

CITY OF ROCK ISLAND
CITY COUNCIL MEETING

City Hall

1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island IL

City Council Chambers, 3rd Floor

5/25/2021 - Minutes

1. Call to Order

Mayor Thoms called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone.

2. This meeting will be conducted by audio and video conference without a physically present quorum of the Rock Island City Council due to the disaster declaration issued by Governor Pritzker

3. Roll Call

Mayor Thoms asked Interim City Clerk Josh Adams to call the roll.

Present: Alderman Moses Robinson, Alderman Randy Hurt, Alderwoman Judith Gilbert, Alderwoman Jenni Swanson, Alderman Dylan Parker, Alderman Mark Poulos, Alderman Dave Geenen, and Mayor Mike Thoms.

Absent: None.

Staff: City Manager Randy Tweet, Interim City Clerk Josh Adams, and other City staff.

4. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Thoms led in the saying of the Pledge of Allegiance.

5. Moment of Silence

Mayor Thoms requested a moment of silence. A moment of silence was observed.

6. Public Comment

Mayor Thoms asked if anyone in the public wished to speak.

Ted Pappas addressed Council about the need for the City to utilize some of the American Recovery Plan (ARP) funds for Friendship Manor. He described the business as non-profit and a staple of the community. He discussed the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their population and measures, and provided statistics on current employment, residency, and

funding for the Manor. He requested that Council put the Manor at the top of the list for consideration of relief funds.

Angie Peterson addressed Council and discussed the Children's Therapy Center of the Quad Cities. She described the organization as providing outpatient pediatric rehabilitation and therapy to children for 72 years. She said the organization has never turned away from helping families in need of services, even with the challenges of the pandemic. She noted families of children with disabilities have endured further difficulties due to the pandemic, as there have been fewer opportunities for therapy. She said they have retained all staff during the events of the past year. She added the waitlist to receive services has more than doubled to nearly 200. She summarized the various financial stresses the organization has endured since the pandemic began.

Derek Ball of Marriage and Family Counseling Service in Rock Island addressed Council, noting the 50-year history of the organization within the City. He said families have experienced specific difficulties as a result of the pandemic. He noted the recent reduction in charitable donations, specifically United Way, which has affected all non-profits. He requested the City use, in part, some relief funds to support the non-profits which serve the community, as it would be an investment in families.

Leslie Kilgannon, Director of the Quad Cities Housing Council addressed the Council. She said they act as the community's local housing trust fund and resource for affordable housing. She requested prioritization for affordable housing development related to the pending ARP funds, specifically to support the Silos to Solutions program. She noted that stakeholders in the area have identified an affordable housing crisis over the previous 18 months. She said the pandemic has highlighted inequities in the community and society, which lifted the need for affordable housing. She offered that the ARP funds provide an opportunity to think big and bring many families stability. She noted the immediacy of the problem with the pending release of moratoriums on evictions.

Julie Larson of the Rock Island YWCA addressed Council. She stated her purpose was to advocate for all non-profit organizations in the City regarding the pending ARP funds. She said the YWCA is proud to be building their new facility in the downtown area, and hoped that it would expand development.

Rock Island resident Kelly Thompson, also of the Quad City Community Foundation addressed Council. She said the organization has been engaged in local communities' disaster response and recovery as part of a coalition. She added she was the point person for the coalition's long-term recovery plan. She summarized the coalition's accomplishments over the span of the pandemic. She said she hoped to see the organizations she works with be a recipient for federal funds to supplement monies raised over the past year. She noted her suggestions were less about what to spend relief funds on and more how to employ them. She provided some examples of areas most affected by the pandemic and how they could use relief funds.

Rock Island County resident Glen Evans, also of the Rock Island County Youth Conference addressed Council. He noted his organization was unable to hold their event in 2020 due to the pandemic. He summarized the purpose of the event and the benefit to local youth. He said he hopes the Conference continues to move forward and engage local children. He noted the difficulties children have handled as a result of the pandemic.

