

MINUTES of the CITY COUNCIL &
EYES ON 30 COMMITTEE JOINT WORKSHOP
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
May 8, 2023 – 5:30 p.m.

Committee Members Present:	Councilor Nancie Cameron, Chair Councilor Richard Michaud Superintendent Lori Lane Mayor Dana Hilliard Planning Board Representative Jason Barry Mayor Designee, Jenne Holmes City Manager Bob Belmore
Councilors Present:	Councilor Martin Pepin Councilor Kenneth Vincent Councilor Donald Austin Councilor Matthew Gerding Councilor Denis Messier
Councilors Absent:	Councilor Robert Gibson Councilor David A. Witham
Staff present:	Director of Planning & Community Development Michelle Mears City Clerk Kristen LaPanne

Committee Chair Cameron called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

APPROVE PAST MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 29, 2023

Councilor Michaud made a motion to accept the March 29, 2023 minutes as submitted. The motion was seconded by Jason Barry and passed 7-0.

REVIEW THE THREE (3) GOALS COMPLETED BY THE COMMITTEE

Chair Cameron welcomed all in attendance and began by reviewing the three (3) goals that had been previously reviewed by the Committee pertaining to *What defines us as a City, Sustainability, and Preserving team approach/ Government approach*. She asked if the Council or Committee members had anything to add before moving onto the remaining goals that will be up for discussion.

Jason Barry recommended looking deeper into what defines the City of Somersworth. He commented on perception and how we envision the City being perceived by 2030. There was discussion of ways to better the perception of the City by reducing litter by way of educating residents and implementing clean street programs that engages the Community. Chair Cameron mentioned that she is aware of local Towns that have trash clean up programs, she will gather information and report back at the next Eyes on 30 Committee meeting. City Manager Belmore reported working with the Strafford County Jail to assign inmates that have assisted in trash cleanup in various parts of the City.

There was additional discussion of windy days causing recycling bins to spill over and blow recyclables around. The potential for closed containers was discussed as well as locations that tend to have more litter than others around the City. All in attendance agreed that the issue of litter is a larger topic that should continue with conversations that would be best had within the Public Works & Environment Committee and brought to the full Council with recommendations. Councilor Vincent commented that litter of bulky items may be due to the costs associated with the disposal.

Councilor Gerding suggested looking into the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire which a number of local communities have joined in an effort to offer alternative energy sources, he believes that it may require creating an energy commission or committee. City Manager Belmore noted that he assigned Scott Smith, Finance Director, to start working on the City's participation in the Coalition and Scott is currently attending a Finance conference that has a session on Community Power.

DISCUSS THE NEXT FOUR (4) GOALS IDENTIFIED BY THE COMMITTEE

Chair Cameron reviewed what the Committee identified as broad goals for pertaining to the next four (4) goals for *Recreation/Library, Education, Central Location, and Transportation/Infrastructure*.

Recreation/Library-

There was discussion regarding the recent presentation of the Public Library Expansion/ADA Improvement Study that would benefit library programs. City Manager Belmore confirmed that the City has applied for a Congressional Directed Spending grant award of \$500,000 for this project. Belmore mentioned that the expansion would assist the City in meeting National Library standards in regards to the number of books, etc. per capita. Councilor Messier stated that the goal should mirror some of the language within the Grant requirements.

Councilor Austin commented on perception, he suggested educating residents on how the Library has become more modernized, the resources it has to offer and the programs available. Councilor Pepin agreed and mentioned that he was contacted by a resident who shared the great experience they had when they attended the library with their children.

Councilor Gerding suggested adding community recreation walking trails which has recently been a discussion with the Conservation Commission regarding the City property at Malley Farm. He also shared the possibility of a kayaking system that could run along the Salmon Falls River. There was a comment that implementing a kayaking system would take some time and preparation but that in the future having this available with public access and the potential of offering access to Downtown businesses would be a great addition to recreation opportunities. Councilor Messier offered the alternative of creating a river map for recreational kayaking.

Mayor Hilliard commented on the importance of recreation programs, he gave an example of the City of Franklin, NH being known for its recreational kayaking after the revitalization of Franklin Falls and brought in many small business and shops to downtown Franklin.

