



CITY OF CONCORD

REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Thomas J. Aspell, Jr., City Manager

DATE: January 31, 2017

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 as of December 31, 2016.

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 Patrolmen Association (CPPA), which provides for 2.5% cost of living adjustments in the next three years; and with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which provides for 2.25% 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 a contract with the United Automobile Workers (UAW), and will begin negotiations with the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) in early January.

b) Health Insurance Costs

Status: Harvard Pilgrim has given the City a not-to-exceed (NTE) rate increase of 13.43% in December 2016. The City will be working with Harvard Pilgrim on possible reductions to this NTE amount.

As of July 1, 2016, all City employees began 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 has moved retirees over the age of 65 to a new Medicare Enhanced plan that does not cover prescriptions and is one third of the cost. A supplemental drug plan has been added, through Aetna, which is a Part D Medicare plan. This change reduced 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.

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. City Administration hopes to have a candidate on board by the end of February 2017.

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” meets regularly to discuss initiatives and ideas for increasing/improving communications.

City Administration is also, with an economic development focus, looking to improve citywide communications and marketing to more effectively present the City and its assets and services to residents, visitors, businesses and site selectors.

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 3,312 followers, and its Twitter account has 909 followers. Featured information for the second quarter of FY 2017 included Fire Prevention Week and fire crews visiting schools, replacing smoke alarms every 10 years, the "Operation Crash" safety demonstration provided by the IAFF locals at the NH Technical Institute, carbon monoxide safety awareness, the new winter coat giveaway also sponsored by the IAFF locals, holiday tree safety, and important City information about winter parking bans and the drug crisis.

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 second quarter of FY 2017, the General Services Department promoted their E-Z Pay for WaterSense contest, Fall Leaf Collection, National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, drought updates, America Recycles Day, winter parking bans, and winter operations. The Department also issued its 2017 Solid Waste brochure at the end of December and continued communication efforts with downtown by obtaining newsletter subscribers from the Concord Main Street Project. As of December 31, 2016, the Department has 1,209 Facebook likes, 366 Twitter followers, 25 Google+ followers, and 52 YouTube subscribers. In addition, the General Services Department has received 6,684 total subscriptions to the Alert Center, Notify Me, and News Flash modules on the City website, which is used regularly to alert the community of related events. Approximately 56 press releases have been published by the local media during the second quarter.

Human Resources Department: In an effort to expand our visibility and response to recruitments, the Department has explored some different outlets for posting position vacancies. The Department purchased four campaigns with Work4 – a social media promotion company – which promoted the City's recruitments via Facebook. While this created many more views to the ads, the Department did not realize a quantifiable increase in qualified applicants. Although the increased visibility is desirable, without qualified candidates, staff feels that the advertising dollars could be put to better use. The Department participated in an electronic job fair with WZID and their affiliates, and participated in a trial campaign with ZIP Recruiter, which is a platform that allows the posting of positions on over 100 job boards at one time.

Recruitments for the last quarter remain brisk with the posting of 23 position vacancies. The WZID campaign did not realize an increased response; and the ZIP recruiter was a very short, free trial period that was difficult to assess the results of. With fiscal responsibility a priority, departments tend to shy away from sources that are not proven and are costly. Some of these include LinkedIn and the Hippo. We have offered these sources but without the department buy in we have yet to try them. Proven popular methods have been INDEED and the Union Leader. Although some positions have been difficult to fill, given the current job market we are certainly not alone with this issue. HR will continue to make every effort to pursue new outlets that would offer results at a reasonable and manageable cost.

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 Instagram and Twitter accounts to market to a new demographic of patrons. The Library also makes great use of the News Flash feature of the City website. The Library has added a voluntary sign-up to receive marketing emails that promote Library services. In addition, the Library has increased the publication of its newsletter from a bi-monthly basis to a monthly basis. A monthly program bookmark is being placed, on a trial basis, in all outgoing holds and interlibrary loans. The Library has reinstated the hanging of posters at local downtown businesses; and has increased its posting frequency on all social media, added scheduled evening and weekend posts, and are assessing when they have the most success with patron engagement. The Library has also begun to utilize local Concord history more in its social media marketing.

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 2,600 “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 its 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 1,600 “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 1,520 followers, and its Facebook page has approximately 2,300 followers. 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 calendar year 2016, over 370 tips were received, leading to the arrest of 37 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 eight “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, and continuing with the 2016-2017 school year, the Police Department took part in two 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 are continuing during the current 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.

With the growing number of mass shooting incidents occurring across the country, the Police Department has been offering CRASE (Civilian Response to an Active Shooter Event) training to all local businesses and schools. This training teaches participants how to react during an active shooter incident. The training also helps those businesses or establishments come up with an action plan should an incident occur at their location.

The Police Department partnered with the New Hampshire Food Bank to sponsor several food drives during the month of September, which was Food Action Month. Participants were challenged to “Help Stuff a Cruiser”. Three local charities were the benefactors of the food drives. Over three tons of food was collected and \$1,430 was raised.

