

Town Council Special Meeting

Minutes

September 7, 2010

Roll Call

Councilors Chase, Breen, Armitage, Payne, Varney, and Rodden were all present and answering roll call.

Councilor Pierce arrived late.

Item 1 Third reading of draft language of the proposed November 2010 referendum bond order that will ask voters to approve and fund a project that will convert the Plummer-Motz and Lunt School property into a library, town hall and community center.

Sean Joyce of the Library Board of Trustees spoke about his board's position regarding the referendum. They feel that the binding referendum should be postponed until June so that more work can be done. They would like to see a referendum with only a modest bond, if any. They are working to evaluate the Library's space needs and explain why the current location doesn't fit.

Councilor Pierce arrived at the meeting.

Chantal Walker, Chair of the Library Board of Trustees, said they hired Jim Thibodeau, an engineer, to evaluate the current building. He identified that the building could be expanded by 4,000 sq feet, but they don't feel that would be enough and there would be problems getting the proper parking without zoning changes. She handed out an evaluation done by herself and Ms. Lyn Sudlow, director of the Library, based on guidelines given by Dr. Lucker in 2003; their evaluation showed that, based on population, they should have 20,100 sq feet currently. They want a library that will be big enough to provide for the community in the future.

Mr. Joyce spoke about the memorandum of understanding. They have made progress and would like the time to continue with that discussion parallel to the referendum question.

Councilor Payne discussed events since the last Council meeting. There have been discussions about whether to have a binding referendum this November or not and whether to have advisory questions or not. There doesn't seem to be a lot of energy around moving Town Hall to the Lunt site. There does seem to be interest in having a senior center/rec center.

Councilor Rodden felt there just wasn't enough agreement or information to move forward with the referendum ballot in November. She felt the next step was to find out what is happening with the Library. She thought the Council and the Trustees should get together at the Library and have a tour, to explore the possibilities and limitations at the site. She would like to see the report from Mr. Thibodeau.

Councilor Varney would also like the Council and the Trustees get together and talk. She would like to see a plan to do public housing in Plummer.

Councilor Armitage met with some colleagues that do similar projects to this and their response was that a public/private partnership was very feasible but there needs to be some private sector

use incorporated into the redevelopment. Realistically that would be housing of some kind. He felt that they should be looking at going out to RFP and see what comes back from the development community. He felt the private sector would need to see a financial viability analysis. The people he spoke to felt the Lunt building was the best building for housing.

Councilor Pierce felt strongly that they should not move forward with the referendum in November, but should postpone it until June in order to have a clearer understanding of where the Library is. She also would like to see a meeting with the Council and the Library Board.

Councilor Chase complimented the committee and the staff for all their hard work. He was glad they were no longer on the fast track; he felt it was becoming far too complicated. They have 20 acres of land with three buildings. The buildings are not worth a lot of money and they need a lot of work. He would like to save Plummer, if possible, for its historic value. He wasn't interested in putting anything on the November ballot, advisory or bond issue.

Councilor Breen thought that after the last meeting they had four Councilors willing to vote to place a revised question on the November ballot, but Councilor Payne placed conditions on his vote that she felt would cause the referendum to fail. She has spoken with Councilor Armitage about his proposed public/private partnership; while she regrets the loss of some of the site to private use, she has heard that those most passionate about the idea want to see a recreational center, with the Town Hall remaining where it is. She would like to see the Town retain control of the three buildings and the green space between, with the sale of a portion of the site to Oceanview. She thought that housing would require the most gutting of the Plummer building due to codes, and that might mean most of its historic value would be lost. She also would like to meet with the Library Board for a tour of their building.

Councilor Rodden clarified her feelings about a joint meeting with the Library Board, and asked that Board to define their reasoning for what they want and why. She would like to see them get to a point where they are signing a MOU. She also felt it was important to have a deadline. She asked if 6-8 weeks was reasonable.

Sean Joyce indicated that it was.

Councilor Armitage asked if that meant they wanted to delay a RFP until after that deadline. Delaying that would mean that they didn't receive those proposals until January which might create a time crunch for a June referendum.

Councilor Pierce was confused what kind of RFP they would be considering, especially in regards to terms of use. She thought the neighborhood would have opinions about that.

Councilor Armitage thought it would be developers that would determine the highest and best use for the property that would allow them to lease out space. Some of the details wouldn't come out until the financial analysis is done. He would see the RFP as open-ended.

Councilor Chase asked Lucky D'Ascanio, Director of Community Programs, if they use the Lunt School.

Ms. D'Ascanio said they do. They use Lunt school in the summer primarily for preschool camp, mainly because of custodial availability. During the school year they use all three buildings for after school programs. They use the high school for programming all year.

Councilor Chase wondered if Community Programs could take advantage of the Motz building being vacant for a few years.

Ms. D'Ascanio said they could.

Councilor Payne summarized the Council's position: they will not be pursuing a binding referendum in November, they will not have an advisory question, and they will schedule a special meeting with the Library Board of Trustees including a tour and discussion sometime in the next 6-8 weeks. He thought they need the library discussion to be pretty well developed prior to an RFP.

Councilor Armitage felt they need to know what the development suggestions are to see whether or not the Council would be comfortable with what is proposed. He liked the vision of the community center, but didn't like the price tag.

Councilor Breen was concerned that they would run out of time if they do things sequentially, considering when language for a June referendum would have to be drafted.

Councilor Armitage said the RFP merely starts the discussion; it doesn't mean they have to sign an agreement.

Councilor Varney proposed a different development idea.

Councilor Rodden clarified that when she said 6-8 weeks, she meant for a final decision and not for initial discussion. She supported the idea of a parallel process with the RFP.

Councilor Pierce felt they can build on the good work that was done by the committee; she doesn't want them to recreate work that has already been done.

Councilor Payne thought there are different ways to look at meeting the wants and needs identified by the Committee's process and he suggested several different ideas.

Councilor Rodden wondered how Councilor Payne envisioned incorporating his suggestions into the current process.

Councilor Pierce said the library meeting would allow them to see some of the many ideas for expanding the library since the ideas mentioned by Councilor Payne are not new ideas.

Councilor Payne said he doesn't want to get them scattered, but he didn't want them to be stuck going down a road that the school site is the only answer to the wants and needs identified.

The consensus of the Council was that they wanted to hear what options the Library Board has explored, why they discarded those options, and why they feel moving to Lunt would be the best option.

Adjourn

Councilor Armitage moved to adjourn, Councilor Pierce seconded. Motion carried 7-0.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Tryon
Recording Secretary