

MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE WORK SESSION OF APRIL 14, 2015

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The following Councilmembers were present: Nasim Ansari, Richard Ford, Patricia M. Randall and Claudette Reid and Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson. Councilmember Terry Urban and Mayor Peter Strazdas were absent with notice. Also present were City Manager Larry Shaffer, Deputy City Manager Rob Boulis, City Attorney Randy Brown and City Clerk James Hudson.

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson deferred to City Manager Shaffer, who stressed the importance of the value of exploring partnerships with regional entities on an ongoing basis and the creation of value through joint planning, funding and implementation of programs of mutual interest and importance and explained. He noted that this requires acknowledgment of the importance of the other organizations and the mutual respect, benefits and challenges that similar conditions present to each municipality. In order to be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem, he said it requires an ongoing commitment to the importance of relationships, structure and regular communication and necessitates a relinquishment of a degree of control in order to receive greater efficiency and effectiveness; and, this all takes time.

Mr. Shaffer let Council know that there is a need to establish relationships as the springboard to cooperation. With this, Mr. Shaffer said that inherent in this process is that one has to give something up in order to get something out, and he explained some of the progress with various topics being planned, funded and/or currently implemented, including: a discussion of the Kalamazoo County Consolidated Dispatch Authority and the fine efforts of different jurisdictions volunteering to do various roles; Kalamazoo County Regional Transportation with the proposed millage question on the ballot in August; discussion with Portage Public Schools and Capital Improvement Joint Planning on such topics as water and sewer, road improvements, traffic considerations and security issues.

Mr. Shaffer indicated that he meets with Portage Public Schools Superintendent Mark Bielang once per month, has had no conversations with regard to billboards on school property with anyone, and acknowledged he has plans to continue to develop a relationship with the Portage District Library and discussion followed. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson indicated a preference to having the City, School and Library Meeting that used to meet quarterly to be held at least once per year and explained that the last meeting of the group resulted in the idea of a Portage Public Schools insert into the *Portager*. Councilmember Reid reflected on a joint meeting between the City Council and the Portage Public School Board some time ago that included discussion over a meal which resulted in the formation of the Portage Public Schools District Advisory Council and the addition of representation from the Portage District Library. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson viewed this as an opportunity to bring these partners into the next 2025 Visionary Sessions to emphasize that these sessions are not just for the City. Discussion followed.

When Mr. Shaffer asked, there were no objections if he should notify Portage Public Schools Superintendent Mark Bielang and Portage District Library Director Christine Klien to let them know that City Council is interested in an annual City, School and Library Meeting. In fact, Mayor Pro Tem Pearson offered that he also should let them know that the City is thinking of having another 2025 Visioning Process and would like to have their involvement. Discussion followed. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson concurred with City Clerk James Hudson to include an invitation to the three Kalamazoo County Commissioners representing the City of Portage, Scott McGraw, Larry Provancher and John Gisler. Discussion followed regarding scheduling.

Mr. Shaffer described some of the conversations he has been having with the various governmental entities and advocates for biking and non-motorized vehicle transportation. He said they are really beginning to put together a consortium to plan, fund and implement necessary connections in order to exponentially expand the capabilities of the resources of that system. He indicated that he met with the City of Kalamazoo about their difficulties building a trail to the south and the Kalamazoo County Parks and Recreation Director about their east-west trail focus. He also mentioned that he met with Vicksburg and Oshtemo regarding planning for trail interconnections with their townships. He mentioned the proposed appointment of Kendall Klingelsmith as the new Parks, Recreation & Senior Services Director, who will be charged with the leadership role and responsibility of making this happen. Discussion followed.

Councilmember Randall mentioned an e-mail she received earlier in the day from Andrew Haan, Associate Director of the Michigan Office of Urban and Metropolitan Initiatives, and head of the southwest Michigan office, who works on urban issues in Kalamazoo, Battle Creek and Benton Harbor. She mentioned that Mr. Haan indicated there is funding for this sort of effort and it just needs an advocate and someone to go after it.

In response to Mayor Pro Tem Pearson regarding the study initiated by Councilmember Ed Sackley with regards to the Portage Road business revitalization effort, Councilmember Reid said that the City did not receive any funding, but did provide resources and a consultant. Councilmember Reid noted that the City of Kalamazoo has been considering trail interconnections, but part of their problem centers around the location of the trails because of contaminated land when attempting to come south and the otherwise fully developed nature of the area in question. She said that trail interconnections is a topic included in the Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study (KATS), a comprehensive non-motorized plan, and would be another option to tap into. Discussion followed. Mr. Shaffer indicated his familiarity with environmental issues, and indicated that this is one of the items on the agenda with his monthly meeting with Kalamazoo City Manager Jim Ritsema and Deputy County Administrator John Faul. He emphasized his readiness to meet this challenge praised the professionalism and support of Mr. Ritsema and Mr. Faul.

Mr. Shaffer shared that the City of Kalamazoo and the City of Portage share a fiber line which will assist in Disaster Recovery should there be any problems or issues with automation during a disaster since an alternate server will be available to either entity from the other entity. Discussion followed.

Mr. Shaffer explained in detail each of the following areas where the City of Portage presently participates in regional cooperation with great success: Fire Mutual Aid, Hazardous Material Response, Emergency Preparedness, Public Media Network and the Drug Task Force. Explanations followed. Mr. Shaffer agreed to find out more about the fire safety operations and equipment at the Kalamazoo Airport in Portage. Discussion followed. Deputy City Manager Rob Boulis also pointed out the city involvement in the Countywide Respecting Differences Program.

Mr. Shaffer summed up saying he meets monthly with the County Administrator and the Kalamazoo City Manager to discuss a variety of issues of mutual concern; that he meets frequently with Portage Public Schools Superintendent, the public School Administrative Team and the Portage City Administrative Team to plan for joint capital improvements; and, that he has met with the Oshtemo Township Supervisor in the past on a couple of occasions to discuss items of mutual concern.

As next steps, Mr. Shaffer recommended developing a task force agenda with Kalamazoo County and the City of Kalamazoo to more formally identify further efforts in cooperation; developing a task force agenda with Portage Public Schools to identify further efforts in cooperation; developing a task force agenda with area Township Supervisors to identify further efforts in cooperation; and to report back to City Council every six months with the results, approximately October.

Councilmember Reid handed out information regarding the Campaign for Transit, with a donation option, and indicated that the Transit Committee is looking for the endorsements of elected individuals. In answer to Mayor Pro Tem Pearson, Councilmember Reid agreed that the service will increase along South Westnedge and will run longer into the evening to accommodate workers who need to take the bus home at the end of a shift, plus there will be some coverage on Sundays. She said she would ask for the specific changes for Portage in order to answer the questions of citizens regarding the proposal. Discussion followed.

ADJOURN: Mayor Pro Tem Pearson adjourned the meeting at 6:59 p.m.

James R. Hudson, City Clerk