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 also has a representative participating on the Merrimack County Drug Court Team, which is working on implementing a Drug Court as part of the Merrimack County Superior Court. The Department will continue these efforts and regularly assess personnel assignments and initiatives to most effectively address illegal drug usage in the city. During calendar year 2016, the Department made 318 arrests of individuals with illegal drug related charges. This is a 23% increase in the number of drug-related arrests over calendar year 2015.

Additionally, during the fall of 2016, the Police Department received a grant award in the amount of \$75,000 through the Law Enforcement Opioid Abuse Reduction Initiative (Project Granite Hammer). These funds will be utilized by the Department to cover overtime costs to conduct illegal drug investigations in the City and surrounding towns.

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 that 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 the safest community 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 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 second quarter of FY 2017, the NH Bureau of Emergency Medical Services approved a proposal for a mobile integrated health care project, which would permit such patients to be seen at their homes or to be transported to a Riverbend facility for clinical follow-up. The Fire Department is also actively pursuing ways to communicate to residents about the treatment options available for substance abuse.

GOAL 5. PARKING MASTER PLAN / IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

Status: The Strategic Parking Plan was presented to the Parking Committee on June 27, 2016. Since June, the Parking Committee has held two public forums; one on August 18th and one on September 8th. In addition, the Committee has held ten workshop meetings to review the recommendations of the study, and potential modifications thereof. During its December 8, 2016 meeting, the Committee asked City Administration to develop an alternate pro forma which models some of the Committee's tentative policy decisions. Work on that effort continues. It is anticipated that the Committee will complete its review and hold a final public forum this winter, prior to transmitting its final recommendations and associated ordinances to the City Council for public hearing in the spring.

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.

In December 2016, the City Council authorized the City Manager to work with the legislative delegation to draft amendments to RSA 231 and RSA 261, concerning alternative funding mechanisms for the construction, repair, maintenance, administration, and enforcement of parking facilities and parking meters.

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 several meetings and accepted input from local event organizers. A report to Council will be submitted in February 2017.

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: This transformative project was substantially completed in 2016. A few remaining light poles on South Main Street, in the area between FIT Outfitters and Thompson Street, are scheduled for removal in the spring of 2017. Some punch list items will also be completed in the spring. Council determination of whether to add up-lighting is also anticipated for early 2017.

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. Schematic design has been completed and design development is approximately 95% complete. Permitting for the project has also been completed. The project received its FAA approvals on October 19, 2016; the Planning Board completed its RSA 674:54 review of the project on November 16, 2016; and the Heritage Commission approved the City's Notice of Intent to demolish portions of the former elementary school, as well as the Gamble property. A Request for Qualifications and Experience (RFQ&E) was prepared for the purpose of selecting a Construction Manager (i.e., General Contractor) for the project. A total of 11 responses to the RFQ&E were received on November 18, 2016. Five firms were short listed and interviewed on December 20th. Selection of the Construction Manager will be made in early January 2017.

A “guaranteed maximum price” for the project is tentatively scheduled to be submitted by the Construction Manager in February. Construction is scheduled to commence in April 2017, and the facility is scheduled to be completed and open on June 1, 2018.

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 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 in early 2017.

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. Completion is expected in April 2017.

The City has also received interest from other parties seeking to acquire other older buildings in the downtown area for conversion to market rate apartments.

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, the Engineering Services Division has engaged a design consultant to commence the preliminary design process.

ON-GOING INITIATIVE 1. SEWALLS FALLS BRIDGE

Status: Construction was completed in the fall of 2016. A final wearing course and the adjacent Heritage Park area will be finished in 2017.

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

Status: The City Council, at its September 2016 meeting, voted to no longer pursue the three lane conversion and instead make safety improvements via driveway access management and re-paving.

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:

- In the fall of 2016, the Department worked with the newly formed NH Squash Association and St. Paul's School to offer new community sports leagues utilizing the indoor squash courts at St. Paul's School.
- 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.
- Works 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.
- Works 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.

The Concord Public Library partnered with local businesses to offer its first “How To” Festival in May 2016. 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 six “Little Free Libraries” in the community. “Little Free Libraries” are community spaces at 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 “Little Free Libraries” are located at Rolfe Park, Rollins Park, White Park, Keach Park, the Oak Hill Trail, and the Marjory Swope Trail. There has been tremendous usage of the free materials in these libraries.

ON-GOING INITIATIVE 4. CREATIVE ECONOMY WORK

Status: 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. Recently, artwork was installed on Main Street as part of what is hoped to be a continuing effort to foster art in our downtown.

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

Status: The FY 2017 paving project went out to bid in mid-October with a bid opening in November. The contract was awarded to GMI Asphalt. A pre-construction meeting will be held in early March with work starting in early April, weather permitting.

This year’s project includes pavement reclamation of the following streets: Carpenter Street; Country Club Lane; Eastman Street; Fairview Drive; Foxcross Circle; Oakmont Drive; Portsmouth Street, from Eastman Street to #30; and South Curtisville Road, from Portsmouth Street to Frost Road, except for the sections already completed by the Concord School District

The project also includes the final shim overlay on the following streets that were reclaimed 5-10 years ago: Cemetery Street; Ferrin Road; South Main Street, from Wilfred Street to Joffre Street; West Parish Road; and Wilson Avenue, from South Street to Norwich Street.