There was another suggestion pertaining to the old Sunningdale Golf Course property that has become a housing subdivision with adjacent conservation land, and including that property when considering recreational walking trails. A suggestion of bike street lanes or trails was also briefly discussed.

Superintendent Lori Lane suggested having more discussion on the aging population and the opportunity to implement more programs for senior residents. Mayor Hilliard suggested the Recreation division shift their focus to senior programs and utilize the limited City resources available and recalled the City Council and School Board jointly adopting the understanding that the School facilities are available for Community recreational needs and programs.

Education

Mayor Hilliard spoke to the national recognition that the Somersworth School system has received and that the special education services offered have been a driving factor for families to move to the City.

Councilor Messier commented on the Somersworth Youth Connection and the engagement incorporated throughout the program. He feels that in order to provide adequate educational programs, engagement is key. City Manager Belmore commented on the robust Career Technical Center programs offered by the high school.

Superintendent Lori Lane spoke to the importance of perception and would like to see the facilities incorporated in the goal. Councilor Messier agreed adding that facility improvements can positively impact the atmosphere, and Councilor Austin added that protecting the atmosphere is important and feels the School Board and staff have done a great job making children feel safe and the City should include a goal to maintain that.

Superintendent Lori Lane recommended creating robust programming to ensure early childhood education is valued and feels that due to the pandemic, young children missed in-person opportunities to gain adequate education and will need additional resources or supports. She added the opportunity to support adult education programs that are engaging and increase skilled trades and hobbies.

Councilor Gerding suggested extended learning opportunities for students and explained that if a program were to be implemented, the school would partner with local businesses and students would be able to earn credits while interning and working with a partnering business. Councilor Austin added the potential to expand the high school health clinic throughout the school system.

Central Location

There was discussion pertaining to how the City can attract more people to the downtown area such as wayfinding signage and the Elm Street Development apartment project. Councilor Messier noted the addition of 128 apartments can expect to lead more people into the downtown area but parking remains an issue. Mayor Hilliard suggested that the increase in residents downtown poses the potential for more businesses and entrepreneurs to develop in the City.

Councilor Gerding mentioned looking at the things that the City has control over, such as infrastructure, zoning and historic preservation. City Manager Belmore noted the recent review and changes to include a downtown parking overlay and form-based codes, but agrees that the City can continue to look into potential barriers for growth.

Jason Barry questioned if there is something that the City can do to incentivize or advertise for economic growth. Manager Belmore noted the Chapter 31 Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive that is available.

Councilor Pepin wondered what the City can do to bring in more development that would attract people to come back to the City. He commented on the history of the City of Somersworth, remembering when factories were thriving and the downtown area had many shops including clothing boutiques, jewelry shops and bakeries. Jenne Holmes commented that throughout her time traveling, she has witnessed many cities trying to revitalize their downtown areas in order to entice people.

Transportation/Infrastructure

City Manager Belmore commented on the Complete Streets projects coming to fruition and mentioned that Wright-Pierce Engineering will have a presentation for the City Council next week on the Constitutional Way design. Additionally, the State has been conducting engineering on Route 108.

Councilor Messer feels that the City does not have enough public transportation and reports seeing many residents using the public COAST buses. He is also in favor of EV charging stations. Councilor Gerding agrees that with the 10-year plan, it is important to continue the discussion of charging stations to support electric vehicles. Jason Barry stated that the Planning Board has been actively having conversations pertaining to charging stations as well. He added that with the Elm Street development, the potential may arise where another COAST bus stop could be beneficial. There was additional conversation pertaining to COAST bus and if another stop is needed, a goal by 2030 could be to fully fund COAST bus and request that additional stop. Councilor Austin added a goal regarding the City's continued support for the Statewide Public Transportation Coalition.

Councilor Gerding would like to reaffirm the City's efforts in maintaining and renovating its sidewalks and streets.

The list of goals identified by the Eyes on 30 Committee and City Council are attached to these minutes and include the discussed attainable goals.

