

**SOMERSWORTH PLANNING BOARD
MINUTES OF WORKSHOP MEETING
NOVEMBER 15, 2011**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dave Witham, City Council Representative, Paul Robidas, Ron LeHoullier, Matthew Durkee and Paul Maskwa, Alternate.

MEMBERS ABSENT: William Sweeney, Anthony Delyani, Dan Proulx and Erwin Grant.

STAFF PRESENT: Dave Sharples, City Planner and Tracy Gora, Planning Secretary.

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m.

1) PUBLIC MEETING

A) Review and discuss proposed 2013-2018 Capital Improvement Plan.

City Manager Bob Belmore welcomed everyone and stated that he is going to present a PowerPoint overview of the proposed 2013-2018 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Stated that members of the School Board, department heads and member of the public are present and handed out a paper copy of the PowerPoint presentation. Referred to page two and stated that there recently was a joint workshop meeting with the School Board and City Council and they discussed where the authority lies with the CIP. Stated that the CIP is due to be submitted to the City Council by December 15 of every year. Stated that page three is more on the authority. Stated that the City Council is the Governing and Legislative body of the City. Referred to page four and reviewed the evolution of the CIP process over the past years. Stated that the Planning Board's transmittal letter goes into the copy of the CIP that the Council receives. Stated that page five shows the CIP development process and stated that the Council typically discussed the CIP at their annual goal session or at a workshop meeting. Stated that the School Board has a separate CIP. Stated that page six shows what the CIP process is in neighboring communities. Referred to page seven and the thought of having a public hearing during the CIP process for more citizen input. Stated that a goal is for level funding so there are no spikes. Referred to page eight and listed the project criteria. Suggested that the Planning Board, School Board and Council consider if \$10,000 is a good starting point for projects. Stated that the number can be tweaked. Referred to page nine and reviewed the priority ratings. Reviewed the summary on page ten.

Scott Smith, Director of Finance addressed the Board and reviewed page eleven.

Belmore reviewed page twelve and the recommended priority one projects. Stated that the CIP shows the big picture amount to do the project and then gets whittled down from there. Reviewed page thirteen and the recommended priority two projects. Reviewed page fourteen and the breakdown on some of the annual projects. Reviewed the funding sources from page fifteen.

Smith reviewed page sixteen and stated that the estimated tax rate, if everything was accepted but not including the School side of things, would be .57 cents.

Belmore reviewed page seventeen, which shows the area that the TE grant would encompass. Reviewed the preliminary timeline for downtown High Street improvements on page eighteen. Stated that the City Council had the first reading of a resolution to sign a contract with the NHDOT to start the TE grant project. Stated that they will then start planning and design work. Stated that the MEDOT is heading up the Somersworth-Berwick bridge project and that a contract has been signed to start. Reviewed the timeline of the High Street project and stated

that they are currently out to bid. Stated that this is not set in stone but is an initial overview. Stated that this concludes his presentation. Stated that they usually stay focused on the next fiscal year but that there is talk of a new fire station in the future and that he would like to start conversations on that. Stated that the Fire Chief can talk more about that but they are doing away with the notion of an addition and talking about a brand new building.

Witham suggested having the Fire Chief address the Board.

Belmore mentioned that all department heads are present and available to answer questions.

Robidas stated that he would like to have a discussion with the School Board. Stated that school needs have been a focus for the last couple of years and that he would like to know of progress, if any.

Don Bliss, Fire Chief, addressed the Board and stated that he has only been working with the City for a couple of months. Stated that the existing fire department is concrete block and was built around 1975. Stated that the mechanical aspects have been replaced or is in bad shape and always needs repair. Stated that the existing structure doesn't have a training area or a decontamination area. Stated that administrative space is almost nonexistent and that there is no confidential work area. Stated that the group quarters are deficient and that there are many functional needs. Stated that there are safety concerns because the building doesn't meet code because the second floor doesn't have a second means of egress. Stated that the structural stability of the building isn't good. Stated that this area has a high probability of earthquakes and the building isn't structurally sound and is dangerous. Stated that regarding energy efficiency, the building is a sieve. Stated that a long-term energy improvement would be to replace the building. Stated that in previous CIPs, there was a plan for a building addition and for some rehabilitation. Stated that an architect was brought in and he said not to repair or rehabilitate the building because it would have code problems. Stated that three million dollars could bring in a new structure rather than repairing the existing building.

Witham stated that the Council talked about adopting a target to maintain the fund balance and asked Belmore if he is suggesting the same type of thing.

Belmore replied yes to having a target number and stated that other communities do that. Stated that it is something to strive for, a planning tool. Stated that they do try to modify the number to keep it even but it would be a good target for a policy guideline.

