



CITY OF CONCORD

REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Thomas J. Aspell, Jr., City Manager
DATE: July 22, 2016
SUBJECT: 2016 – 2017 City Council Priorities

Recommendation

Accept this report as to the current status of the City Council Priorities established on January 25, 2016.

Background

Members of the City Council met on January 25, 2016 to discuss and set priorities for the remainder of Calendar Year 2016, as well as for Calendar Year 2017.

Discussion

Listed below, in ranked order, are the accepted priorities, projects and ongoing initiatives; and their respective statuses.

GOAL 1. BALANCED BUDGET ISSUES: FY 2017 and 2018

a) Collective Bargaining/Contract Negotiations

Status: The City's negotiating team has finalized an agreement with the Concord Police Supervisors Association (CPSA) which provides for 2.5% cost of living adjustments in the next three years. The parties also agreed to re-opener language in the event medical plans need to be modified to avoid the Excise Tax (Cadillac Tax) on medical plans. The City is currently negotiating contracts with AFSCME, and will begin negotiating with the CPPA and UAW in the near future.

b) Health Insurance Costs

Status: This year, the Health Benefits Review Team sent out a Request for Proposals for medical insurance. Six vendors responded. The incumbent, Harvard Pilgrim, had given the City a not-to-exceed rate increase of 14% in December 2015. After a lengthy review process of the proposals received, the City negotiated with Harvard Pilgrim to offer the same plans to active employees with a 6.9% increase. This brings our five year average for premium increases with Harvard Pilgrim to 4.6%, as this five year period includes two years with no increases.

As of July 1, 2016, all City employees will be paying 10% of their medical and dental plan premiums. This cost sharing was implemented as a way to control the cost of health care. Compared to the previous health insurance points structure provided by the City, these changes will reduce the overall health insurance costs and share part of the responsibility with employees.

The City is moving retirees over the age of 65 to a new Medicare Enhanced plan that does not cover prescriptions and is one third of the cost. We will be adding a supplemental drug plan through Aetna that is a Part D Medicare plan. This will reduce the monthly premium from \$477 to \$318 per month, representing a 33% decrease in cost for a substantially similar plan.

GOAL 2. COMMUNITY-WIDE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES TO EXPAND TAX BASE

Status: On April 11, 2016, the City Council approved a resolution which expanded the RSA 79-E Program to make historic buildings not located within the two established RSA 79-E Districts in downtown and Penacook Village potentially eligible to participate in the program.

Over the last several months, the Community Development Department put forth two significant changes to the Zoning Ordinance to facilitate the development and redevelopment of property. The first, approved by Council in 2015, eliminated the 60% open space requirement for minor subdivisions addressing what was considered a particularly onerous regulation for property owners in Concord. In May 2016, Council also voted to support a recommendation to alter the base thresholds that trigger minor site plan review in cases where no change to the site is actually proposed and there is virtually no impact to the surrounding neighborhood. Additional changes were also subsequently made to the requirements for ADR application reviews within the ordinance, all with a goal of improving efficiency and effectiveness during the development review process.

On June 6, 2016, the City Council adopted the FY 2017 budget, which included funding for the creation of a new Economic Development Director for the City.

GOAL 3. PUBLIC INFORMATION, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Status: The City is working effectively towards increasing public awareness through branding, marketing and communications.

City Administration: A “Communications Collaborative” has been created, which consists of public information specialists from Parks & Recreation, the Library, Police, Fire, General Services, and the City Manager’s Office. The “Collaborative” will meet regularly to discuss initiatives and ideas for increasing/improving communications.

Fire Department: The Fire Department maintains an active presence in print, electronic and social media. WKXL hosts a weekly segment to provide an update on Fire Department activities and safety messages. The Department’s Facebook page has 3,109 followers, and its Twitter account has 782 followers. Social media outlets have been used to publicize Department and City events and to communicate safety messages about safe grilling and electrical hazards.