Rock Island resident Shelia Gussey addressed Council. She represented both the First Day Fund in Rock Island and Milan and Citizens to Preserve Blackhawk Park. She requested Council consider providing relief funds to both programs.

Mayor Thoms thanked everyone that spoke and all other non-profit organizations and staffs in the area for making the community a better place.

7. Goal #1: Financially Sound City Providing High Quality Service and Infrastructure

City Manager Tweet asked how Council preferred to proceed with discussion of goals. Alderman Parker questioned whether or not a motion would be necessary to discuss anything.

MOTION:

Alderman Parker moved to discuss Goal #1 and consider the action steps; Alderman Geenen seconded.

Community and Economic Development Director Nathan Parch came to the front and addressed Council on five department topics listed under Goal #1. He noted four of the programs listed would be brought to Council before September 2021, which includes the Rental Inspection Program, Geographic Information System (GIS) Services, CIRLF procedures, and Rehab Programs, but he was able to give an update on the Quad City Arts program. He said Staff is currently developing a contract for services that will hand the operation of the arts program to Quad City Arts with the Arts Commission continuing to function in an advisory capacity as part of an agreement to come before Council in June 2021. He provided more details on the GIS Services program, noting the Bi-State Regional Commission was unable assume those services, but is coordinating with local municipalities to explore the potential for a regional GIS and share data.

Alderman Robinson said his intent in requesting the meeting was not to receive updates, but rather to understand how Council came up with the goals. He asked what the plan was to communicate to residents how Council goals would be achieved. Mr. Tweet said there is a 15- and five-year plan, the latter of which has four goals voted on by Council. He noted the action steps listed under the goals are items Staff would present back to Council throughout the year. Alderman Poulos said he echoed Alderman Robinson's concerns, adding if there were targets for completion of action steps, he would be able to communicate progress to constituents. Alderman Parker said the five-year and annual goals are more broad than specific. Alderman Robinson asked if the current process is effective for the City. Mr. Tweet said other Alderpersons requested a step-by-step review of the goals with the option of voting on changes, and Staff has prepared updates on what they were tasked to do.

Alderwoman Swanson pointed out that the five-year plan stretches back to 2017 when many Council members were not present, and suggested checking action steps dating back to then in order to see accomplishments. Alderman Robinson said the way the City transmits information regarding the goals is not clear. Alderwoman Gilbert asked if the four listed Council Goals are the same as the five-year plan. Mr. Tweet confirmed they were, but with more detail. He noted the items listed on the City's website are annual goals with action steps listed as Council requested. Alderman Robinson asked if the City should change the process approach to goals in order to make it easier for residents. Mr. Tweet noted it would be fully up to Council. Mayor Thoms said goal-setting generally requires multiple meetings, and it could create a lack of consistency for Staff if goals often change. Alderman Hurt suggested that the City's vision should be on the City's website for residents. Mr. Tweet said that could be done.

Alderwoman Gilbert asked what the specifics were regarding a city's vision statement. Mr. Tweet said the action steps for City goals are the specifics regarding what Council wants Staff to accomplish. Alderwoman Swanson said it is difficult for new Council members to have goal setting so swiftly following the beginning of their term, and changes over time can alter

perspective of goals. Alderman Robinson said the key part of a business is their vision, and as the City does not have one it becomes difficult to assign goals. Alderwoman Gilbert recalled the 2017 goal-setting session in which the moderator told Council members they could not be all things for residents, and should instead focus on core services that need to be provided. She suggested having less action steps and more focus on projects. Mayor Thoms said most of the goals can be accomplished and are specific. He noted many action steps may be completed by bringing them before Council, but not all are implemented. Alderman Robinson said the City needs a structure on how to perceive the goals.

