

MANAGER’S CONFERENCE MINUTES
Portsmouth City Council Meeting on
August 12, 2019 – 6:42 p.m.

Members present:

Sean Dunne	1 st Ward
Charlotte Gordon	2 nd Ward
Kevin E. Johnson	3 rd Ward
Jerrold Albrecht	4 th Ward
Gene Meadows	5 th Ward (Absent)
Thomas K. Lowe	6 th Ward

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

1. **Accepting Amounts and Rate from Tax Budget Commission** **CM-19-56**

Manager Sutherland asked Auditor Williams to give Council the information. Auditor Williams stated that this was the annual tax budget amounts. The Scioto County Budget Commission reviews it and then sends our tax rates to the city for each year. He will be meeting with them on Friday to go over the numbers which will go on the resolution for the next meeting.

Councilman Albrecht moved to adopt alternative #1.

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

2. **Vacation of Alley at 616 & 618 9th Street** **CM-19-57**

Manager Sutherland stated that the legal description was attached and the City Planning Commission had already voted unanimously to allow the request.

Councilwoman Gordon asked if that property would reflect the tax increase and if the neighbors were all good with the vacation of the alley. Manager Sutherland said that he would assume that it would increase and that according to the Planning Commission everyone was in agreement.

Councilman Albrecht moved to adopt alternative #1.

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

Discussion

1. **Parks and Recreation Person**

Manager Sutherland asked if Councilman Dunne would give more details on what he was thinking and where the city should be headed as far as the Parks and Recreation employee. Councilman Dunne stated that he had looked at other cities that had Parks and Recreation Departments and the job descriptions for those positions and also some of the specific things that could be addressed by Portsmouth in that position. He said that it would include everything from McKinley Pool to fund raisers for the current Dog Park and possibly future parks, the event at Spartan Stadium (Blues, Brews and Barbeque) demonstrated to the organizing committee that Portsmouth had the capability of hosting a number of large events that would bring in money from outside of our area but also retain money within our area so that people wouldn't have to travel to certain types of festivals and events. He said the city has a historic stadium, which was a candidate for a very large state grant next year.

The Parks and Rec. person could help develop a variety of events from music and food to Little League Sports and that would bring money into our city. He believed that the position would pay for

itself with the amount that both directly and indirectly bring into the city. He would like to have Council bring it up for legislation as there used to be a position within the city for a Parks and Recreation Employee. Acting Mayor Johnson asked Councilman Dunne if this person would strictly be a PR person which would organize various events throughout the city all year long and would this not be a labor job where they would be doing physical labor in the parks or would that part still be handled through the Service Department. Mr. Dunne gave an example “if we sold memorial pavers for a Dog Park, they wouldn’t place the pavers into the ground or anything, but would help collect the money, advertise for it and raise the money for the recreational park”. He said that people want the Blues Brews and Barbeque again next year but he just doesn’t have the time to organize it again. The employee would have to know how to advertise an event, how to book acts and supervise an event.

Councilman Lowe said he grew up near Allard Park and they had a program in which a city employee would organize events in each park and he wondered if this position would handle things like that and if so they would need to pick which parks got the most traffic, which in turn would draw kids in and keep them out of trouble. Mr. Dunne explained that parents and kids were spending a lot of money on youth sports and some families spend over 10% of their family income on travel sports. He said that currently Huntington, WV hosted major regional tournaments which was worth quite a lot to their city and he would like to see Portsmouth compete for those kinds of tournaments.

He said that Manager Sutherland had done a great job in getting McKinley pool opened this year as compared to previous years; he would like for this employee to look for ways to add activities to the pool which would be invaluable to that facility. He said having someone to organize that would be invaluable. Solicitor Haas asked for a job description so that he could have something to go by and Mr. Dunne replied that he had made a composite of 6 different job advertisements elsewhere and combined it with stuff that would apply to the job the city would offer.

Councilwoman Gordan stated that one danger would be making it so large that one person couldn’t succeed because that would be a lot to wrap into one job. Mr. Lowe stated that other people will be needed under that position because it would be way too much for one person. Ms. Gordon said that to move it forward that employee would have to feel really successful and be successful in order to grow it and she sees the need for this position going forward.

Acting Mayor Johnson said he didn’t want to be a nay-sayer and thought it was a great idea, but we need to balance the scale within the city. There is a Service Department that is on a skeleton crew and we need to make sure that we have enough service people. Manager Sutherland said that we were not back to full staff, and adding these two positions would not put it back to what it used to be, but he had seen the immediate need with the two positions requested on Council’s agenda. He said there were some other things that we need to be looking at, such as the Engineering Department which needed to be put back together. He said that he had code enforcement complaints, grass complaints and part of that was because the Engineering Department had been decimated through the years and it needed to be put back.