General Services Department: The General Services Department continues to increase communications with the community. The Department disseminates public information via website updates, print media, press releases, the City Manager's newsletter, its monthly General Gazette newsletter, and bill stuffers. Social media is used to improve community engagement, continue branding, and encourage public awareness of services.

During the last quarter of fiscal year 2016, the General Services Department promoted the Neighborhood Street Paving Program, Spring Leaf Collection, National Work Zone Awareness Week, hydrant flushing, the Sustainable Tree Program, National Drinking Water Week, National Public Works Week, Everett Arena roller skating, Guyette Pool renovations, and participation at Intown Concord's Market Days. Two YouTube videos were created: "We Are Concord General Services" to promote public works services during National Public Works Week, and "Everett Arena Roller Skating" to advertise the new summer roller skating at the arena. As of June 30, 2016, the Department has 917 Facebook likes, 341 Twitter followers, 24 Google+ followers, and 39 subscribers to its YouTube channel. Approximately 32 press releases have been issued to the local media during the last quarter.

Human Resources Department: In an effort to improve outreach activities as they pertain to position vacancies within the City, the Human Resources Department utilizes online cloud-based recruitment software for applications. An applicant can be made aware of other City job opportunities by completing a job interest card. Job interest cards are sent out to those who have completed a profile and have let us know what types of work they are looking for. The Human Resources Coordinator is working with several social media platforms for recruitment activity to include Linked In, JobsinNh, Craig's List, Indeed, and Facebook.

Concord Public Library: The Library makes good use of social media to post information about upcoming programs and library services. A YouTube channel was created for the posting of videos of Library programs, and a Facebook page is also maintained. The Library recently launched an Instagram and Twitter account to market to a new demographic of patrons. The Library also makes great use of the News Flash feature of the City website.

Parks and Recreation Department: The Parks & Recreation Department creates four seasonal brochures each year, which are delivered to all elementary school children in the city. These brochures highlight all Department programs and events for the next 3-4 months. The content of the brochures is also posted on the Parks & Recreation web site. In addition, the Department maintains a very active Facebook page, with over 2,500 "likes". The Department also creates a monthly newsletter for the web site, weekly news releases for local media, a monthly TV show ("We Are Serious About Fun") with Concord TV, and numerous public service announcements. The Department works very closely with the Friends of the Audi to advertise events and rental opportunities.

The Parks & Recreation Department also maintains the web site for the Beaver Meadow Golf Course. Staff creates and sends out weekly and monthly e-mail blasts to several thousand golfers who have signed up to belong to our online e-club. The web site receives 2,500-3,500 unique web hits per month. The Department also maintains a very active Facebook page for the course, with over 1,500 "likes". During the golf season, staff coordinates weekly newspaper and radio ads.

Police Department: The Police Department utilizes a number of social media sites, as well as the City website to present information about the Department to the public and to keep the public informed of events occurring within the City. The Department's website includes many pages with valuable information, including guidance on how to obtain reports and other services that the Department provides. The site also provides notification on upcoming hiring processes, drug take-back days, upcoming citizen police academies, and other events. In addition, all Police Department press releases are placed on its web page.

The Police Department's Twitter page has approximately 1,450 followers, and its Facebook page has approximately 2,000 friends. Both of these venues are used to disseminate information regarding Department and/or City events, and provide emergency information as necessary.

The Police Department also administers the Concord Regional Crimeline, which allows individuals to anonymously provide tips regarding ongoing investigations in Concord and surrounding towns. Tips can be submitted by phone, online or by text message. During 2015, 399 tips were received through Crimeline leading to the arrest of 32 individuals and the ability to close out numerous cases. Through the first six months of calendar year 2016, over 190 tips were received leading to the arrest of 11 individuals.

The Police Chief participates in a weekly radio show on WKXL, where different topics are addressed based upon events occurring in the city, state and, on occasion, the nation.

Another initiative of the Police Department is the "Coffee with a Cop" program. This program is designed to promote interaction between the community and the Department by sharing coffee and fostering discussion in a relaxed atmosphere. Since its inception, the Department has held six "Coffee with a Cop" events at different locations throughout the City. All of these events have been well received by the public and business owners.

