

**CITY OF ROCK ISLAND  
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION  
March 11, 2019 - 5:30 p.m.**

**City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3rd Floor  
1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL**

Present: Mayor Mike Thoms, Alderman James Spurgetis, Alderman Stephen L. Tollenaer, Alderman Dylan Parker, and Alderman Dave Geenen

Alderman Virgil J. Mayberry arrived at 5:34 p.m.

Absent: Alderman Ivory D. Clark and Alderman Joshua Schipp

Staff: City Manager Randy Tweet, City Attorney Dave Morrison, City Clerk Judith Gilbert, and other City staff

3/11/2019 - Minutes

**PRESENTATION ON CATHOLIC CARE PACKS PROGRAM (JEAN PAGGEN)**

Former City Clerk Jean Paggen spoke about the Catholic Care Pack Program. The program began with Rock Island County Sheriff Deputy Tim Ott last fall when he began handing out Ziploc bags with items in it for the homeless. Mr. and Mrs. Ott met with Father Co, pastor of Sacred Heart Church and Saint Mary's Church, and Barbara Roedel of Saint Pius Church (all churches in Rock Island). The idea was to fill backpacks with useful items for the homeless. Backpacks and items were purchased with some seed money that was donated. A logo was created by Chris Mandel of Mandel Design in Davenport. He also set up a Facebook page and a website.

Ms. Paggen explained that the backpacks are now being painted with CCP in white acrylic and reflective paint so they can be seen at night. After that the backpacks are delivered to the Sacred Heart Rectory where a group of volunteers fill them. Once the backpacks have been filled, they are blessed by a local priest in the community where they are going to be distributed.

Ms. Paggen said the winter season backpacks contain socks, a blanket or sleeping bag, hand warmers, non-perishable food items, water, hygiene products, some religious items, a motivational or inspirational message card, and a list of local organizations and agencies that can provide assistance. Ms. Paggen said they have contacted the Rock Island County Veterans Assistance Program and the Veterans Administration Community Referral Center in Davenport who will be providing information for veterans in the backpacks too.

Ms. Paggen said the first delivery of backpacks was in January to the Rock Island County Sheriff, the Rock Island Police Department, and the Rock Island Fire Department. She expressed her gratitude for Police Chief VenHuizen and Fire Chief Yerkey who have been instrumental with contact information and support. Since then, backpacks have also been delivered to Moline Fire Department, Davenport Police and Fire Departments, Galesburg Police and Fire Departments, Muscatine Police and Fire Departments, East Moline Police and Fire Departments, Milan Police Department, Silvis Police Department, Scott County Sheriff Department, Knox County Sheriff Department, and Muscatine County Sheriff Department. Mr. Ott met today with the Clinton Police, Fire and Sheriff Departments. Ms. Paggen said meetings

are also being set up in the Dubuque, Cedar Rapids, Geneseo, Peoria, and Rockford communities.

The website address is [WWW.SACREDHEARTRI.COM/CCP](http://WWW.SACREDHEARTRI.COM/CCP). Calls regarding the program are coming in from various churches offering help. Ms. Paggen said the program is totally dependent on volunteers and contributions of items and monetary donations. She stated that checks can be made out to Sacred Heart Church of Rock Island with CCP in the memo line of the check. A backpack was provided so that Council members could see exactly what is being distributed.

Mayor Thoms made a suggestion to ask recipients what items they might find useful in the backpacks. Mayor Thoms said it was an outstanding program. Recipients are asked to bring the backpacks in to get them refilled (usually done at the local Fire Department). Alderman Spurgetis thanked Ms. Paggen for her presentation. Ms. Paggen said they have given out more than 100 backpacks so far. Alderman Mayberry commended Ms. Paggen for her past service to the King Center and the City and for staying in Rock Island. Mayor Thoms said Ms. Paggen has done so many things to give back to the community. Ms. Paggen thanked Council for their time.

### **MIDWEST HIGH SPEED RAIL ASSOCIATION PRESENTATION**

City Manager Randy Tweet introduced Kendra Johnson, Program Manager, from the Midwest High Speed Rail Association. Mr. Tweet had met with Executive Director Richard Harnish earlier. Mr. Harnish and the association are seeking a letter of support from Council so Mr. Tweet invited them to come and present to Council what their organization is trying to accomplish.

