific Reserve" within the same departments.

Recently the Harbor Advisory Committee and the Parks and Recreation Commission have asked for spending on very specific Capital Improvements. I would ask that they look at their list of specific needs and see how this existing un-earmarked money can be used as a "Specific" reserve to meet some of those specifically identified needs. It does not make sense to fund identified needs and then maintain "General" reserves that are not reserved for anything.

Third, I ask the Council to move the \$28,980 located in the Downtown General Maintenance Reserve account to the existing sidewalk Capital Project account. This downtown money has sat in an interest bearing reserve untouched since at least 1986. We are trying to repair downtown sidewalks and it is expensive. We can use this money to help pay for some of the improvements we are making and it will help free up some of the other sidewalk money to get more repairs and improvements done on walkways outside of the downtown area where the need is also great.

Finally, we have a Capital Project that should just be put in Reserve for the respective department because we do not anticipate a need to spend this money in the near term.

I ask that we convert the \$27,220.70 in Cable TV Capital Projects to a \$27,220.70 Cable Equipment Reserve.

That's it for now. We will continue to work on these Projects to get them completed and have our reserves specifically speak to the reason for which they exist.

11.K Discussion on extended parking in City Parking lots.

The City spends a lot of money making available parking lots for users of our facilities as well as the general public in their daily visits. We just spent \$100,000 on 2 downtown lots. Regardless we have people who use our parking lots as their permanent place to park or store their vehicle or stuff every day.

At the Union Street parking lot, we have four to five neighborhood residents who park there every day. At Commercial Street parking lot we have about four to five. It does not seem that this was the reason these lots were built. At the Washington Street parking lot we have approximately a dozen. At the Cross Street parking lot we have two to three every day. In the Front Street parking lot we have two to three. In the Beaver Street parking lot we have as many as fifteen. And at Thompson's Wharf we're not only having parking issues, but we're now starting to see people try and use the City's land to store their personal property- trailers, storage bins etc.

I am concerned about the long-term extended use and perhaps abuse of City-financed parking opportunities. Earlier in the year I mentioned that many of the privately owned lots in and around central downtown area rent out spaces minimally for \$25 a month for tenants in nearby buildings who do not have their own parking.

Down at the Front Street parking lot we are blessed with people who put everything from campers to boats to storage trucks and trailers for months at a time. I don't really think this is the reason why we invested a quarter of a million dollars in building that lot.

Last fall I directed that a 35-foot long camper that spent most of the summer to be removed from the lot and it was relocated a block away to the business lot of the owner. Now that spring has returned the owner wants more parking close to their business and has moved the camper right back to the City owned lot on Front Street- presumably again for the entire summer. We have another business that

leaves a 25-foot box truck loaded with the owner's personal possessions in one of our lots for 3 to 8 months at a time.

The City Planner advises me that the value of developing downtown parking spaces is roughly \$10,000. That doesn't include paving, striping, or plowing. We have recently heard repeated complaints about abuses in parking on the downtown streets and how we need to increase our traffic fines and get more serious about turning over the visitor, merchant and tenant parking on those areas. We also talked about the need to provide adequate parking for the handicapped. This will only extend greater pressures into the City parking lots.

I have a hard time seeing a reason why the City should finance long-term storage of trailers, motor homes, trucks, boat trailers, cars or storage bins for any private people or landlords who don't provide parking for their tenants. I think our parking lots should be used only as daily use lots. If people need to have extended use of them for days or months or an entire year then I think they should pay a fee to privately owned lots first and then as a last alternative- pay a monthly fee to the City.

City property belongs to all City residents and is generally used by the general public as well. No part of it should not be overtaken by individuals to the point where it becomes pretty much unavailable to everyone else.

I would like a policy or an ordinance that addresses these issues and I bring this forward to get the discussion rolling toward a better situation for everyone.

That's it for now. We will continue to work on these projects to get them completed and have our reserves specifically speak to the reason for which they exist.

That is it for now.

I will be trying to figure out how to fly fish this weekend with some local pro's that seem uncomfortably committed to seeing me fall into the water. It's an odd circumstance when my goal was to find a way to get away and find a little air. I don't think they'll mind if I actually get to breathe as long as I endure the rapture of the cold water that I surmise they are already well acquainted with.

Have a safe and enjoyable weekend and don't forget the humor wherever you find it.