Alderman Parker explained how he interprets goals, action steps, and how they are implemented. He said increasing the City's capacity to achieve goals may not always be possible, and creativity is necessary. He suggested reforming the way the City functions may be needed to improve how it operates. Alderman Robinson said focusing on the City goals is a priority despite what he may bring to Council as an individual goal. Mayor Thoms added the City should decide how to facilitate goal-setting, be it with a mediator or consultant. Alderwoman Swanson said it is reasonable to begin looking at a new five-year plan. Mayor Thoms suggested looking forward to setting a new plan, but cautioned against altering the work Staff had already done. Alderwoman Swanson suggested viewing action steps from previous years to see what had been accomplished since. Mr. Tweet suggested completing a request for quote (RFQ) to choose an organization to assist with goal setting. Alderwoman Gilbert agreed, but stated the direction should be clear before doing so.

Alderwoman Swanson suggested focusing on what people want and need to attract them to, or keep them in the City. Council discussed as a group whether to continue hearing from Staff regarding the listed goals and action steps. Alderwoman Gilbert said the City has discussed many plans to facilitate goal setting and has not been satisfied, and more thought should be placed into what is needed with the process. Alderman Robinson suggested creating a draft for the RFQ to allow Council to add suggestions. Mayor Thoms suggested allowing Staff to provide the updates per the original agenda plan.

Parks and Recreation Director John Gripp addressed Council with updates on action steps for Goal #1. He noted 2016 surveys that identified citizen needs for parks and recreation. He said the goals for his department are living documents that can change over time. Mr. Tweet updated the status of the American Water discussion, stating they would come to Council in the form of a study session to present their proposal. Alderwoman Gilbert said it would be on American Water to educate residents that are currently not supportive of the proposal. Alderman Poulos said he spoke with stakeholders of American Water and wished to hear positive and negative comments from their clients.

Human Resources Director John Thorson addressed Council with updates on the injury and illness prevention program per the goals. Police Chief Jeff VenHuizen then addressed Council with updates on the proposed social worker liaison program. Alderman Poulos asked if the program was feasible. Chief VenHuizen said there is support for the program, but it will require resources and time. He noted the program would be useful, as the Police Department is not equipped to handle issues involving mental illness or mental health. Alderwoman Swanson suggested having a Family Resources advocate located within the Police Department. Chief VenHuizen replied it may not be a significant move to do so, as they are already near and the department currently collaborates with them. Alderman Parker said he was glad these issues were being discussed amongst law enforcement groups, and requested updates on those discussions as they happen. City Attorney Morrison added it may be beneficial to have a representative of the Justice Center discuss these issues with Council members.

Mr. Tweet summarized progress on the solar power policy and program. This included site visits in March 2021, and the final analysis from Eagle Point Solar is forthcoming, which may include information on a power purchase agreement.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 7-0-0 roll call vote. Aye: Robinson, Hurt, Gilbert, Swanson, Parker, Poulos, and Geenen. Nay: None. Absent: None.

8. Goal #2: Expanding Local Economy

MOTION:

Alderman Poulos moved to discuss Goal #2 and consider the action steps; Alderwoman Swanson seconded.

Mr. Tweet discussed action step 1 involving strategies related to redirecting hotel and motel tax revenues for tourism-specific programming. He said \$100,000 was diverted already, and another \$100,000 would have followed if not for budget cuts in the previous calendar year. He added Visit Quad Cities had been consulted and presented to Council in April of 2021 in anticipation of presenting to Council again in June 2021. He said DARI, City staff, and local representatives discussed establishing a local film office in the City, and a letter supporting the idea was submitted to State representatives, for which the City expects to receive \$50,000. Aldermen Robinson and Poulos asked if there would be measurables for Visit Quad Cities to assess progress. Mr. Tweet said those would be determined by language in the agreement. Alderman Parker explained what the measurables might be based on the DARI agreement already in place.

