

CITY OF ROCK ISLAND
CITY COUNCIL MEETING

City Hall

1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island IL

City Council Chambers, 3rd Floor

6/8/2021 - Minutes

1. Call to Order

Mayor Thoms called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

2. This meeting will also be conducted by audio and video conference without the requirement of 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 Jr., Alderman Randy Hurt, Alderwoman Judith Gilbert, Alderwoman Jenni Swanson, Alderman Dylan Parker, Alderman Mark Poulos, Alderman Dave Geenen, and Mayor Mike Thoms.

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 regarding the need for the City to allocate a portion of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to Friendship Manor. He summarized the challenges Friendship Manor and their industry have endured since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. He provided financial statistics on losses sustained by the industry and the Manor itself, and noted the Manor's dedication to their employees during the pandemic.

Alderman Hurt asked Mr. Pappas if the monies for COVID-19 testing at Friendship Manor was self-funded or Federally funded. Mr. Pappas replied the Manor received funding for the first half of 2020 for testing, but has not received any since. Alderman Geenen added he has heard that many non-profit agencies have pulled projects and drawn upon all resources to get through the pandemic whilst keeping employees. Mr. Pappas said he is seeing a mental health crisis with both staff and residents due to being confined, and some exhibit symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He noted if aid did not come soon, the Manor may not become viable, and layoffs may occur.

Rock Island resident Cathy Jordan addressed Council regarding ARPA funds for Delacerda House. She described the organization as the largest housing provider for the homeless population and those living with HIV. She said the organization is aligning themselves with other non-profits in the Quad Cities and nearby regions in asking for assistance from the City to collaborate with them.

Rock Island resident Thurgood Brooks addressed Council regarding ARPA funds. He said the funds present a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform the City, and they must be used wisely, fairly, and with commitment to a number of goals. He stated the goals as ascertaining equity and distribution, serving each area of the City according to need, obtaining extensive input from residents, pursuing long-term sustainability to see future revenue generation, and providing transparency throughout the ARPA process. He explained each goal in detail.

Rock Island Third Ward resident Angelo Julien addressed Council regarding ARPA funds and emails sent to Council members. He provided suggestions to Council for how to allocate funding for the City, including holding the funds to see what projects would be needed over time. He then discussed emails he sent to Council following recent discussions on police pursuits in the City. He noted he did not receive replies from many Council members, and suggested all residents should receive something back for giving their time and concerns. Mayor Thoms noted that ARPA funds could not be used to pay down debt.

Rock Island resident Derek Ball addressed Council regarding the need for the City to allocate ARPA funds to Marriage and Family Counseling Service. He said even a small percentage of relief for a non-profit such as his could be life-changing and could serve many City residents. He offered to help with the process in order for the City to allocate funding in such a way that they can have the greatest impact on the most Rock Island residents as possible.

7. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Discussion

Mayor Thoms began by explaining what ARPA was, and how much the Federal Government disbursed. Alderman Geenen confirmed the amount at \$1.8 trillion. Alderman Robinson recommended a stop time for the meeting as to keep the discussion productive. Alderwoman Gilbert asked what Council expected for discussion outcomes. Mayor Thoms said his understanding was Council would develop the process for allocation and not the allocations themselves at the meeting. Alderman Robinson said council should ask what needs to be

achieved. Alderman Geenen replied it should be a massive, full recovery in three years where residents have money in their accounts, can fix their homes, and the City has money in the general fund to repair roads.

Alderwoman Swanson said ARPA funds have restrictions, and must be used in accordance. She encouraged stabilization for the City and warned against not addressing shortcomings that became evident during the pandemic. She said the key thing to remember is ARPA funds are rescue funds and have rules for use. Mr. Tweet discussed documents from both Alderwoman Gilbert and compiled from Council discussions regarding what the discovery process and topics could be for ARPA fund allocation.