MISCELLANEOUS

There were no miscellaneous items discussed.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Michaud made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Jason Barry and passed 7-0. The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen LaPanne, City Clerk

1. *What defines us as city?* - 10 SQ miles, City on the move, proud past - bright future, Hilltopper spirit
Welcoming, diversity, strong sense of community, State of NH historical markers,
 - Attain 10 historic markers per Mayor's Initiative
 - Hilltopper School & Forest Glade Cemetery historical markers approved by State
 - List of potential historical markers within the City
 - Willand Pond
 - Fred Brown Gov from Somersworth-
 - Old City Hall- NR and State Historic- CLG funds
 - Mills – Great Falls
 - Former GE/Aclara
 - Hydro off of Old Mills Road
 - Somersworth's name
 - Identify, prioritize and obtain historical markers (2 per year by 2030)
 - Marketing on website- with write up/map-links to other information/local businesses to visit
 - Historic District Commission Road signs
 - Promote diversity
 - Identify flags that go at Citizen Place and dates (i.e., 1st Nations, English, Québec, Greek, Irish, Indonesian)
 - Work with Cultural Commission to create Resolutions
 - Military flags on date group armed forces formed
 - Annually change cultural banners DT-
 - Historical Society Museum
 - Cultural events (International Children's Festival & Indonesian Festival)
 - Reducing litter, provide education, implement clean street programs
2. *Sustainability* - tree city, community gardens, composting program, preservation of open space, recycling, Monarch butterfly park, New England Cottontail bunny- release, tree inventory at Idlehurst School property
 - Tree City
 - Maintain annual designation
 - Arbor Day Foundation-DPW submits
 - Tree City flag
 - Annual tree planting- City owned property, meeting with State canopy Idlehurst
 - Document expenditures
 - Encourage new developers to plant trees
 - Solar Array off Blackwater Road
 - Annual Community Garden Program- has doubled since inception
 - Planning Board updated EV regulations to require EV Charging stations in site plans
 - Composting- school and DPW private arrangement collecting taken away.
 - Measure the amount of compost per year

- Ash Street Monarch Butterfly Park
 - Conservation Commission- working on invasive species plans for open space-HOA space
 - Community Power Coalition of NH
3. *Preserving team approach/ Government approach* - strong working partnership, joint commission of City Council & School Board, commitment to nonpartisan elections, strong sense of team between elected and professional staff and City staff and School staff, understanding that City is under one budget, recovery friendly workplace initiative, mental health, school base health clinic, strong relationship with Tri-City Mayors, CIP upgrades to facilities, Emergency preparedness
- Nonpartisan Municipal Elections- Resolution recently adopted
 - Recovery Friendly Workplace Resolution to be voted on at next Council meeting
 - Maintain relationship with Somersworth Housing Authority
 - Eyes on 30 Commission adopted
 - Identify/quantify practices to be adopted as processes
 - Joint Commission- School Board and City Council
 - City Council Goal Setting Sessions
 - City Council Budget process
 - Formalize processes
 - Establish official Councilor orientation – Joint relationships
 - Continuing Somersworth Highschool Clinic partnership
4. *Recreation/Library* - new programming for seniors, schools as community centers, recreation, park improvements, parks and recreation facilities, SYC
- Public Library Expansion / ADA Improvement Study, Grant
 - Promote to Community (programs available, modernization, resources available)
 - Walking trails (Malley Farm and old Sunningdale Conservation land)
 - Biking lanes and trails
 - Salmon Falls River kayaking system/map, business access
 - Senior recreation programs
5. *Education* - SYC, striving for excellence, adjusting to demographics of our community, library, focus on early childhood education, creating other opportunities for preschool, growing opportunities for CTC to include adult education
- National recognition of schools
 - Special Education Services offered
 - Maintenance and improvement to school facilities
 - Safety
 - Early childhood education
 - Adult education and programs geared towards hobbies (gardening, cooking, language)

- Extended learning opportunities
 - Expansion of HS Health Clinic
6. *Central location* - vibrant Downtown (DT) Commercial Business District as our economic center, walkable DT, defined City center for special events and activities, citizens place
- Wayfinding signage
 - Downtown development
 - What does the City have control over?
 - Zoning
 - Infrastructure
 - Historic Preservation
 - Chapter 31 Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive
7. *Transportation/infrastructure* - public transportation, reliable transportation, continued commitment towards infrastructure improvements, all users of transportation
- Complete streets projects
 - EV charging stations
 - Addition of bus route (Elm Street development project)
 - Support Statewide Public Transportation Coalition
 - Reaffirm City efforts maintaining/renovating sidewalks and streets