Mr. Dunne reiterated that if we thought about some activities that would bring money directly into the city and if it was done right, it would pay for itself and if it grew it would pay for others. Mr. Sutherland stated that some of the responsibilities did at one time fall under the Service Department reign and we need to make sure that it is all lined up and details needed to be worked out, but he thought we could get there. Mr. Lowe said he was for this position, but felt the Engineering Department needed to be put back. Mr. Sutherland stated that we were trying to make some moves to get it back in a forward direction. Mr. Lowe asked him “how many would we need to kick start it”, Solicitor Haas stated that we need an Engineer and Mr. Sutherland agreed. *“Mr. Haas was speaking but could not be heard as his microphone was off”*.

Mr. Lowe asked how much money was it costing the city to sub out work to Columbus, no one knew the answer. Mr. Johnson asked if we would have to sub out the work if we had an Engineer and Mr. Sutherland said that we would have to have certified employees in specific building situations. *Mr. Haas spoke again, still no microphone*. Mr. Johnson said he likes the concept but it needed further discussion. Mr. Dunne asked if he put together the job description for a first reading and it was suggested that it needed to go onto the City Manager’s agenda first.

Mr. Lowe said he would also like to get the discussion going on to getting an Engineer or whatever is needed in that Department. He added that we need to start enforcing some of these code violations because we're losing so much money by not being able to enforce it; Ms. Gordon agreed with Mr. Lowe. Mr. Sutherland explained that there was a position for code enforcement but through the transition of Mr. Allen leaving and some other things, she's (Tiffany Hedrick) had never been guided on what she was supposed to be doing which needs to be figured out. He added that she's in the Union and the proper steps need to be followed when making changes. Mr. Johnson asked if there had been any monetary violations written since the code enforcement officer was put in place. Mr. Sutherland stated that there had been and to be perfectly honest, she was told to stop and that is what we're trying to get fixed. Mr. Johnson said that needed to be addressed since we're not writing any monetary violations at all, and he's not saying that it's her fault because she hasn't been trained. Mr. Lowe said he would like to know how many had been written since she's been on the job. Mr. Haas said he did not know, but he knew that she had gone out and cleaned up a lot of abandoned vehicles, but he doesn't know about the citations. He said that position was set up to be more of an educational process. Ms. Gordon stated that there were facades missing on downtown buildings and Mr. Sutherland stated that she would not be allowed to do that type of work, structural issues need to go to Mr. Winters, which he was working on getting it fixed, but it will take a little bit of time.

Mr. Johnson said that he felt if the city was going to consider an Engineer, then some research needs to be done on what type of compensation package would be offered. Mr. Sutherland said that Department Heads used to be the same, Mr. Johnson asked what kind of an issue would they run into if you try to compensate him or her more. Mr. Haas said there was a salary study done and he wasn't sure what happened to it because there was supposed to be adjustments made all around the city with respect to compensation and salaries, but that never happened. He said that Council should have the kind of conversation where jobs are prioritized and the compensation applied accordingly which would need to be done in a long-term plan. Mr. Lowe asked Auditor Williams if the city could afford an Engineer, Mr. Williams stated that all of these things would have to be considered when doing the budget. Ms. Gordon asked if there was one big giant master plan that salary and wages were taken into consideration as well as a new Parks person and City Engineer? Mr. Haas stated that the budget is coming up and Manager Sutherland would need to take that into consideration when planning out the budget. Mr. Dunne attended a meeting with a group from Kentucky in which the Carpenters Union had set up and there was a whole list of examples of various projects that cities lost out on income based upon somewhat shady hiring practices and things like that, but he reiterated that this one position could help fund itself, for us to enforce fair pay, it would bring more in on city taxes. He had invited them to come to speak to Council.

2. Utility Bill Rate Study Proposal

Manager Sutherland said that at the last meeting they touched on storm water fees and sewer rates and he had reached out to a firm that had previously given him a proposal to look at the water rates again. He had given Council a copy that he would like them to review because there was a lot of information and if anyone has questions, please get them to him ahead of time and he'll reach out to the firm to try to get the answers. He added that he wanted a professional third party to look at it with a fresh set of eyes. Acting Mayor Johnson said that he would like a couple of weeks to look it over. Mr. Sutherland said that the combined sewers have been an ongoing problem.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m. on a motion by Councilman Lowe.

Submitted by: *Diana Ratliff* – City Clerk