Mr. Tweet introduced Development Association of Rock Island (DARI) Director Liz Tallman to discuss the status of action step 2. She said based on the agreement signed with the City, DARI developed a specific work plan to accommodate Council goals. She detailed the categories contained within the work plan, and looked forward to June and July to present to Council. She discussed Incentives programs related to action step 2 for public arts.

Public Works Director Mike Bartels addressed Council with updates on action step 3 for improving the City's image. Mr. Bartels said the focus is on the downtown and major corridors with street sweeping, weed spraying, tree removal, and sidewalk and streetlight repairs. He noted this began in May and is ongoing. Mayor Thoms asked if there was a plan to rid the downtown of stumps and roots as well. Mr. Bartels said that was part of an overall plan for the downtown, but that new trees would not be planted in the same locations. Alderman Robinson asked if street sweeping was limited to downtown. Mr. Bartels replied it was taking place throughout the City in main corridors, and has moved to brick and residential streets. Mr. Tweet said DARI would present to Council in June of 2021 with regards to promoting a positive image of the City with marketing.

Community and Economic Development Department Director Nathan Parch discussed updates to action step 4 to look at institutional barriers to development within the City. He noted that Staff would bring a presentation to Council in August related to the costs of development in the City in comparison to neighboring communities.

Ms. Tallman addressed Council regarding action step 5 to retain businesses by assisting with succession planning. She said a resource guide for starting a business within the City had been completed and placed on the DARI website. She noted DARI would seek assistance to conduct

a workshop on this subject in June 2021, and would conduct business surveys. For action step 6 regarding downtown marketing, she said their newest employee had begun constructing a marketing plan that would be presented in June 2021, but would be City-wide. Alderman Parker asked if DARI was considering more of a holistic plan for marketing. Ms. Tallman replied the plan was focused on how to campaign for and celebrate the City. Alderman Geenen noted there is a different way to communicate to residents without social media exposure or those that speak other languages.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 7-0-0 roll call vote. Aye: Robinson, Hurt, Gilbert, Swanson, Parker, Poulos, and Geenen. Nay: None. Absent: None.

9. Goal #3: Revitalization of Strategic Locations

MOTION:

Alderman Poulos moved to consider the action steps in Goal #3; Alderman Parker seconded.

Mr. Bartels addressed Council on action step 1 under goal #3 regarding funding for 11th Street improvements. He noted this action step would always be in play even if Council did not request it. He provided updates on grants applied for to assist with the 11th Street corridor. Alderman Hurt asked if the City would be receiving \$150,000 towards sidewalks along 11th Street based on information he obtained. Mr. Bartels was unaware, but noted the funding of sidewalks through the pavement patching program. Alderman Robinson asked why the decision was made to work on the southern portion of 11th Street. Mr. Bartels replied the water main below that area has had problems and is more of an immediate need. He provided a status of areas along the northern part of 11th Street. Alderman Hurt asked if there would be a way to make improvements without funding from the State. Mr. Bartels replied that anything the City disturbs needs to be fixed. could be done with the hopes of a partnership with the State.

Mr. Parch addressed Council on action step 2 regarding the utilization of the 11th Street Watch Tower. He said the City has been approached about having a Farmer's Market at the location. He added Staff continues to work in partnership with DARI to develop a vision for the site. He suggested holding a charrette, a meeting in which stakeholders map solutions to resolve an issue, which includes the community. He noted the Planning Commission may be able act as a facilitator.

Mr. Tweet provided an update on action steps 3 and 4 regarding the Downtown Plan. He said Downtown Manager Jack Cullen would address Council in August or September of 2021 on the progress in the downtown area, including discussions regarding SSA possibilities. He noted Staff is working with Mr. Cullen to interpret and implement the Downtown Revitalization plan. He noted the recommendation from Staff and the Task Force will likely be to remove the Plaza.

