

APPROVED MINUTES of the City
Council Meeting/Budget Workshop of the City of
Rye held in City Hall on November 14, 2007 at 7:00
P.M.

PRESENT:

STEVEN OTIS, Mayor
ANDREW C. BALL
MACK CUNNINGHAM
MATTHEW FAHEY
DUNCAN HENNES
HOWARD G. SEITZ
Councilmen

ABSENT: GEORGE S. PRATT

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Otis called the meeting to order and invited the Council to join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Roll Call

Mayor Otis asked the City Clerk to call the roll; a quorum was present to conduct official city business.

Budget Workshop

Mayor Otis announced the first workshop as an opportunity to identify questions not specific to the Enterprise Funds or public safety which are topics planned for discussion at future workshops.

Councilman Cunningham identified some capital projects which might no longer be necessary.

- Do we still need \$144,000 for new voting machines? No, probably not this year. The decision from NY State is still to be made.
- Is there a plan to use \$113,000 for the police impound facility? There is still a need for this.
- What is the plan to use \$117,000 for the Friends Meeting House? Lisa Easton has done a pro-bono Building Condition Report and a Historic Assessment and the City is still waiting for bid specifications for our application to the "Save America Treasures" Grant (\$50,000). Councilman Hennes suggested donating the site to a non-profit organization, perhaps joining forces with the Save the Bird House group. Mayor Otis said there might

be some legal problems as any such plan would involve parkland alienation. He said the City was still trying to put together a package to create the restoration and adaptive use for this property.

- What are the consequences for delaying the purchase of new vehicles for police for a year? There is a schedule and the new replacement policy reflects the value of updating the fleet to include newer vehicles, while keeping older ones for more miles.
- Is money still necessary for the GIS system which was begun in 1997? It is nearly completed and the remaining funds have been encumbered for various licenses.
- Is \$7000 still necessary for the Recreation Master Plan?
- What about the \$116,000 in the budget for the Central Avenue Bridge? Will this money stay in the budget? This money was moved from the Central Business District (CBD) fund. Depending upon reimbursements from the Department of Transportation (DOT) now that FEMA is no longer a potential funding agency, these funds will be put back into the CBD fund.
- What is the impact of holding Fire Department expenses to last year's level?

Councilman Hennes confirmed that the \$2,204,000 in debt to be taken from the Undesignated Fund Balance is for Capital Projects (P3-152) and Equipment (P3-7). The debt on P14-4 is all paid by others. There is approximately \$1,000,000 left in the Damiano Fund. The Installment Purchase Contract for Cloz is the gross amount; the rent is reflected elsewhere.

Mayor Otis said he would like to move the improvements to the Boston Post Road to 2008 so the question would be what can be deferred. It appears the walkway will be on the side of the road so the City can go ahead and pave, but the information needs to be updated, public exposure for the project is required and input from the neighborhoods needs to be obtained.

Councilman Seitz said all his questions are based on his desire to find additional sources of non-Rye taxpayer revenue. The proposals include raising Merchant parking permits by 50% (a potential increase of \$50,000); of doubling parking fees (a potential increase of \$250,000 – assuming similar compliance) and increasing Rye Recreation fees (a potential increase of \$60-100,000). He would use the increase to give additional funds to the Rye Free Reading Room and to support the Recreation Scholarship Program. The Council requested a 10-year history of Merchant permit increases versus property tax increases for the same period.

Councilman Fahey said we need to “get off the dime” and come up with a plan for increasing Commuter Parking. He suggested an auction every quarter and more bike racks. A discussion about dealing with Metro North followed. It was agreed that something needed to be done, but with the approval of Metro North as they do have the capability of repossessing the parking lot (which they own). It was suggested that this specific topic be considered at a workshop early in 2008 so increases can be included in the 2009 budget.

Mayor Otis announced that the City Council needed to have a brief Executive Session prior to beginning the regular City Council meeting and made a motion, seconded by Councilman Hennes to adjourn to Executive Session at 8:00 P.M. to discuss attorney/client

matters relating to public safety. No decisions were made. Councilman Fahey made a motion, seconded by Councilman Ball to close the Executive Session at 8:12 P.M. The regular City Council Meeting convened at 8:11 P.M.

Announcements

Mayor Otis announced that the City of Rye is unfortunately experiencing a rash of daytime burglaries. The Police are working on the situation but now is the time to lock your doors and windows at all times and turn on your burglar alarms. The Police are warning people with Reverse 911 messages, but all citizens are urged to call 911 or 967-1234 if they see suspicious persons and/or vehicles. It would be helpful to note the license plates.

Mayor Otis noted the continued advance of both the Girl's Field Hockey Team and the Boy's Football team in the State Tournaments. He wished them all well during the weekend encounters.

3. Residents may be heard who have matters to discuss that do not appear on the agenda

John Carey, Forest Avenue and member of the Rye Cable Committee, presented the Council with his comments on the Cablevision (CV) draft renewal agreement dated November 5, 2007. He said his emphasis was on protecting Rye's contract rights in light of the fact that CV owes the City \$23,000. He suggested that the City create its own proposal for CV, that it is important to have competition (especially now there is an agreement with Verizon) and perhaps it would be best to put the ball in CV's court. Mayor Otis thanked Mr. Carey for his suggestions and said they would be studied.