Ms. Johnson said the organization is made up of people who want to take the train more. They have been concerned with the state capital bill. Ms. Johnson said they are asking for three things from the Governor and the legislature: a significant amount of money to be devoted to passenger rail and transit throughout the state; for IDOT to start preliminary engineering and environmental review of a high speed line from Chicago to St. Louis; and for the Governor to have IDOT start the creation of a statewide high speed rail plan which would be a coordinated, comprehensive plan with different modes integrated. They think rail projects like getting trains to the Quad Cities would become a bigger priority within the overall plan because it increases the value of each individual project. Ms. Johnson said essential to making these things happen is getting the Governor's and the General Assembly's support. That is why letters of support from communities are needed. Mr. Harnish will be testifying at both the Senate and House committees this week. They want to bring as many letters as possible.

Alderman Geenen asked if the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce has endorsed the initiative. Ms. Johnson said she knew that Mr. Harnish met with them. Alderman Geenen was concerned about the Quad Cities project competing for funding with the larger plan for high speed rail. Ms. Johnson responded that the Quad Cities project is included in the funding for the larger plan. She said the order of the projects would be determined by IDOT as they formulate a statewide rail plan. She thinks local support from the Quad Cities communities would encourage the Governor to support moving forward the Quad Cities project and eliminating the barriers.

Alderman Geenen said he served on the local Passenger / High Speed Rail Commission six years ago and wants to hear from Paul Rumler's group first. Alderman Mayberry asked about the Chicago to St. Louis line. He wanted to know if the extension from Princeton to Moline is part of her group's proposal. Ms. Johnson said their maps are conceptual because they are not a planning agency; theirs is more of a visual representation what rail / transit routes are wanted by the communities. She added projects will be decided by the state. Alderman Geenen said an endorsement from the local group will get the municipalities to endorse what the association

wants.

Alderman Parker said Ms. Johnson's group is an advocacy organization for high speed rail for the Midwest with their specific focus being the Illinois Chicago to St. Louis project. Alderman Parker said he is a big advocate for high speed rail. He agrees that the state needs to do a comprehensive plan; he said they are not even thinking about it. Alderman Parker supports high speed rail for the Midwest and would support a broad declaration of support from the City. He said he would be attending the association's annual meeting on March 23.

Alderman Geenen said the association needs to try and work regionally. Ms. Johnson agreed the more coordination, the better. Alderman Parker asked if they had reached out to Bi-State Regional Commission. Ms. Johnson didn't know. Alderman Parker recommended talking to all regional planning bodies. Alderman Mayberry asked Alderman Parker why he thinks the state has not been doing anything. Alderman Parker said the state is not involved in high speed rail; he said there is no formal plan from IDOT for high speed rail. Ms. Johnson said they are hoping the Quad Cities passenger rail project becomes a priority in the capital funding bill. Discussion continued regarding high speed rail funding for passenger rail projects and getting more money in the capital bill for rail.

Mr. Tweet said he had some sample letters. Since it is not a resolution, he can draft a letter of support and get Council's signatures.

Ms. Johnson thanked Council.

## **COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PLAN PROGRESS REPORT**

Community and Economic Development Director Chandler Poole said he is presenting an update and progress report on the Downtown Revitalization Plan. He stated the plan was completed in 2015 by Houseal Lavigne Associates. Mr. Poole explained that the current plan took ten plus plans, initiatives, and ideas and put them together to create one cohesive plan to help drive things forward. The new plan created a flexible framework for improving downtown Rock Island. He said it's a living, breathing document. The plan was created with input from the public, the businesses in the downtown area, and other stakeholders such as the Development Association of Rock Island (DARI). Mr. Poole said the plan addresses administrative actions, regulatory actions, partnerships (past, present, and future ones needed), resource prioritization (time frames), and funding or how to pay for it.

Urban Planner Miles Brainard spoke about development regulations. He showed a photo of the plaza under construction. He said it was funded with CDBG money. He explained the department is currently doing an update to the zoning code which has been a long process. He said the goal is to try and revise the zoning code so that it is possible to create the downtown they want including design standards, the layout of the downtown, and the density of the downtown. Mr. Brainard said streetscaping guidelines have been developed which have been discussed before. He said they are currently working with a consultant on the Downtown National Register District nomination which would provide historic resources, but also access to tax credits. Mr. Poole said there is a lot of other work being done by City staff and partners all the time.