Ms. Tallman addressed Council on action steps 5 and 6 regarding College Hill redevelopment and the 11th Street business development corridor. She said business groups have not met this year due to the pandemic but would likely reconvene later in the summer. Alderman Parker asked if the possibility of developing SSAs for other corridors in the City would be a good idea. Ms. Tallman replied it was a good topic for discussion. Alderman Robinson asked about the 18th Avenue and 11th Street corridor and whether or not improvements had been considered. Ms. Tallman replied it was a possibility, as facade improvement had already been done in that area.

Mr. Parch addressed Council on action step 7 regarding rental ordinances. He said annual rental inspections began in January of 2021, but due to the pandemic, only the outsides of 561 properties had been completed. He said a study session had been planned for September 2021 regarding updates to the City's rental ordinance. Alderman Robinson asked if the data regarding the completed inspections could be obtained, and Mr. Parch said he was currently not aware. Alderman Robinson said there were many rental properties in his Ward that he wished to learn about their conditions. Alderman Parker said more time should be spent with what Council wished to accomplish with rental housing, and expressed interest in having an entity to assist residents with unresolved issues.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 7-0-0 roll call vote. Aye: Robinson, Hurt, Gilbert, Swanson, Parker, Poulos, and Geenen. Nay: None. Absent: None.

10. Goal #4: Increase Population through Livable Neighborhoods

MOTION:

Alderman Parker moved to consider the motion; Alderman Poulos seconded.

Martin Luther King Jr. Center Director Jerry Jones addressed Council regarding the Human Rights and Fair Housing commissions. He provided a brief summary of attempts to mediate the concerns of each commissions, and the struggles therein. He noted the resources needed to investigate complaints, and said City Attorneys Morrison and Lareau had been consulted to assist in developing a stronger ordinance. Alderman Geenen asked if Mr. Jones had taken notice of a stronger need for fair housing as a result of the pandemic. Mr. Jones replied no, but speculated that the reason was because mediation is the only power of the Human Rights Commission. Alderman Geenen asked if Mr. Jones or the MLK Center staff had seen the need for help with fair housing intensify due to the pandemic, and if a specific funding amount for staffing was needed to address the problem. Mr. Jones replied yes, and the main focus of any staffing should be arranging hierarchy to ensure no conflict of interest, as well as adequate training and development. He also discussed hopes for strong marketing for the potential revision of the Human Rights Commission so residents see it as a resource. Alderman Geenen briefly discussed staff shortages at Project Now that has prevented emergency assistance from being disbursed.

Alderman Parker asked what the progress had been on the first bullet point of action step 1. Mr. Tweet replied a study session would be planned for August 2021 to discuss cultural competency analysis, equity planning, affirmative action, and a diversity inclusion workforce plan. Alderman Parker noted the existing report on impediments to fair housing and asked when items would be completed. Mr. Tweet said a presentation was forthcoming in July 2021 that would be more in-depth. Alderman Parker asked who was in charge of implementing the impediments to fair housing analysis. Mr. Tweet said that information should be available in the aforementioned study session.

Police Chief VenHuizen addressed Council on action step 2 regarding safety and gun violence. He discussed the status of manpower with the Police Department with regards to the status of this action step 2, and noted the decline in applications. He said the particular goal is broad, and referred to the listed actions the Department has undertaken to address the goal. He asked Council for additional direction. Alderman Poulos asked if the applications who declined offers had accepted elsewhere before Rock Island was able to make an offer, and Chief VenHuizen confirmed yes. Both agreed that offers needed to be more aggressive. Alderman Poulos asked

about a program that helps determine locations of shots fired. Chief VenHuizen discussed the Shot Spotter system and the costs involved, and noted that the Peoria PD found the system to be beneficial. Alderman Parker asked about the neighborhood camera program and whether or not it has been helpful. Chief VenHuizen said it has been helpful, and some footage has been used in criminal investigations.

