

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
April 11, 2011
7:00 P.M.**

MAYOR JEFFREY E. GRAHAM PRESIDING

PRESENT: **COUNCIL MEMBER ROXANNE M. BURNS
COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH M. BUTLER JR.
COUNCIL MEMBER TERESA R. MACALUSO
COUNCIL MEMBER JEFFREY M. SMITH
MAYOR GRAHAM**

ALSO PRESENT: **MARY M. CORRIVEAU, CITY MANAGER**

Presentations:

Niagara Frontier Grotto, National Speleological Society, Joseph Giunta

Mr. Joseph Giunta of the Niagara Frontier Grotto, National Speleological Society, addressed the chair concerning the cave system under Watertown and the fact that he is willing to put together a group that would do a mapping of the caves as well as working with the DEC doing bat counts.

He explained that the last time a group of explorers had documented the Watertown caves was in 1958 and indicated that some of the caves are mapped, while others are just ideas of where caves could be located because of the topography of the land. Mr. Giunta advised that the structure of the underground limestone and their 75-foot depth would likely provide for safe exploration. Mr. Giunta advised that there were two types of caves, one used for casual, lighted exploring such as Howe Caverns and the other which would include much more of an expedition experience, such as crawling through certain portions of the cave. He advised that permission to enter a cave has to be given by the landowner where the entrance to the cave is. Once inside, now matter where the cave goes to, it would not be considered trespassing.

Mr. Douglas Anderson, who also addressed the chair on this topic, advised Council that he had received email photos from Phillip Walker, nephew of T. Urling Walker, showing commercial caves in Florida.

Mayor Graham asked about written accounts of the caves being connected.

Mr. Giunta advised that there are many accounts. However, none are documented.

Council Member Burns asked if Mr. Giunta thought the myth about the caves leading to the vaults was true.

Mr. Giunta remarked that it is very possible.

Mayor Graham asked if there was any commercial or hobbyist value to the cave network.

Mr. Giunta replied that in order to determine that, his group would have to go in first and see what the City has and how stable the caves are. He explained that groups of 4 or 5 individuals would come to the City at a time to work on the caves.

Council Member Macaluso asked about the City's liability if anyone gets hurt.

Mr. Giunta advised that technically the City would be liable. However, they are good at what they do and have never had an accident and would be willing to sign waivers for liability. He also indicated that he had been contacted by a local survey company who volunteered their services.

Mayor Graham commented that staff would have to review this to see if there are any potential downsides for the City.

Mrs. Corriveau remarked that staff would need to talk about what we are doing as far as opening the caves.

Council Member Butler remarked that his concern is what would prevent anyone for going in the caves once they have been opened.

Mr. Giunta explained that they would have to be gated.

Mr. Anderson advised that he had spoken with DEC and they have an interest in accompanying them into the caves because of the bats.

Mr. Giunta stated that he believed there was federal money available for protecting underground water systems.

Council Member Smith suggested letting them map the caves and letting DEC study the bats.

Mayor Graham remarked that he would also like to see DEC involved in this.

Council concurred to have staff begin to talk about this.

Classification and Compensation Study Report,

James C. Fox, Ph.D., Managing Director, Fox Lawson & Associates, addressed the chair concerning this report. Executive Secretary for the Civil Service Commission Beth Morris and Margaret Ryan, Commission Member, also were present.

Mr. Fox reviewed the classification, job evaluation and compensation studies. He explained the Decision Band Method used to evaluate all jobs included in the study. The survey collected data for 37 benchmark classifications and 24 out of 52 organizations completed the survey. FLA reviewed and analyzed the market data from custom survey market, published survey market and combined market.

In reviewing the overall comparisons, the actual salaries are 2.4% below the custom survey market and 2.1 % below the combined market, but 5.0% above the published source market. He explained that what the City is paying is a little less but the structure of the minimum and maximum is a lot less than the market. He commented that hiring is probably hard to do because of the salaries. However, those employees that do come into the organization usually stay and move up.

Mrs. Corriveau remarked that when looking for individuals with certain skill sets, it is hard to attract people because of the starting salaries. She explained that once people understand the benefits offered by the City, they stay. Therefore, the number of people who leave is very low.

Council Member Burns commented that she was surprised that they would compare private sector to public service positions as we know that government has benefits that will exceed the private sector.

Council Member Smith remarked that, in fairness, compensation packages should be compared. He stated that it would be interesting to define.

Mayor Graham commented that before anyone's expectations get beyond the scope of this meeting, he asked if salary increases were being proposed.

Mr. Fox stated that they were not. He commented that there is value in the benefits that shouldn't be ignored.

Council Member Butler remarked that pension and health care benefits total 35%. He commented that we fall short on the highly skilled individuals and we do have problems filling those positions.

Mr. Fox explained that the step plans get the raises now, but management has no steps. Therefore, in some cases, the subordinates are paid more than the supervisors.

