MINUTES FROM THE PRE-MEETING
OF THE PORTAGE CITY COUNCIL
OF JUNE 22, 2020

Mayor Patricia Randall, via the WebEx meeting platform, called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Councilmembers Chris Burns, Lori Knapp, Claudette Reid and Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson also joined via the WebEx meeting platform. Councilmembers Richard Ford and Terry Urban were absent with excuse. Also in attendance were City Manager Joseph La Margo, Deputy City Manager Mike Carroll (via WebEx meeting platform), Deputy City Manager Adam Herringa (via WebEx meeting platform), Communications Manager Mary Beth Block, and City Clerk Erica Eklov.

With regard to Item A.3, Councilmember Knapp requested clarification regarding the intent with the Action Recommended. Deputy City Manager Herringa responded that the City Administration would like to remove the time limitation previously approved in 2018 in light of COVID-19, noting that the city has committed to building the Community Senior Center. He further noted that the City Administration would like Council to approve both the original dollar-for-dollar match, as well as make up any remaining funding difference. He stated that the city intends to continue the fundraising campaign but noted that donation activity has slowed during COVID-19. Councilmember Knapp subsequently expressed concerns regarding the lack of a dollar cap, highlighting the recent Fire Station #2 construction project. City Manager La Margo relayed that the city is working closely with the architectural firm and does not expect the city to incur excessive costs beyond $12.5 million. Mr. La Margo also noted that the city has applied and will continue to apply for grant funding to assist the project but the City Administration doesn’t anticipate responses for at least a year. Deputy City Manager Herringa offered that City Council would not be approving a blank check but committing $12.5 million. Councilmember Knapp expressed concerns with the increase in cost but inquired about a noted decrease in square footage. City Manager La Margo confirmed that grade level square footage had decreased but the basement square footage had been increased. Councilmember Reid asked for clarification regarding the basement plan. City Manager La Margo responded that expanding the basement was the least expensive way to plan for future programming without adding to costs and expanding the building footprint.

Councilmember Reid stated that the supporting documentation identifies the sale of the old Senior Center as a funding source, but noted that City Council has yet to approve the building’s sale. She stated that the current proposal for the city funding the difference could hinder additional fundraising efforts and asked that the Capital Campaign Committee explore the matter. City Manager La Margo agreed with Councilmember Reid regarding pre-approval from Council prior to selling the old Senior Center, which was a plan previously introduced by his predecessor. He further stated that he would be happy to institute a funding cap but noted raising additional funds had been challenging as of late. Mayor Randall noted the original appraisal for the old Senior Center dated from 2018 when the Portage District Library was interested in expanding but stated the Library had since changed plans. She relayed that the YWCA had explored the property for a potential daycare, as well as others for a potential Indian cultural school. The Mayor stated that that fundraising meetings had stopped in light of COVID-19 precautions and she did not want to further delay construction. She agreed for the need of a dollar cap in the Action Recommended, but not a calendar deadline should there be another resurgence of COVID-19. Councilmembers Reid and Knapp stressed the need to review the potential of losing donors with the city promising to make up the funding difference.

Councilmember Reid expressed additional concerns for the city to be fiscally responsible during the economic effects of COVID-19. Councilmember Burns also agreed and requested the cost estimates used by the City Administration. City Manager La Margo agreed, stating he would provide estimates to Council. He stressed the importance of the project, noting that other cities he had worked for would have benefitted from this type of project and Portage was going to serve as a model with the Community Senior Center. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson agreed with the points made by the other Councilmembers and urged the City Manager to continue keeping City Council informed.

With regard to Item A.4, Councilmember Knapp requested that the city highlight the project area map attachment in the Action Recommended for transparency. City Manager La Margo responded that the City Administration would address the matter.

With regard to Item A.6, Councilmember Reid noted a recent e-mail received by all of City Council from former Mayor and Crossroads Towing owner Jamie Graham in which he thanked Council for updating the bid language. She inquired what Mr. Graham was referring to. City Manager La Margo responded that both he and Deputy City Manager Carroll had reviewed the prior city towing bid specifications and been able to remove several proprietary stipulations in order to provide impartiality. Mr. La Margo further stated that he had been able to meet with both Mr. Graham and the owner of McDonald's Towing to address concerns with the contract. Deputy City Manager Carroll stated that the stipulation for heated indoor storage was no longer a requirement, as well as a Better Business Bureau rating. Councilmember Burns asked for clarification regarding the e-mail from Mr. Graham also noting a quoted price for the city, but an inflated price billed to a customer. Deputy City Manager Carroll responded with an explanation of the history of the contract services. Mayor Randall requested clarification regarding the audit process for the vendor. She relayed satisfaction with the update of the bid requirements, but noted a preference for rotational towing, citing prior news stories of large accidents and incidents with towing issues on I-94. Deputy City Manager Carroll responded with information regarding the current towing vendor audit procedure and typical rotational towing structures. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson stated that he and the City Manager had also discussed towing options with the Kalamazoo County Sherriff, as well as representatives of the Kalamazoo County Consolidated Dispatch Authority.

With regard to Item A.7, Councilmember Reid inquired whether any agreement had been made with the developer for the second phase regarding additional visual barriers or tree plantings. Deputy City Manager Carroll responded that nothing has been volunteered by the developer but staff will work with the developer during the permitting process.

With regard to Item A.9, Councilmember Knapp confirmed that the next city election in 2021 would include a partial term for the remainder of Councilmember Ford's three-year term.

With regard to Item A.13, Councilmember Reid inquired about the room notations under the Calendar of Meetings. City Clerk Eklov responded that the various Boards and Commissions were exploring how to continue holding meetings with the loosening of the Executive Orders and this offered them flexibility going forward. She confirmed that the meetings would be noticed appropriately once meeting details were finalized.

With regard to Items D.1 and D.2, Mayor Randall requested clarification regarding representation during each public hearing. City Manager La Margo responded that Community Development Interim Director Forth would be present for both matters and the petitioner would be present for Item D.2.

ADJOURNMENT: Following a summary of the meeting, Mayor Randall adjourned the meeting at 9:07 a.m.

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Erica L. Eklov, City Clerk