

MANAGER’S CONFERENCE MINUTES
Portsmouth City Council Meeting on
October 12, 2020 – 7:52 p.m.

Members present:

Sean Dunne	1 st Ward
Charlotte Gordon	2 nd Ward
Kevin E. Johnson	3 rd Ward
Andrew McManus	4 th Ward
Edwin Martell	5 th Ward
Thomas K. Lowe	6 th Ward (Absent)

Also present was City Manager Sam Sutherland, Solicitor John Haas, City Clerk Diana Ratliff and Auditor M. Trent Williams.

Manager Sutherland asked that the Discussion Items be amended to include a second item – Street Art Wall which was previously discussed. He stated that he felt that now that the Commission was established the city needed to move forward to lease the wall to the folks that want to do street art.

1. **Year Ending Expenditure Adjustments** **CM-20-64**

Manager Sutherland stated this was from the City Auditor for year-end expenditure adjustments. Auditor Williams stated this was the annual year-end authorization for close-out procedures. Mayor Johnson asked if this was housekeeping that the city had every year and the reply was “yes”. Solicitor Haas advised that Auditor Williams actually drafts this ordinance and he reviews it once received.

Vice President Dunne motioned to adopt alternative #1.

There were no questions or comments: **VOTE: 5 Ayes – 0 Nays**

2. **Dispatch Union Contract** **CM-20-65**

Manager Sutherland stated this was the ratification of the Dispatcher’s Union Contract for 2020, 2021 and 2022. Clerk Ratliff asked if this would go into effect 30 days from today, Manager Sutherland stated that it was 30 days from the time Council was informed.

Mayor Johnson stated that he had expressed numerous times about being unhappy when dealing with Dispatch whether it was with his own calls to them or other citizens calls. He had not been satisfied with the Dispatch service here in the city for quite a while. He and his family had been spoken to rudely and understood that Dispatch had a lot of weight on their shoulders and was quite the job they have to do. He said that he knew someone on Dispatch and they did a very good job, but he also knew how he had been spoken to when he called Dispatch. He’s not really happy with this and if you go all the way back to 2013 when he first came onto City Council, he had never been opposed to anything regarding our city workers and was very supportive of the city workers, but hasn’t been happy with Dispatch. He believed that more training was needed because when our citizens feel there’s an emergency and they call Dispatch they need to be treated in a very professional way and he encouraged citizens that if they call Dispatch and they have an issue or feel like the call wasn’t handled professionally to contact Chief Brewer, Sam Sutherland or their Councilperson. He said that the Dispatch conversations were recorded and if someone felt they weren’t treated properly to let someone on Council know about it.

Councilman Martell agreed with Mayor Johnson because when he’s had to call, he wasn’t treated with respect until he told them that he was a Councilman and then their tone changed, but he said he shouldn’t have to say that to them and wasn’t very happy with their service.

Vice President Dunne motioned to adopt alternative #1.

There were no questions or comments: **VOTE: 4 Ayes – 1 Nay (K.E. Johnson)**

3. **Buckeye Elite Basketball Tournament**

CM 20-66

Manager Sutherland stated that they had discussed this at the last Conference Agenda and in reviewing the budget, there was \$2,500 appropriated and to meet their request, an additional \$1,000 would need appropriated. He asked that if there was a way to incorporate language in the ordinance that if the tournament didn't take place because of COVID, that the money would be returned to the city. Mayor Johnson stated that a few years ago, the City asked Civic Forum to return firework money because they weren't able to have the fireworks and he didn't find this as an unreasonable request. Mayor Johnson explained the reason for the additional thousand requested was due to a major sponsor dropping out. He stated that it was a wonderful 3-day event in which young talent was showcased. Manager Sutherland stated that he would budget in the future for the \$3,500. Mayor Johnson asked that the readings be waived so that they could have the money for operating expenses.

Vice President Dunne motioned to adopt alternative #1.