During the 2015-2016 school year, the Police Department took part in two new programs focused on the schools: "Lunch with a Cop" and "Police Readers". "Lunch with a Cop" features police officers joining students throughout the city during lunch time to field questions and leave a positive impression with the students. The "Police Readers" program has police officers go into K-2nd grade classrooms and read books to the students. Both of these programs will be continuing in the next school year.

The Police Department offers Rape Aggression Defense (RAD) classes, which is a comprehensive course for women and includes situational awareness, prevention, risk reduction and avoidance, and progresses to the basics of hands-on defense training. The RAD System is dedicated to teaching women defensive concepts and techniques against various types of assault by utilizing easy, effective and proven self-defense tactics. The system of realistic defense will provide a woman with the knowledge to make an educated decision about resistance.

GOAL 4. PUBLIC SAFETY WORK & CONTINUED SUPPORT OF SOCIAL SAFETY NETWORK

Status: The Police Department takes an aggressive stance in combatting the opioid crisis facing the City. In January of 2016, the Department assigned an additional investigator to the Drug Enforcement Unit in order to augment the Unit's efforts in conducting undercover drug investigations and to assist in collecting and disseminating drug intelligence. The

Department has worked closely with other stakeholders on this matter to include other police agencies, service providers, and other branches of the criminal justice system. The Department will continue these efforts and regularly assess personnel assignments and initiatives to most effectively address illegal drug usage in the City. During the first six months of calendar year 2016, the Department made 191 arrests of individuals with illegal drug related charges. This is a 65% increase in the number of drug-related arrests over the same period last year.

The Police Department also continues with initiatives put in place to best address community safety concerns. The highly successful Problem Oriented Policing (POP) Unit is a tool the department utilizes to address issues which can be best resolved with a concentrated pro-active approach which is not always possible through the Patrol Division. The POP Unit is able to address public safety issues through enforcement and by coordinating with other City and community resources. The POP Unit has been very successful in addressing issues with the homeless population, panhandling, nuisance properties, and many other quality of life issues within the City. Additionally, all officers are encouraged to participate in community engagement activities. The success of the Police Department in providing as safe a community as possible is dependent upon a cooperative effort between the Department and the community as a whole.

In an attempt to strengthen its partnership with the refugee/New American community, the Police Department has held several Q&A type meetings with the refugee/New American community to address any questions or concerns they may have relating to the community, local and state laws, and the Police Department. With the assistance of the NH Department of Motor Vehicles, the Police Department implemented a driver training course to assist those having difficulty obtaining a driver's license due to language and cultural obstacles. This continues to be a work in progress. The Police Department also looks forward to working with the new administration of the New American Africans to further the partnership between the police and the refugee/immigrant community.

The Fire Department actively participates in collaborative efforts with Concord Hospital, Riverbend Community Mental Health, and the Concord Regional Visiting Nurses Association for effective patient care, particularly for patients suffering from mental health conditions. During the last quarter of FY 2016, there was considerable progress made in moving toward the ability to transport patients with acute mental health conditions to Riverbend's new facility, rather than to the Emergency Department. The Fire Department responds to approximately 300 such calls each year and this is an important step forward to providing a more appropriate facility for patient care.

GOAL 5. PARKING MASTER PLAN / IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

Status: The Strategic Parking Plan was presented to the Parking Committee on June 27, 2016. It is anticipated that the Committee's review will continue into the fall. Once its review is complete, the study, together with the Parking Committee's recommendations, will be presented to the City Council.

GOAL 6. FOSTER/ENHANCE DIALOGUE WITH LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION

Status: In coordination with Merrimack County, the City provided support regarding a proposal to construct a new County Courthouse, adjacent to the existing courthouse,

instead of on the Heights. Support included testifying at numerous State Legislative Committee hearings and background work associated with those hearings.