Mr. Poole next reviewed development promotion. He spoke about a diversified business community; they are working to make sure that there is not one particular industry in the downtown. He said in the event of a downturn, it could be better handled with a diversity of businesses. He said they are encouraging as many different types of businesses to locate in the downtown. Every development project is done on a case by case basis. They work with the

developer to find out what the City can do to help them. Mr. Poole said new partnerships are always being sought such as the partnerships developed with the Historic Preservation Commission, DARI, and other organizations. Some programs that are used to help businesses include the Facade Improvement Program (\$7,500 dollar for dollar match), the Commercial Revolving Loan Fund (CRLF), and the Enterprise Zone. Mr. Poole said the CRLF program is being re-done with HUD and consultants and will be re-launched later this year. The Enterprise Zone was just renewed and will help with the purchase of tax-free building materials in the EZ area. Mr. Poole's department works with businesses to inform them of these different programs.

Mr. Brainard discussed the sense of place, an abstract concept, that means you know you are in a certain kind of place. He said streetscaping guidelines are a big part of this, creating a vibe of the downtown making you feel it's somewhere special and different. It includes different elements from type of pavement, planters, lighting, landscaping, and many different things that form a sensory perceptive experience of downtown. Mr. Brainard said they have also been working for several years to increase and improve public art. The Arts Advisory Commission and staff work closely together on the sculpture program, acquiring art, and figuring out how to better maintain the art. The department will also be doing an inventory of all downtown businesses, including performance venues of which there are quite a few in downtown. This will be the focus of the new economic development manager. Mr. Brainard explained that sense of place is also the kinds of things you can experience such as the kinds of activities in the downtown. He said a big part of downtown is that it is artistic and music driven and it's how Rock Island stands out from its peer communities.

Mr. Poole said Tarah Sipes is the new economic development manager and today was her first day. Mr. Poole discussed improved transportation. One of the things they have been thinking about is improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in the downtown. They are working with IDOT, Public Works Department, Undependent Rock Island, and different groups. Mr. Poole said you need to get people downtown and not just in vehicles, but people and families using the bike trails or going to Schwiebert Park, and people walking downtown. He said the 1st Avenue "road diet" remains an ongoing dialogue and that is a long term project. Mr. Poole said sometimes MetroLINK is forgotten, but they are critical to downtown. Besides their transfer station, they know where bus stops should be to maximize the effectiveness of moving people around downtown. Mr. Poole said they need to work with MetroLINK.

Alderman Parker asked for the status of the road diet. Interim Public Works Director Mike Bartels said he did not have an update on the project. Mr. Tweet said it is still with IDOT; he said it is a tough project of taking four lanes down to two lanes. Alderman Parker asked about the conversion of one-ways to two-ways. Mr. Tweet responded that it is part of the City's long-term plan and will be worked on after the I-74 bridge project, but it is not being worked on as part of the downtown plan now.

Mr. Poole said parking is a big issue with a vehicle-driven society. He said the existing parking garage will undergo substantial repairs in the near future. They have met with the consultant Desman who has done an analysis and they have a draft report on the garage. Mr. Poole said additional parking garages are not feasible in the near term. He explained they are very expensive to build at \$10,000 to \$15,000 per parking stall. He said multiple improvements have been made by Finance and Public Works Departments to both parking enforcement and signage. There has been more non-metered parking. As development occurs, Mr. Poole said they look at parking and how it will affect a project. Mr. Poole added that further changes to parking are always on the table as part of any streetscaping improvements such as how it will look. He stated that when they work on any development project, they look at and address all of the ripple effects and work on them too.

Alderman Spurgetis asked when Council will see the parking garage report. Mr. Poole replied it will be another two weeks; they are fleshing out the draft. Alderman Spurgetis asked if they were

in touch with the Holiday Inn or if they were communicating with the City; Alderman Spurgētis felt they are one of the foremost businesses in the downtown. Mr. Poole responded that Bruce Kinseth is the owner of the Holiday Inn and he and Mr. Poole talk on a regular basis. The department knows what his needs are. Alderman Spurgētis asked if they could be a partner with the City on parking facilities. Mr. Poole replied the Holiday Inn has a small surface lot next to the hotel and they also lease a number of spots in the parking garage from the City. Mr. Poole did not think they would be assisting with paying for any of the repairs in the garage. Mr. Tweet said the Holiday Inn does pay for space in the parking garage. Mr. Poole said there is not a lot of money the City gets from the Holiday Inn for renting parking spaces.