Alderman Parker asked how the budget process functioned with staff shortages. Chief VenHuizen confirmed that the department budgets for open positions but lists them as vacant. He also noted shortages of staffing at State police academies, which limits the number of available spots. Alderman Hurt asked how many spots were locked in to the next academy sessions. Chief VenHuizen replied six in September 2021, but they have asked for nine in the event that spots open. He discussed the nature of preparing offers to qualified applicants in the Quad Cities area, and the need to potentially extend earlier offers in order to lock in candidates.

Mr. Parch addressed Council on action step 5 regarding promotion and connection with neighborhoods. He said a study session is planned for August of 2021, and the department could use additional direction from Council. Mr. Tweet added the City formerly had some very active neighborhoods for which Staff was also heavily involved, but that has changed over time. He said this action step is designated to get residents involved and active in particular neighborhoods. Alderman Parker said this presented an additional capacity challenge, as the City's Community and Economic Development staff had many neighborhood organizers to facilitate activity. Alderman Robinson said it is difficult to promote neighborhoods without a communication plan.

Ms. Tallman addressed Council on action step 4 regarding collaboration with area realtors. She said DARI is attempting to build a stronger relationship with developers and realtors in order to better market the residential and commercial products. She said the plan is to meet with individual agencies for discussions to prepare for an event where all agencies are brought together. She noted the Residential Housing Resources Guide that is completed and will be presented to Council in June 2021. She discussed potential incentives and programs to attract new residents and businesses, including a State program to potentially provide up to \$40,000 in student loan forgiveness. Alderman Geenen noted that could be a game-changer in terms of attracting new residents. Alderwoman Gilbert asked if there were links to these programs on the DARI website. Ms. Tallman said they are on Facebook, but the City needs put up the link and she was not sure if it was yet.

Mr. Parch addressed Council on action step 5 regarding cleanup and beautification efforts and nuisance ordinances. He said the department would provide Council with an overview and updates in July of 2021. Alderman Geenen said he receives many nuisance complaints regarding dogs, and asked to have that included amongst the other items in action step 5. Mr. Tweet said this could be addressed along with the other items. Alderman Parker asked what department was in charge of animal control. Chief VenHuizen came up to the front and said there are civilian officers that handle both animal control and abandoned vehicles. Alderman Parker asked if that position had additional duties. Chief VenHuizen replied there are many complaints and it is a time-consuming matter. He confirmed they perform other functions including road kill clean up, but large animals are handled by Public Works. Mayor Thoms said the City's ordinance on animals does not carry much weight. Chief VenHuizen said the City has an ordinance, but the department must also follow State statute, which is ambiguous in terms of adequacy for animals. Alderman Parker asked if the County had an animal control officer. Chief VenHuizen confirmed yes, but they were not obligated to provide services. Alderman Robinson asked Mr. Tweet if there was a way for residents to submit nuisance complaints via the website. Mr. Tweet said that was being considered.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 7-0-0 roll call vote. Aye: Robinson, Hurt, Gilbert, Swanson, Parker, Poulos, and Geenen. Nay: None. Absent: None.

11. ARP Process Discussion

MOTION:

Alderman Parker moved to postpone the motion until June 14, 2021; Alderman Hurt seconded.

Alderwoman Gilbert said there should be consensus on a deadline to discuss the measure. Mr. Tweet said he would attempt to set a date prior to the next City Council meeting for a special discussion.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 7-0-0 roll call vote. Aye: Robinson, Hurt, Gilbert, Swanson, Parker, Poulos, and Geenen. Nay: None. Absent: None.

12. Other Business

No additional business was discussed.

13. Motion to Adjourn

MOTION:

Alderman Geenen moved to adjourn; Alderman Poulos seconded.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 7-0-0 roll call vote. Aye: Robinson, Hurt, Gilbert, Swanson, Parker, Poulos, and Geenen. Nay: None. Absent: None.

The meeting adjourned at 9:53 p.m.

City Clerk

Josh Adams, Interim