In coordination with the Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce, the City provided support regarding a proposal to open the State House to the public on weekends to promote tourism in downtown Concord.

GOAL 7. ENHANCED COMMUNITY EVENT OPPORTUNITIES

Status: The Mayor established an Ad-Hoc City Council Committee to review the process, costs and revenues associated with community events. The committee held its first meeting in late June.

The Concord Public Library is the current repository of the four community mosaics created by Concord residents as part of the Citywide 250th celebration.

PROJECT 1. MAIN STREET COMPLETE STREETS PROJECT

Status: The South Main Street phase of the project began on March 28, 2016. Work is set to move to the west side of the street shortly.

On April 11, 2016, the City Council appropriated \$2 million for installation of underground utilities on a section of South Main Street, roughly between FIT Outfitters and Thompson Street. Work on this effort began in the spring of 2016 and continues.

PROJECT 2. CITYWIDE MULTI-GENERATIONAL COMMUNITY CENTER

Status: On April 11, 2016, the City Council approved a \$7.1 million plan for a new city-wide multigenerational community center at the site of the former Dame School located at 14 Canterbury Road. As part of its approval, the Council appropriated \$6.55 million of supplemental funding for CIP #443 for design and construction. A contract for design services was executed on May 23, 2016. Preliminary design is underway. As part of those efforts, the General Services Department has inspected underground utilities serving the property. An updated hazardous building materials survey has been completed and all interior and exterior measurements for the existing structure have been verified. Geotechnical investigations are scheduled for early July. Currently, the project is scheduled to go out to bid in January 2017. Construction is scheduled to commence in spring 2017. The project will take approximately 14 months to complete.

PROJECT 3. SUSTAINABILITY: MUNICIPAL FACILITIES, RECREATIONAL ASSETS, AND NORTHERN PASS

Status: In March 2016, City Council approved a proposal to locate solar array(s) at the Hall Street Wastewater Treatment Facility. One or two 1.98 million kilowatt hours (each) solar photo voltaic arrays will be installed.

City staff provided a report and presentation to the City Council on the impact of invasive insect species within the City of Concord at its April 2016 meeting. The City Council accepted the report with the understanding that there will be several action items over the next several years.

The City continues to follow the Northern Pass project closely. Per Council's direction, the City filed as an intervener at the federal and state levels. The Council's Northern Pass Committee, the Community Development Department, and the City Solicitor's office continue to work closely to protect the City's interests in this matter.

PROJECT 4. OPPORTUNITY CORRIDOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

a) South Main Street

Status: The City continues its efforts to market the former NH Employment Security property at 32-34 South Main Street.

b) Penacook Village

Status: The City continues its efforts to market the remaining City-owned portions of the former Allied Leather Tannery property at 27-35 Canal Street.

The City, working with local partners, has engaged with the developer of the former Summer Street School, located at 12 Cross Street, about financing needs in order to renovate the property into eight market rate residential condominium units.

The Concord Public Library is monitoring potential locations to better house the Penacook Branch Library, as the current building has increasing challenges.

c) Downtown 2nd & 3rd Floor Redevelopment

Status: In February 2016, the developer of the Remi Block (formerly known as the Vegas Block) closed on a \$2.8 million financing package for renovation of the property into 20 market rate apartments and three commercial storefronts. The City contributed \$200,000 to the financing package through its Revolving Loan Program. Further, the City has supported the project with a RSA 79-E Tax Relief Incentive benefit (valued at \$315,000), and a license for installation of balconies over the City's adjacent streets. The City is in discussions with the developer regarding use of municipal parking to support the project. The project is scheduled to be completed around the end of calendar year 2016.

In June 2016, the Planning Board approved the site plan and subdivision for the Bienvenue project, which will convert the former Sacred Heart Church to 10 condominiums. This project has garnered significant interest, as its units will push the price point for downtown residential living in Concord.

d) North Central Corridor/Storrs Street Connection & South End Rail Yard

Status: Using budget surplus associated with the recent cleanup of the former Tsunis property, staff has begun the process of securing an engineering consultant to commence the preliminary design process.