4. Report by Rye Historical Society on challenge grant results

Kristina Bicher, former Executive Director of the Rye Historical Society and present Trustee reported that the Society has met the challenge grant of \$30,000 to be matched by the City to install a fire suppression system in the Knapp House. She said they had retained an engineer (Ingemar Asp from Fire systems Services in Ossining, NY) to design and complete the project, not only for the archives area, but for the whole historic structure. In answer to a question from Councilman Ball as to why the plan changed from a chemical to a water-based system, Ms. Bicher said Mr. Asp is recommending a water-based system rather than a chemical system for a variety of reasons (it is less toxic, once the chemical is used there is no more even if the fire is still raging, and water doesn't leave a film). Mr. Asp, eminent in his field, having installed water based systems in other facilities including the Library of Congress, recommends water especially as most documents are already in mylar folders and further protected by acid-free folders and boxes so restoration, should it be necessary, is actually easier. Ms. Bicher said this system is less costly so the Society is able to do more with the same amount of money. She said the time table for complete installation will depend upon going to the BAR and the

Landmarks Advisory Committee for approvals and then be ready to hook up to the water main by early spring. Mayor Otis noted that the City is in partnership with the Society, helping to care for the City's archives, and thanked the Society for making everything even safer.

Adrienne DePolo Becker, President of the Rye Historical Society thanked the City for the grant saying the Society had made a long journey since 1991 when the decision to purchase and preserve the Knapp House was made. She said the Society and City can be very proud of this achievement and she thanked the City for their continuing support, not only of the archives operation, but for maintaining the Square House. Councilman Cunningham confirmed that the new roof on the Square House was necessary because it was not only at the end of its life, but was producing wet conditions.

5. Citizen and Organization Comment and Council discussion of the 2008 Tentative Budget

Mayor Otis said creating the final budget involved lots of steps; that changes can and will be made along the way; and tonight was the beginning of public participation which is both important and welcome. He noted that the Rye Finance Committee has produced a Citizens Budget Report, condensing the "phone book" version of the Tentative Budget into seven pages. This document, along with the full 2008 Tentative Budget can be found on the City's web site.

Karen Bresolin, President of the Rye Free Reading Room, said 2007 had been full of extenuating circumstances, including hiring a new director, flood damages, a crack in the basement wall, and repair of the effluent pumps. They have developed an annual campaign for the first time and are half way to their goal. They have grant applications in the works; have received \$13,000 from FEMA; and raised \$100,000 from the community to fix the flood damage in the children's reading room. But, she said, they can't always depend on the public to save them so they need more of the City's support. *Mark Moore, Treasurer of the RFRR*, said each year private fundraising has been up by 13%, outpacing the increases each year from the City and he pointed out the cost/book checked out is lower than others in the County. *New Director Kurt Haderler* reported this year's budget was an increase of 7.7% over last years; materials increased 5.5%; operations increased 4.1%; building operations are reduced but personnel costs are up (part-time contractual costs are up 6.6%; for full-time employees they are up 9.9%; a Maintenance Supervisor has been hired, there are additional part-time workers and a 10% increase for the promotion of the Managing Librarian to Assistant Director). In addition energy costs are significantly higher and the RFRR would like a larger increase from the City. Mayor Otis said the Council is impressed by the public support and they are aware the RFRR wants more.

Mary Julian, President of the Friends of the Rye Nature Center, reported that the center is thriving, so much so that they are suffering a space crunch and would like to add a third classroom and an additional bathroom. They also need more office space. She reported that visitation is up to 14,000 visits per year; that grant money is coming in; and they would like to celebrate their 50th anniversary by having a building fund drive to increase the available space. They estimate the cost to be about \$450,000 plus "soft" costs and would like the City to consider

providing seed money of \$150,000. The Council asked *Peter Jovanovich, head of the Building Committee*, to put the request in writing to the City Manager.

Councilman Cunningham asked if the mortgage tax line shouldn't be more conservative. City Comptroller Mike Genito said the figure is based on prior experience and he was comfortable with the figure.

6. Resolution to authorize bonding for tax certiorari claims

No action was taken on this agenda item.

6A. Consideration of draft letter regarding Westchester Joint Water Works treatment facility proposal

Mayor Otis reported that the Westchester Joint Waterworks had proposed a plan to improve their treatment facility in the amount of \$80 million. The County is concurrently planning to build their own treatment facility and Harrison is asking the Westchester Joint Water Works to consider a better, more economical solution. The Mayor submitted a letter supporting Harrison's desire for further examination. The Council approved the letter as drafted and authorized the City Manager to send it.

7. Miscellaneous communications and reports

There were no miscellaneous communications and reports to be discussed.

8. Old Business

Councilman Ball said he was distressed to see the graffiti still adorning the side of the Subway building. City Manager Shew said the proper notices had been sent to the property owner and the "clock is ticking."

9. New Business

There was no new business to be discussed.

Mayor Otis made a motion, seconded by Councilman Hennes to adjourn to Executive Session at 9:12 P.M. to discuss attorney/client information concerning tax matters. No decisions were reached. Mayor Otis made a motion, seconded by Councilman Hennes to close the Executive Session and return to the regular meeting at 9:32 P.M.

10. Adjournment

There being no further business to discuss, Mayor Otis made a motion, seconded by Councilman Hennes and unanimously carried, to adjourn the meeting at 9:33 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan A. Morison
City Clerk