Witham referred to the page that shows the CIP summary and stated that it shows a total of over \$45 million for six years but that fiscal year 2013 seems like a spike. Asked if that is from the school.

Belmore confirmed.

Robidas stated that it seems like it's the same thing in the CIP as it's always been for the school.

Don Austin, Chairman of the School Board addressed the Board. Stated that it looks like the same thing as past years and that they have been using the same format for CIP needs. Stated that each year they try to put money into the operating budget for routine maintenance. Stated that they have had some emergencies over the years. Stated that they discussed with City Council the need to look at it proactively. Stated that they don't always want to have to react to things and would rather be proactive. Stated that here are projects that they have been asking about for years. Stated that Maple Wood School needs maintenance and that the High School needs windows. Stated that HVAC units need to be replaced. Stated that with the new school, they want to manage the building so there are not emergency situations in the future. Stated that

the State is talking about revamping the building aid program and they want to show that there is a program in place for the schools. Stated that the new building aid program will be more competitive and there will be limited funds from the State. Stated that they need a proactive program in place.

Jerry Perkins, member of the School Board, addressed the Board. Stated that the projects were grouped because of eligibility for aid. Stated that costs go up when you put them off and that capital improvements are falling further and further behind because little has been done. Stated that they continue to have projects but that the operating budget for all schools was about \$75,000 this year. Stated that you have to show that you have a maintenance problem to get them done. Stated that the recent joint workshop was helpful to everyone for how to look at the CIP in the future. Stated that they have projects that are geared toward air quality and safety. Stated that not a lot have been accomplished.

Robidas stated that he is not trying to be critical but he doesn't know how the City can fix everything and keep the tax rate down. Asked if school building maintenance should not be in the school's CIP but lumped with all City buildings. Stated that he doesn't know how the City doesn't fix these things. Stated that it isn't going away.

Witham stated that, regarding grouping the school's CIP needs in FY13, there should be balance for financial outlay from year to year. Stated that he understands why it is lumped together and asked how challenging it would be to divide the \$6.6 million over the six years to avoid peaks.

Perkins stated that he thinks the School Board is going to look at that and have manageable projects. Stated that the workshop meeting identified how the City looks at bonding. Stated that he feels that it is the direction they are leaning.

Witham stated that he thinks that they need to identify where the weaknesses are in the CIP. Stated that he thinks that \$6.6 million is a weakness because it is not achievable. Stated that it needs to be realistic. Suggested a capital reserve fund for building maintenance where a little bit gets put into an account each year to minimize dramatic impacts to the tax rate.

Robidas agreed that there needs to be a proactive amount, not a reactive amount. Stated that there needs to be balance and asked how other Cities handle municipal buildings. Asked if it would be better if all City buildings were managed together.

Belmore stated that the idea of having school buildings grouped together with City buildings has been mentioned before but that State law would have to change. Stated that they could explore the possibility of having a facilities manager that reports to the City Manager and School Board. Stated that there are only a couple of part-time employees to take care of City buildings. Suggested a capital reserve fund and an improvements fund.

LeHoullier stated that he agrees with Robidas and Witham and that he has heard about replacing window at the High School and renovations at Maple Wood School. Asked if the renovations are as immediate as the need to replace windows.

Austin stated that Maple Wood School probably has the lesser priority.

Perkins stated that the projects can be broken down.

LeHoullier stated that he hears a lot about stimulus programs and asked if there is anything available.

Austin stated that they look for everything but that there isn't much out there. Stated that they took advantage of the money that was available. Stated that regarding an overall facilities manager, their current person in that role, Andy, has a good handle on what's needed.

Durkee stated that it's clear that they can't have one overriding person for all facilities and that there are budgetary issues. Asked how it is best to get projects prioritized. Asked if part of the problem that they are not getting enough money.

Austin stated that the Council approves the bottom line and the School board has to allocate it. Stated that it comes down to a choice of keeping a teacher or a program or a building. Stated that when they don't have a building for the teacher or the program, it becomes a priority in terms of funding. Stated that they looked at new alternatives for funding and that they don't think the operating budget will ever be enough.

Perkins stated that in the past they would submit a CIP and wait for funding. Stated that the operating budget was separate.

Durkee stated that the burden of maintenance is on the School Board but that the resources aren't in your corner. Stated that the system is broken. Stated that they need to prioritize but it is hard to do when you are only given \$75,000.

Maskwa agreed with Durkee and stated that he is not sure how they even get to some projects.

Durkee stated that he can't deny that the priorities of the school buildings are not being met. Stated that part of the problem with the Hilltop School is that they were forced into not using it. Asked where the point is of not being able to use a school.