Mr. Brainard said another aspect of the plan is promoting it. In the plan, it says it should be referenced daily; he said staff reference it quite often. Mr. Brainard would encourage everyone in the community to check out the plan which is available on the City website along with other community plans. He said as staff, they need to do a better job of doing more regular progress reports on the various plans and what things are happening. Mr. Brainard said they need to talk about it better. He said they need to be more intentional about communicating the successes and letting people know the progress of the plans and doing this on a regular basis and not just for Council, but also for the entire community. Alderman Geenen said there are things to celebrate that are moving us forward.

Mr. Poole talked about the things they are going to do now. He said staff have put together a walking committee made up of CED and Public Works staff, business owners, building owners, and downtown residents. They would take a small area of downtown and walk it and saying what they like and what they don't like. They would look at access, parking, sidewalks, and more. Mr. Poole would encourage establishing the walking committee. He said they will have the Preservation Commission, the Arts Advisory Committee, and their other partners look at sections of the plan that touch them and review it, update the plan, and help drive the initiatives forward. Mr. Poole said there are a tremendous number of surface parking lots that are owned by Modern Woodmen. He said they need to look at working with Modern Woodmen to get some shared parking arrangement, perhaps for the evenings or during the day; all to encourage people to come to the downtown.

Alderman Mayberry said it was very important what Mr. Poole said about people who live in the downtown should be a part of it. Alderman Mayberry added that they have more people living downtown now than ever before. Mr. Poole said absolutely residents need to be included as part of the plan.

Mr. Brainard next talked about the plaza, the centerpiece of downtown. He said point blank they do not have the money to do a major renovation of the plaza. They cannot afford to convert it to a regular street or a woonerf. He said however they can explore some alternatives or ways to make it better utilized, maybe with some sprucing up or minor changes. Those might include some deep cleaning of the plaza, better landscaping, or minor modifications to the stage. Mr. Brainard said they have to work with the resources they have.

Mr. Brainard said partnerships are a continuing theme and very important. He said various City departments such as CED, Public Works, and Parks and Recreation are responsible for the downtown although every department is responsible for the downtown. He said we all need to work together to make the downtown better through collaboration. He added that the City must also partner with organizations outside of the City like DARI and many other groups who could help and contribute including even residents with expertise that would be helpful. He stated there is no partner too small or too large. Mr. Brainard said businesses and other interested persons could participate in the walking committee or a multi-modal task force. He said it is these types of partnerships that allow the City to leverage resources better and building on what we have and working with people to make improvements together.

Mr. Poole summarized the plan remains active as a living, breathing document. He said things are changing and things are going forward. He stated the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are all the same as before. Mr. Poole said the city is an industrial town and that is a good thing. He said it means we have a good work ethic and we're proud of who we are. He said there are a tremendous amount of opportunities. The historic group is impressed with the number of buildings in the downtown; that is a huge strength for the city. Mr. Poole said the threats will always be the same: people going to Iowa, people working from home rather than locating a business downtown, and all the same things that every community struggles with in regard to the downtown. He said they do continue to use the plan and look at it. He said tonight was a great example that we need to make sure we're celebrating what we've done. Not everything will happen right away. He said 90% of what they do isn't seen because it's staff putting in the work before it comes to Council or the public. Mr. Poole said they are making slow and steady progress; it's a good, solid plan and continues to be so.

Alderman Spurgetis asked if the river was a part of the downtown plan. Mr. Brainard responded that the current plan incorporates a lot of previous plans including the River Vision Plan from 2004. It is still an active plan and a recent update was just unveiled in Davenport. He said they are trying to activate the riverfront on their side. The development of Schwiebert Park was part of the plan. Mr. Brainard said it is a continuing dialogue, a partnership between the different cities in the region to improve the waterfront and make it an active space both for recreation and for business. Alderman Spurgetis said he brought it up because he thinks it is an important component for local residents as well as for tourists or people just visiting. Mr. Brainard said he sits on the River Action Steering Committee and a major conversation with the members is about river recreation and transportation; for example, adding a second Channel Cat or recruiting a river cruise line to make a stop somewhere in the Quad Cities. He said the conversations continue.

Mr. Tweet said he asked Erik Reader from DARI to be here as he is working on many programs and DARI is a part of it as a City partner. Alderman Geenen asked for Mr. Reader's thoughts.

