Minute of the Public Works Committee on January 25, 2021

**Present Also Present**

E. Beatty C. Saley, PW Director

T. Giannattasio S. Johnson, Assistant Director of PW

P.Vetro J. Rosen, Mayor’s Assistant

R. Vitale L. Streit, Recording Secretary

**Minutes**

A motion was made by Giannattasio, seconded by Vetro to approve the minutes of the October meeting as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

**Director’s Report**

* The Board of Finance bonding authorization meeting was tonight for the following:
  + $5.5 million for sidewalks and roads
  + $1.98 million for various city building improvements
  + $550,000 for playgrounds
  + $660,000 for Gulf Beach revetment
  + $550,000 for erosion control projects
  + $1,995,000 for sewer pump station upgrades at various locations

This will come up at the Board of Alderman meeting on Monday.

* Christmas trees have been picked up. Repair work; pot holes and tree work has been ongoing. Damage from the August windstorm is still being worked on.
* Johnson stated that there are 400+ trees around the city that are damaged. They are making headway in working on this but one Tree Crew can not do it. Contractors have been used in the past. He met with a new contractor today and he is in the process of getting him approved as a vendor. They are looking at how best to use contractors. FEMA just approved funding; however, tree removal protocols have to be clarified. The area behind the Police Department is consumed with trees from removal. This is being worked on on a daily basis but some require UI assistance and this can take up to 5 weeks to schedule.
  + Public Works has transitioned to a new land use system called Municity; there is only one person in the office with a backlog to get caught up on.
  + There are positions budgeted but unfilled and staff is being lost due to retirement.
  + Chris reported that they worked for 3 weeks assisting with mutual aid to the storm after August. 26 positions were reduced. Currently there are 21 vacant positions, 3 people out on Workman’s Comp. and 4 people retired. Staff is fatigued and it is taking more time to resolve issues; but everyone is doing a good job. Steve stated that the highest need has to be prioritized; but this is not always what the public wants as a priority.
* Chris stated that a cell went down today at the Beaverbrook Plant on Deerfield Ave. Mondays are always tough after the weekend.
  + A truck, with logs for their load, turned over this morning coming off of I-95 onto Schoolhouse Road and PW had to assist.
  + It’s supposed to snow tomorrow so this is being prepped for.
  + Parsons has been a COVID-19 Vaccine site 1-2 days per week and PW is assisting with this set up and breakdown for each event.
  + East Shore Fire Station had issues with the heating system PW assisted with that.

Vitale stated that this is an ongoing issue; being short staffed and not getting help and he questioned where the issue is and how it can be resolved. Chris stated that he hired a new Electrician 1.5 years ago and he was a very good employee and just left for a better offer. PW continues to work hard, it is challenging; people are working remotely, social distancing, etc. there is a lot going on. The ballfields on French Drive – they had a contractor to do the work but it turned into a bigger project than anticipated and PW had to remove some trees and do some work.

Vitale asked if the Mayor cut the PW proposed budget. Chris stated that he had. Chris stated that the challenge is that administration of the department is a full time job but he has to be out in the field as well.

Vitale stated that there is a lot more responsibility with the Pickle Ball Court, the Splash Pad, etc. and the budget is never over ridden. It has been 3 or 4 years and Public Works can’t keep up. Beatty stated that the Aldermen can make a statement – a bi-partisan commitment to staff Public Works.

Chris stated that they lost 5 long term employees in the last year and with COVID, everything has changed; a lot of buildings need supervision. He suggested having a dialog about it but they are still doing the best they can with what they have and the Mayor is supportive of the Department.

Beatty stated that it is early in the budget process and the fact that Public Works needs help needs to be addressed; there currently is not a hiring freeze and there needs to be a bi-partisan commitment to staff Public Works. Giannattasio agreed that there needs to be a bi-partisan approach and it is this committees’ responsibility to bring it to the full Board of Aldermen. Public Works has become almost a first responder/a core function and the Board has to take notice of that. This is a staff/personnel issue and the City is not competitive with the private sector. The City is losing experienced workers and retirees and this is a concern.

Giannattasio suggested drafting a letter from the Public Works Committee addressing the concerns with the Public Works budget and the departments increase in demand and then work with Chris to present specific needs. Vitale stated that Board of Alderman board members need to be lobbied to come to one conclusion.

A zero increase in the budget is mandated/requested in the process. There are new demands due to COVID; offices/buildings need to be sanitized and cleaned; modifications to offices have been needed. Vetro suggested that Chris could make a request to the Board of Aldermen and it can be brought up at a caucus and put it on the table with a list of priorities. Giannattasio stated that a starting point would be to bring it up under the Public Works Report at the next Board of Aldermen meeting. There was a hiring freeze at one point but there is not now.

**Concerns**

* Giannattasio stated that there is a pothole on Roses Mill Road. Chris stated that he will look into this.
* Vitale stated that there are 2 big limbs in the water at the Duck Pond. Chris stated that he will try to get there tomorrow.
* Vetro stated that there is a tree that needs to be looked at on Stevens Street. Chris will look into this.

The next regular meeting will be on February 22, 2021.

A motion was made by Vetro, seconded by Gainnattasio to adjourn at 8:30 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Streit