Austin stated that he doesn't think that they can compare Hilltop School with the other facilities because Hilltop School was not a failure to maintain. Stated that building codes changed overtime. Stated that Maple Wood School is 30 years old and that if the hot water heater goes, then you can't have school. Stated that as far as building failure, he doesn't think they are there. Stated that they are keeping the building open and as healthy as possible.

Durkee stated that his issue is that he feels they go into crisis management mode when they could have addressed problems before they were a priority. Stated that they need to get away from crisis management.

Maskwa stated that Witham mentioned reasonableness and suggested breaking \$6.6 million down to a reasonable number.

Witham stated that he thinks these comments are right on point. Stated that part of the issue is how they've gotten to this point. Stated that the school identifies the need and the Council gives a bottom line. Stated that the Council just votes on the bottom line and that it is a unique system. Stated that it was discussed at the City Charter level but was never developed. Stated that there is a better understanding of the process and that they can't continue to turn a blind eye. Stated that they need forward progress and that a capital reserve fund may start to get them there.

Durkee stated that he thinks that a capital reserve fund is a great idea but compared it to personal finances.

Witham stated that, switching gears, when he thinks of important items, he feels that High Street is a priority. Referred to the TE grant and the planned rehabilitation and asked if the timeline is realistic.

Belmore stated that the timeline is a best-case scenario and may be a little aggressive. Stated that there are many agencies involved. Stated that they need to send out a request for proposals and have public outreach and partner with residences and businesses.

Witham stated that the TE grant process from application stage to where they are not took about 2.5 years. Stated that High Street is tough to drive on now and asked what they can do between now and then.

Belmore replied patchwork and stated that it is in the plan and that it is within reach. Stated that they have to spend today so that it doesn't cost more tomorrow.

Witham asked if the traffic signal at the intersection of West High/High/Washington Street is part of this.

Belmore stated that they will be looking at it and a less-expensive short-term fix.

Witham stated that the Police Department is just asking for cruisers. Stated that in the past they have ordered them in advance and asked if they should continue like that.

Belmore replied yes.

Witham stated that there was a discussion on reducing the Fire Department's fleet size.

Bliss stated that the issue is if they should maintain three trucks with a ladder truck. Stated that it is a complex question with lots of factors involved. Stated that he wants to see what area fleets look like because they all rely on each other.

Witham stated that the CIP only shows one truck for replacement and asked if that is because it is current.

Bliss replied yes and stated that they are just maintaining.

Robidas asked, regarding reducing the fleet size, if there is an apparatus that has the capability of two.

Maskwa asked if 30 years is the timeframe to replace water mains.

Tom Willis, Director of Public Works, addressed the Board. Stated that it depends on the material and that some can go for 70 years.

Maskwa stated that he is happy to an energy efficient vehicle proposed for Code Enforcement. Asked if there is room for any more energy efficient vehicles.

Belmore stated that he'll look into that. Stated that they are always looking for grants for vehicles.

Belmore stated that capital improvements are needed for the water sewer lines instead of crisis management.

Witham stated that in years past there wasn't a nest egg of money and so projects had to lean financially on the fund balance. Stated that rates were increased to repay the fund balance. Stated that the hope is that they don't fall down that slope again.

Belmore stated that it wasn't discussed in the past but that now they do that on an annual basis.

Smith stated that in the past there were cash flow deficits in the water/sewer department so they had to freeze the general fund to make up for it. Stated that he thinks the balance of that will be erased this year. Stated that the City is in the range they want to be in.

Motion: Witham moved that the Planning Board endorse the Capital Improvement Program as presented and forward it to the City Council with the following recommendations:

1. The School Department Capital Improvement Program be modified to span the six years to minimize dramatic funding requests and to assist in reprioritizing projects;
2. The School Board, in conjunction with the City Council, closely examine and evaluate the establishment of a Capital Reserve Fund for school building improvements; and,
3. Water and sewer rates be maintained so that positive cash flows are maintained so that the fund balance can build for future capital projects in both of those areas.

Witham stated that in addition the Planning Board endorses the changes made to the Capital Improvement Program to reflect current needs with a note for the construction of a new Fire Station instead of a building addition as one example of a change in the Capital Improvement Program.

Seconded by Maskwa. Motion carried with a 5-0 vote.

Belmore thanked the Planning Board and all staff in attendance for the thoughtful discussion and support.

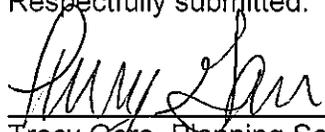
LeHoullier thanked everyone for attending.

Motion: Robidas moved to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded by Witham. Motion carried with a 5-0 vote.

Meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:



Tracy Gora, Planning Secretary
Somersworth Planning Board