Mr. Reader said he has been immersed in the downtown for the last two years and seeing where the plan has or hasn't gone. He said there are many programs and departments involved as well as the local business community. He said there was great engagement in 2014 and 2015 when the plan was created. He said the plan itself is rather vague rather than action-oriented which leaves a lot of opportunity out there. Mr. Reader said a lot of good things have happened. He said there has been a lot of investment and it looks better. Even though there may be several vacant storefronts, there is a lot taking place downtown with new things that weren't there before. He gave several examples such as The Locks, the Garden District, new breweries, the Shoppes on 2nd Avenue and the Be Well Incubator. He said perhaps all of the energy and activity that is happening is not broadcast enough. Mr. Reader said knowing what the vision is for downtown and gradually working towards it is progress even when it takes a lot of time. He said there are many programs and incentives to start businesses and grow a business. He stated there has been a lot of good expansion with many things to celebrate. The community should be proud; he said Rock Island is a really great arts, music, and entertainment community. Mr. Reader said we shouldn't take it for granted.

Alderman Geenen said we need to celebrate the small victories. He commended Mr. Reader for the new magazine that is published highlighting the variety of businesses in downtown Rock Island.

Mayor Thoms asked Mr. Reader if he thought there was any appetite for a special assessment district. Mr. Reader responded that there is the difficulty with Illinois having the reputation for overtaxing. He said they look at neighboring communities that do have incentives or a mechanism that allows for that long-term maintenance. He stated as the downtown TIF comes to a sunset, a special assessment district needs to be considered and looked at together with

other things to see what's worth continuing or adding things. Mr. Reader gave the example of Moline paying for their streetscaping with a special assessment district. He thought it would have to be packaged together with a whole lot of things for the business community to consider it. Mr. Reader said the walking tour is a start to assessing things. He added the plan goes to 2030 so there is still a lot of time to get things completed that were in the plan.

Alderman Parker said in last year's goal setting session, he was very much in favor of convincing the downtown business owners to establish an SSA, but they need to see what they're going to be paying for. Alderman Parker wanted to know who would lead getting an SSA and selling it; he said there needs to be a holistic idea driving it. He said having long-term funding to pay for downtown housing studies or redeveloping the Argus building or what needs to happen to get private investors interested. Alderman Parker said in his vision of downtown, an SSA is needed to make it work and fund what's needed long-term. The City doesn't have the money; downtown needs specific revenue. Alderman Parker asked what is the plan for the TIF; is it going to be recreated and how will the lawyer be paid. He wants to know who is going to lead the charge to sell the business owners.

Mr. Tweet responded that the TIF is up and the City will not be recreating the TIF for the downtown. He said it was a 36-year TIF; it cannot be recreated. Mr. Tweet said they would probably look at other options. He explained that the walking tour is about where to start the streetscaping as a pilot. He said the thinking is once the business owners and landlords see something, then it would be time to start having the conversation with them. He said the City is not ready for that conversation because the City has to show them something and right now there is nothing to show them.

Alderman Parker said he wants to have that plan ready by the time the streetscaping is done with a budget for the SSA and what kind of money there would be and what could be funded with the SSA. He wants to have all of that information ready by the time the City is wooing the business and building owners. If there isn't a detailed plan ready, the opportunity could be missed. He wants to know who will be in charge of coming up with the SSA plan and budget and having it ready to go by the time the City is wooing the business owners. Mr. Tweet said they would have that; all of that would need to be in place before the business community was approached.

Alderman Spurgetis asked if the courthouse should become available for development, are staff ready to assist. Mr. Tweet responded the City can assist them, but the City doesn't have a dedicated staff person for that. Alderman Parker said by the time litigation is over, he wants the City to be ready to help them. He believes any prep work done for redeveloping the courthouse could also be applied to the Argus building or other buildings. Alderman Spurgetis said the courthouse could be part of the downtown plan if it became available. Alderman Parker said a lot of downtown plans include specific redevelopment strategies. Mr. Tweet said the current downtown plan did not look at specific buildings; the Historic Preservation Commission will look at specific buildings. He added the courthouse has not been looked at. Alderman Parker said many of the plans look at specific buildings. Discussion continued.

Mr. Tweet said these are good topics for goal setting. He said they are following Council's priorities and an update on the downtown plan was one of them. He said it's up to Council to decide about diverting resources to the downtown and should be proposed at goal setting.

Note: A list of action steps from the plan and their current status was distributed to Council.

The study session concluded at 6:39 p.m.

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Judith H. Gilbert, City Clerk