



City Council Minutes

The City of Cortland

January 12, 2010

Council Work Session
January 12, 2010
City Hall
7:00 PM

Present: Mayor Feiszli, Aldermen Craig, Hayes, Tobin, Quail, Leonard, Ferguson and Michales

Absent: Alderman Dye

Others Present: Director of Administration and Finance Bryan Gazda, Corporation Counsel Ronald Walsh and City Clerk Carol Tytler. Bernard Thoma of Thoma Development

Mayor Feiszli called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. Aldermen Ferguson and Tobin joined the meeting in progress.

Agenda Item #1 – Discussion regarding the submission of a grant by Thoma Development Consultants to the NYS Office of Community Renewal

Mr. Thoma reviewed upcoming grant opportunities. Alderman Michales asked if any of the grants required city funds. Mr. Thoma responded that the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) does not while the HOME program requires a 5% to 10% local share which can be covered through program income.

Mr. Thoma indicated that the maximum grant available for the Microenterprise program is \$200,000. Alderman Hayes asked if the contract with businesses could include opportunities for training. Mr. Thoma indicated that \$20,000 had been budgeted for training. Experienced businesses might be interested in marketing or similar training while new businesses might need more basic training and assistance. He indicated that the Council could also waive the requirement if no training is needed.

Alderman Hayes asked if applicants are screened for back taxes and other violations. Mr. Thoma responded that all applicants are screened and must be current on taxes and other charges.

It will take 18 months to expend the Microenterprise funds once a grant is awarded. Mr. Thoma expects that five to seven businesses could be funded with grants ranging from \$5,000 minimum to a maximum of \$35,000. If there is a substantial waiting list, a follow-up grant could be submitted to request additional funding. Thoma Development has

already held the first required public hearing back in December 2009. The second public hearing will be held on January 19 at 6:30pm preceding the Common Council meeting. The Microenterprise grant will come before the Council for a vote at that meeting.

Mr. Thoma indicated that Thoma Development needs additional input from the Council regarding the HOME and CDBG grants to determine the exact direction of the proposals. They propose that the HOME grant target low-to-moderate income owner occupied houses within the City of Cortland. They expect that 15 houses could be rehabilitated through the grant program. Thoma Development will return in March to obtain final approval from the Council.

For the CDBG, Thoma Development is proposing a focus on ownership of multi-family homes where home owners fall within the moderate income level. Recently, low-to-moderate income individuals have struggled to qualify for mortgages and have been unable to take advantage of the grant program. By moving to the higher income level, they hope to qualify more owners. In addition, the home owners would create one to two rental units which would be made available to low-to-moderate income people. The program could target specific properties or prioritize neighborhoods with a high percentage of rental properties (not owner occupied). The grant could also provide extra incentives to the owner for renting to low income individuals. Thoma has not yet determined if the funds will be loans or grants to the individuals. They want to ensure that the owner has enough funds to repair and upgrade the house and enough assistance to live in the neighborhood while keeping rents low. Alderman Quail commented that the renters will provide additional income to the owner-occupant. Mr. Thoma indicated that the program may allow the city to convert some properties that are purely rental to owner occupied with rental units. The impact of recently opened large scale student housing projects may also result in more housing vacancies that encourage people to apply for the program.

General feedback from the Council was positive and Mr. Thoma and his staff will begin developing the proposals as presented.

Agenda Item #2 – Discussion regarding guidelines for formation of Finance Advisory Committee (FAC)

Mayor Feiszli reviewed the regulations for establishing committees and asked for comments and concerns regarding the draft mission statement that had been previously distributed to the Council members. Alderman Quail asked for clarification regarding the objective of the committee and what role it would play with the Council and the Mayor's office. The Mayor Feiszli indicated it would be a non-voting committee with a mix of Council and citizen members. The Mayor and Council would direct the committee.

The Mayor indicated that the committee could work on a variety of tasks including researching policies and procedures, helping to develop a five year plan, etc. Brian Gazda clarified that the City does submit a five year plan to the state based on

projections from the AUD. Alderman Quail commented that a five year plan can be outdated as soon as it is completed and expressed concern that a project of this nature should not take too long to develop to avoid this situation. Mayor Feiszli commented that there is room for improvement in many areas and referenced a memo prepared by Alderman Michales with specific suggestions for the FAC including starting the budget process sooner and providing quarterly financial reports to the Council. She also indicated that citizens might look at other municipalities and their policies and bring that information to the Council. Alderman Quail credited Mr. Gazda for providing the Council with monthly financial reports since moving into the administrator's position. Mayor Feiszli listed policies that should be developed as identified in the audit including: cell phone use, city vehicle use and credit card use policies. Mayor Feiszli indicated that the FAC might also recommend that other committees be established to address other areas. Alderman Hayes expressed concern that quarterly meetings may not be enough and the FAC may have to meet more frequently. Alderman Quail commented that it should be a working committee, not just a committee that pushes more work onto Mr. Gazda. Mr. Gazda commented that a finance committee could meet and develop documents for the Council to consider and evaluate different scenarios when staff does not have the time for these tasks. Alderman Michales said that his document outlined similar ideas and would be a good starting point. Council members asked Alderman Michales to email them copies of his outline.