ON-GOING INITIATIVE 1. SEWALLS FALLS BRIDGE

Status: Construction is on schedule and within budget for substantial completion by November 1, 2016.

ON-GOING INITIATIVE 2. MAJOR TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS – LOUDON ROAD

Status: The City Manager, Deputy City Manager for Development, and City Engineer met with representatives of the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) to review alternatives for Loudon Road. City staff will work with NHDOT on costing out and itemizing potential revenue sources for those alternatives. The City is awaiting feedback from NHDOT. Administration hopes to return to Council by the end of summer 2016.

ON-GOING INITIATIVE 3. CREATE AND EXPAND PARTNERSHIPS (particularly in regards to Recreation and Economic Development Opportunities)

Status: The Parks & Recreation Department coordinates work with many community groups to expand recreation opportunities and to help with the offering of the following programs and services:

- Coordinates the Adopt-a-Spot Program with over 50 different organizations maintaining areas around the city.
- Works with numerous youth sports groups to assist with marketing and registering of participants. In addition to the Concord Crush Youth Lacrosse Program, the Department works with Concord Youth Hockey to assist with their “learn to play hockey” registrations.
- Works with the Pope Memorial SPCA for the operating of the dog park at Terrill Park.
- Coordinates with several groups for community park clean-up days, including the Friends of White Park, Concord Crew at Kiwanis River Front Park, the Merrimack River Greenway Trail Committee, and the group representing the Skate Board Park.
- The Senior Citizen Program continues to expand due, in part, to partnerships with the Concord Regional Visiting Nurses Association, AARP, and the Community Action Program.
- Worked with the Concord School District to host their weekly Concord Heights Family Resource Center at the former Dame School.
- Works with the Friends of the Audi to promote events, marketing, and volunteer days.
- Worked with the Capital Area Wellness Coalition, the Patriots Alumni Club, the Concord Police Department, the Concord Rotary Club, Black Ice Pond Hockey, and Friends of White Park to offer several special events around the City.

In May 2016, the Concord Public Library partnered with local businesses to offer its first “How To” Festival. The festival offered thirty 25-minute educational sessions for the public on a range of topics, including biking opportunities promoted by S&W Sports; scarf tying provided by Gondwana; and useful information about the City’s trail system to name just a few.

The Concord Public Library has installed the first of five Little Free Libraries in the community. Little Free Libraries are community spaces in which residents can read and exchange books for free without a library card. Simply take a book, pass it on to another reader, return it or exchange it for a different title. The locations of the first Little Free Libraries are Rolfe Park, Rollins Park, White Park, the Oak Hill Trail, and the Marjory Swope Trail.

ON-GOING INITIATIVE 4. CREATIVE ECONOMY WORK

Status: Creative Concord is preparing to undertake a strategic planning and priority setting effort the summer of 2016. At present, Creative Concord is actively engaged in conducting the Americans for the Arts economic prosperity survey and is working with the City on the development of pilot programs for the coming year. The FY 2017 Budget provides matching funds for the survey and funding for the beginning of a downtown public arts program.

ON-GOING INITIATIVE 5. CONTINUE EXPANDED NEIGHBORHOOD STREET IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Status: The General Services Department completed final pavement overlays on the following streets: Blevens Drive; Old Loudon Road; Portsmouth Street from East Side Drive to Old Loudon Road; Quail Ridge; Silk Farm Road from Clinton Street to the Bow town line; Sundance Drive; and West Portsmouth Street. In addition, the following streets were reclaimed: Chestnut Court; District 5 Road; Edward Drive; Fogg Street; Irving Drive; Spaulding Drive; St. John's Street; Sulloway Street; Susan Lane; Union Street; and Vernon Street. All of these streets will receive a final maintenance overlay in several years. Manchester Street from the south side of the Merrimack River to Garvins Falls Road was cold-planed and overlaid with a final course of pavement, as was South Street from Avon Street to the Bow town line.