Mrs. Morris advised that the Commission is ready to move forward in reviewing the classification plans and implementing changes. She outlined the proposed title changes as well as the creation of a new title and the creation of a couple of new positions. She explained that the Commission can't create a position – both the City and Commission have to agree. Mrs. Morris advised that those individuals with changes will have a letter from her and the opportunity to schedule an appeal. She explained that the procedure is for the Commission to adopt the classification plan and then forward it to Albany for their approval.

Mrs. Corriveau advised that all job descriptions have been re-written. Council Member Butler questioned the number of employees – 400+ and the fact that there were only 82 job titles.

Mrs. Morris explained that this study didn't include police and fire.

Council Member Butler asked if the classification change will lead to disparity in the salary.

Council Member Smith asked if the classification change would also change the pay.

Mrs. Corriveau answered both questions by explaining that there are only 3 or 4 situations where they combined individuals into a title. She explained that as positions become vacant, they will look at it.

Mrs. Morris explained that 11 job titles were combined to create 5 new job titles and no one is harmed. She also advised that the Commission has nothing to do with setting salaries.

Parks and Recreation

Council Member Burns remarked that she would like to discuss the issues at the Recreation Department as far as the outstanding money and collection of funds is concerned in regards to bookkeeping practices and accounts receivable/payable.

Council Member Smith concurred with her. He commented that last week it was just outstanding bills. But, the more we uncover, the deeper it seems to get. He stated that a friend of his contacted him explaining that she had paid for her son's golf lessons last summer. Recently, she received a letter with the check asking her to resubmit a new check. He questioned how the department is accounting for cash. He also asked why the audits have not picked this up.

Mrs. Corriveau responded that if Council wanted to talk in depth, she needed to have the people here that could answer the questions. She explained that they discovered that the City had accounts receivable in Parks and Rec and she notified Council.

Council Member Burns remarked that she is not looking to have one question answered. She stated that she wanted to raise a bigger issue. She stated that she has been requesting information for weeks and weeks and questions haven't been answered.

Mrs. Corriveau asked what it was that Council wanted. She stated that she provided the information on the Wizards and would appreciate understanding what else is wanted.

Council Member Smith remarked that he had asked for contracts for baseball, football and ice hockey and what they were to pay and if the City received the payments. He stated that he realized Mr. Mills was on vacation and that the City Manager had indicated that the budget was higher priority.

Mrs. Corriveau advised that the accounts receivable issue was important to her and that is why she called Council. She remarked that once staff is able to identify the depth and breadth of the problem, they will find a solution.

Mayor Graham commented that last week discussion was held about paying when service is rendered. Now, they find that there is an unpaid invoice back to 2002. He remarked that Council Member Smith's friend raises an interesting point in questioning why they got a letter a year later.

Council Member Smith replied that it is embarrassing. He questioned how we track the cash coming into that department if this is how the checks are handled. He also commented that he was advised that these account receivables are in the fund balance. He stated that he thought that the fund balance was just cash.

Mrs. Corriveau advised that the fund balance is cash and receivables.

Council Member Burns remarked that we know the situation of the Wizards and the Revolution and the fact that they have outstanding bills. We have a story of a resident's check not being cashed as well as a check from the Red & Black being found in a drawer. She stated that she feels she has a fiduciary responsibility to try to correct these issues. She stated that she knows that Mrs. Corriveau and Mr. Mills are working on this. However, she would like this issue addressed sooner, rather than later. She asked Council to support her in having an independent audit done for Parks and Recreation. She stated that one would assume that when we have a professional auditing firm come in, disparities would come out.

Council Member Macaluso stated that she didn't understand the process.

Mrs. Corriveau advised that the invoice comes out of Parks and Rec. The bills are payable to the City Comptroller. Some individuals pay at Parks and Rec. Then, Parks and Rec bring the payments up to City Hall.

Mayor Graham remarked that there are some users saying that they never received their bills. He also commented on putting service charges on them.

Mrs. Corriveau advised that there is no process of putting service charges on them. The City Code says to pay in advance. However, billing has been a long standing practice. She also remarked that there is nothing stopping the City from sending accounts to collections.

Council Member Smith questioned how we could go back and assess how things were paid in 2004 when we find checks that aren't even cashed.

Council Member Burns remarked that Council has a responsibility to move forward on the audit of Parks and Recreation.

Mayor Graham commented that he had looked at the recent audit today and they used a broad brush with the numbers.

Council Member Butler remarked that he didn't think Council could arrive at a decision tonight on the audit and it should be discussed under new business. He stated that Council would also have to interview the auditor.

Council Member Burns responded that this is a work session and there is no new business section. She stated that she doesn't think this can wait another week. She stated that the auditor could be hired under a professional services agreement. She also commented that Council has never interviewed an auditor.

Mrs. Corriveau advised that the City Comptroller is the one who interviews auditors.