Alderman Quail commented that the FAC will not solve the problems the city is facing. He stated that the biggest challenge was consolidation and in the past he met with county representatives to discuss options such as a combined police force and fire district. Mayor Feiszli felt the Council should solve internal issues first as there are many things that can be improved upon, but agreed that consolidation should be worked on as well. The Mayor emphasized that it was time to implement the things the Council has been talking about for some time.

Mr. Gazda suggested that the Council could reach out to the public asking for comments on things developed by the Council. Alderman Leonard asked how issues would come up for further discussion. He has received differing viewpoints on some topics and would like the Council to decide what direction they will go with those issues. Alderman Quail commented that ultimately, the Council votes on the budget and he does not want to abdicate responsibilities that belong with the Council. He expressed concern that too much information would be available to committees, and not enough to the Council.

Alderman Hayes commented that the committee structure should help the Council stay in the loop by providing reports and other documentation. Committees should have clearly defined roles.

Mr. Gazda had contacted Oneonta to obtain documentation on their finance committee however they did not have anything in writing. However, they have had a very positive experience using a finance committee. He suggested that the Council allow him to create a working document to describe the roles and responsibilities of the FAC and share that with the Council for further comment and development. He will have the draft

document available for the February 2 Council meeting. Alderman Ferguson indicated that she supports the concept of a committee but is undecided about what responsibilities should be assigned. Mayor Feiszli asked about inviting citizens. Alderman Leonard commented that the Council should decide what the committee will do before inviting community members to be part of the committee. Mayor Feiszli indicated that she would continue to accept letters of interest from citizens until a decision was reached. Alderman Michales commented that committee size should be limited. Alderman Ferguson felt an Actuarial would be a good choice to include on the committee to assist with risk assessment. Aldermen Quail and Hayes expressed concern about the flow of information and what information would be appropriate for access by citizens on a committee. Alderman Hayes felt committee members needed adequate information to provide good advisement. County Attorney Walsh indicated that an intra-departmental committee is not discoverable until a final document has been produced. Mr. Gazda commented that a Personnel Committee would need to be all Council, with no outside members.

Agenda Item #3 – Discussion regarding procedure for Council meetings.

Alderman Quail referenced section C3-8 of the City Charter regarding procedures for Council meetings. Mayor Feiszli reviewed requirements under the Charter and opportunities for restructuring the Council meetings. She has spoken with a parliamentarian who is willing to work with the Council to better understand Robert's Rules of Order and how they apply to Council meetings. There is a \$50 fee.

Mayor Feiszli indicated that the minutes do not have to be as detailed as in the past, ward reports are not mandatory and meetings should include any "unfinished business" from previous sessions (such as the blue bag issue). Aldermen Hayes and Ferguson expressed an interest in securing a presentation by the parliamentarian and felt it would also help with time management during Council meetings. Mayor Feiszli felt it would help the Council to identify the best structure for the Council meetings. Alderman Quail commented that there are a limited number of rules that apply to Council meetings and the majority of these were listed on a handout previously distributed by the Mayor.

Alderman discussed aspects of the ward reports with most agreeing that reports should be very brief and focus on broader issues (like crows) and issues relevant to the entire city (blue bags) as opposed to singular issues within a ward (a barking dog). Alderman Hayes commented that these larger issues should be added to the meeting agenda by contacting the Mayor five days prior to the meeting. Alderman Quail commented that the ward reports also provide an opportunity to publicly say what is happening in your ward. Alderman Ferguson commented that hearing similar issues in other wards allowed her to identify problems that were more widespread. Mayor Feiszli indicated that the auditors have commented that the Council appears to spend more time on ward reports than on the other agenda items.

Members also discussed hearing reports from other boards. Mayor Feiszli commented that reports could be submitted in writing. Alderman Quail agreed that Council members could then read them in advance. Since alderman often represent the

Council by attending various committee meetings, several felt these individuals could provide a brief report back from that committee on relevant issues. Mr. Gazda emphasized the importance of not micromanaging other committees. Mayor Feiszli commented on the value of sitting and listening at these meetings. Alderman Quail recommended that Council members read the agenda and material packet for various committee meetings to determine what items are going to be addressed and determine if they should attend. Both Alderman Quail and Alderman Ferguson reported positive experiences when they have attended committee meetings. They felt very welcome and thought it was good to show Council support through attendance.

Mayor Feiszli asked for input on the assigned seats for the Finance Director, Corporation Counsel and City Clerk. There were no comments shared. Alderman Leonard asked if a discussion about the Zoning Officer could be added to the agenda for the next Council meeting. The Council asked for clarification from Corporation Counsel on the need for an executive session during that discussion with Mr. Walsh indicating that a discussion regarding full or part time position should be discussed in open session while merits of a specific individual would warrant an executive session.

Meeting adjourned by Mayor Feiszli at 8:15pm.

CAROL TYTLER – CITY CLERK

MAYOR SUSAN FEISZLI