There were no questions or comments: **VOTE: 5 Ayes – 0 Nays**

4. **OPWC Resolution** – Was removed – it was added to Council's agenda

CM-20-67

Discussion

Storefront Registrations – Manager Sutherland stated that this had been brought forward during the Master Plan about the empty storefronts on Chillicothe Street gives a bad appearance. In the Master Plan it was discussed that instead of letting those storefronts sit empty, possibly decorate them up a little bit and hopefully give the appearance that things maybe weren't a functioning business but would look better than looking at an empty building. Vice President Dunne stated that he and Councilman Martell had looked at legislation in California where they had had an issue with storefront vacancies. There were ordinances passed there that levy a charge against empty buildings and a way to encourage that the buildings be used or sold. He said it was something that had been talked about in different ways since he's come to Portsmouth. He added that vandalism would do damage to people's property values and make it hard to sell and the effects about an empty building had on overall value in a city. Councilman Martell stated that in California they passed an ordinance that would penalize owners of buildings that were sitting empty and not being utilized for anything, no construction and was a blight to the area. He said in California the owners were penalized through a tax and that money that the city received from taxing the owners of blighted buildings was put into a small business fund that would help other small businesses with grants especially during a pandemic or any other type of situation where a building was falling apart, they could apply for a grant. He said if a person was to start construction on a building, then they would not be penalized because they would be trying to make adjustments. He said now is the time to try to get people motivated to do something with their buildings. Councilwoman Gordon stated that this was brought on in the Master Plan and in the City of Akron started a really amazing project where all of the empty storefronts where given over to artist to basically work in and work was created specifically for those spaces. She stated that with the money collected by the building owners, would be seed money for bringing in Artist because it cannot be done for free because it took time and materials to create pieces. She reiterated how successful it had been and that it had become its own entity. She thought that the new Art Commission could oversee the project. She added that she would not only like to see this on Chillicothe Street but in other parts of downtown because there were windows that had been boarded up. Possibly have them replace the glass or to paint the plywood and use it as a canvas. She stated that permission would be needed from the owners to get into those windows to put work in them. Councilman Martell stated that one of the ideas that he had for the Commission would for the buildings that were boarded up on the second, third and fourth floors to get together with the High School in the area and have kids paint on the plywood and then the plywood would then be put in those windows, this would encourage our youth. He really wanted to motivate the owners to do something with their buildings.

Street Art Wall – Manager Sutherland stated that this had been previously discussed and now that the Art Commission had been established, it was time to move forward on this issue. Councilman Martell stated that Portsmouth Street Art Project had been talking about this for a long time and would like to see something happen now that they have things in order and he had asked Solicitor Haas to draft a lease ordinance for the Portsmouth Art Project and to have that wall that had been discussed. He would like this to be on the agenda at the next meeting and to possibly waive the three-reading rule so that it could be done as soon as possible. Clerk Ratliff asked for clarification on which agenda City Council’s agenda or the Conference Agenda? Solicitor Haas stated that he had meant to contact Manager Sutherland to have it on his agenda as Councilman Martell had contacted him a week or so ago and he had been aware of it and if Council wanted to move it to a first reading, he would have the legislation ready for review. Clerk Ratliff stated that Council would need to vote to move it forward. Mayor Johnson said this was unusual because Council typically had it on the Conference agenda first and then moved onto Council’s agenda but this had been ongoing for so long, he felt that it needed to be moved to Council’s agenda. Councilwoman Gordon stated that the three-reading rule had been waived for other projects because of weather and the ability to do construction and she thought this would fall under the same concerns. Councilman Martell explained that the wall would be on Offnere Street towards the current floodwall; it actually was an old portion of the floodwall and he thanked Council and Solicitor Haas.

Vice President Dunne motioned to adopt alternative #1.

There were no questions or comments: **VOTE: 5 Ayes – 0 Nays**

The meeting adjourned at 8:18 p.m. on a motion by Vice President Dunne.

Submitted by: *Diana Ratliff* – City Clerk