Mayor Graham questioned the issue of operating a concession out of a cash box and also the fact that the concession deals with inventory issues. He commented that he had no problem using an auditor.

Council Member Macaluso asked what Council Member Burns hoped to gain by doing an audit. She stated that this situation can be corrected by ourselves and having an outside audit will cost money. She asked what she was looking for.

Council Member Burns responded that she wants to see the money coming in, tracking of funds and if deposits are being made as well as ways to improve the process. She questioned why Council Member Macaluso thought it was too expensive when there was an outstanding balance of \$50,000 until last week.

Council Member Macaluso stated that she never said it was too expensive. However, the problems with the billing system can be corrected by the City.

Council Member Smith remarked that in reality we have outstanding bills that our own departments have let go.

Mrs. Corriveau advised that the last audit was \$25,000. She recommended allowing Mr. Mills and her to assist in putting together a description of what we want looked at. She remarked that they both have concerns about getting a handle on what the situation is. She stated that there is an advantage to having someone from outside look at it. They want the audit to give the City recommendations on how to do things better. She recommended using someone who knows the City's process in the line of work that is done at Parks and Rec.

Mayor Graham suggested using the current city auditors.

Council Member Butler remarked that a new firm would look at things with a new pair of eyes. However, he would like to think about it a little more.

Council Member Macaluso responded that she is not up for the audit now. She stated that Mrs. Corriveau and Mr. Mills need to get down there but she doesn't see the urgency in any of this.

Council Member Smith agreed that Mrs. Corriveau and Mr. Mills should move forward with this and Council should give Council Member Butler until Monday to decide.

Council Member Burns stated that she is willing to defer until Monday to make the decision. Mrs. Corriveau could contact the present firm to see if they even want to do the audit.

Council Member Burns left the meeting.

Gaffney Drive Sewer Improvements

City Engineer Kurt Hauk presented a power point report on this issue.

Mayor Graham commented that given the commitment we had to upgrade the system, he thought we should continue on with it. He stated that he understood there are technical issues as it relates to the device that would be put in.

Mr. Hauk reviewed the original upgrade recommendation and the July 2009 presentation. He explained that the current configuration is adequate to meet the demand and there are no engineering requirements to upgrade. He explained that he would have to design by peak hourly flows and design average flow based on a site plan.

Mr. Hauk showed a flow meter chart from in front of Friendly's showing inflow during a storm event. He advised that under average conditions, it has the capacity in the pipe. However, they need to find and remove the source of the storm events inflow on Arsenal Street. In addition, they need to find and remove the source of inflow upstream of the Gaffney Drive pump station.

Mayor Graham remarked that he had sat in Council chambers when Mr. Doneghan presented the development proposal. Everyone said that he couldn't have it there. Then a diversion line was done. This is an area that we know is going to develop. Years from now, someone will question why the City didn't have the vision to do this now.

Council Member Butler remarked that Mr. Hauk is convincing and he is confident that this is the way to go.

Council Member Smith remarked that initially we had no capacity. Now we do have it. He remarked that if we can eliminate the inflow problems, he doesn't know what we would upgrade to.

Discussion was held on the use of the grant funding.

Mr. Mix suggested contacting them to ask if the grant funding would still work since small businesses would no longer be going to this pump station.

Council Member Macaluso remarked that she agreed with Mr. Hauk.

City Hall and Library Heating and Cooling, Geothermal Report Review

Mr. Hauk remarked that there was not a clear cut decision made last week and questioned what we could afford.

Council Member Macaluso remarked that City Hall needs to be upgraded before anything else is done to it.

Council Members Smith and Butler agreed.

Council Member Smith commented that in terms of the library, geothermal is the way to go.

Mrs. Corriveau responded that it comes down to if we can afford it.

Mayor Graham questioned the fact that the people doing the study also sell the system and stated that we should be more cautious about getting into this.

Council Member Smith responded that geothermal is not a new technology.

Council Member Macaluso stated that geothermal is not for City Hall. She might consider it for the library, but more information is needed.

Mayor Graham commented that no one believes paybacks of 60 years.

Mrs. Corriveau advised that a chiller does need to be ordered for City Hall.

Funding Requests -Community Action Planning Council and Urban Mission

Council Member Smith remarked that we just can't afford to be giving out more funds. He stated that many of the organizations overlap.

Council Member Butler questioned his ability to decide which philanthropic agencies should receive taxpayer funds. He stated that he has lots of questions for them.

Council Member Smith stated that he would plug in last year's budget number. He stated that this is different than what was recently given to DPAO because they bring people into the community and those people spend money here.

Mayor Graham questioned if this is a core mission of the City and also questioned where we stop with advertising events.

Council Member Butler remarked that he wants to know what Urban Mission wants as no amount was in their request.

Work session adjourned at 10:35 p.m.

Donna M. Dutton
City Clerk