Alderman Parker discussed the need for a recovery plan, and said he compared this scenario to the way natural disasters are handled. He noted there specialists that develop recovery plans for communities, and Council members are not experts at recovery. He suggested hiring a consultant to assist with the process. He said Council should identify needs before deciding to attempt to transform or stabilize the City. Alderman Geenen reminded Council of the Staff recommendation to create an investment policy for ARPA funds, and suggested placing some funds in money market accounts similar to the City's regular investments. He added there are creative things Council could do to help meet the needs of non-profits. Mr. Tweet reminded Council that the City's investment policy was changed in order to handle ARPA funds.

Alderwoman Gilbert said the City should figure how to hear the needs of residents and businesses. Alderman Robinson said the needs assessment currently taking place on the West End could be applied to the whole City. Mayor Thoms reminded Council that the City's needs should also be considered. Alderman Robinson replied that the data collected could guide Council on where funds need to be allocated. Alderman Poulos said he thinks the City should operate like FEMA, and noted the pandemic is not like other disasters, as there are no identifiable damages. He added that infrastructure should also receive attention to protect the City and residents in the future.

Alderman Geenen discussed the effect of certain relief benefits that will be offered or are being offered to residents. He said many residents would benefit from additional financial literacy. Mayor Thoms discussed alternate methods of collecting needs data from residents. Alderman Parker said he did not want a door-to-door consultant, but Council needs to understand how the pandemic has affected the community. He added this was an opportunity through an expert to capture how to reach the public in advance of future planning. Mr. Tweet asked Council if he should be reaching out to consultants. Alderman Parker replied he has an interest in disaster expert recommendations. Alderman Robinson said the City needs to understand how the pandemic has affected people, as there is no precedence for this.

Mayor Thoms asked Council what a transformation would look like. Alderman Robinson said desired outcomes should drive what the City does. Alderwoman Swanson said it is not fiscally sound to tie strategic plans to restricted funds. She added her previous experience with disaster recovery, the first step is to identify immediate needs, and then bring stabilization to the City. Alderman Geenen said non-profits may not be prepared to handle the funds. Alderwoman Gilbert noted residents will be watching closely how the City decides to allocate the funds. Alderman Parker said part of the recovery plan should include a communication plan to residents. Mayor Thoms noted this could be an opportunity to collaborate with local communities and see what their process is. Alderman Parker said there is an opportunity for the City to lead the Quad Cities in focusing on renters and their needs. Alderman Geenen added that many residents in the City are worth consulting to assist in making decisions. Alderman Robinson also noted the need to handle communication with refugees.

Mayor Thoms asked Council how soon Council wanted to have Unplugged meetings to communicate with residents. Alderwoman Swanson said there should be more than one public

meeting in order to cater to the needs of residents. Alderman Geenen asked if the funds could be used to hire Staff to assist Council. Mr. Tweet confirmed yes. Mayor Thoms suggested any potential Staff should be under the direction of the City Manager. Mr. Tweet asked if there was a consensus on how to collect data or the need for a consultant. Alderwoman Gilbert said the City needs to gather additional information, and did not think a decision could yet be made regarding a consultant. Mr. Tweet noted that in this scenario, a consultant would be hired to use their expertise to move the City forward. Alderman Parker said Mr. Tweet was correct, and an expert is needed to guide how the funding is spent. Alderwoman Swanson said she thought the Council was committed to executing a plan. Alderman Geenen noted there is leveraging the City could do to make the funds go further.

Mr. Tweet asked Council if there was a consensus that consultant options should be explored. Alderman Hurt asked what the cost for a consultant would be and whether that would be covered under the ARPA funds. Mr. Tweet replied there has been no contact with consultants, but the costs associated would be covered by ARPA. Alderman Hurt said there was no sense to hiring a consultant without a plan. Mr. Tweet asked for consensus from Council that a consultant was needed to assist in developing a recovery plan. All Council members confirmed yes verbally or by nodding.

Mr. Tweet discussed options for hiring staff to manage the process. Alderman Parker said he considered DARI (Development Association of Rock Island) to be a consultant, and noted the City already has an agreement with them for services. He suggested a similar model to manage the ARPA fund process. Alderman Poulos suggested an annual audit to check the status of the process. Alderwoman Swanson suggested having an audit done twice a year. Alderman Robinson reiterated that the data collection taking place in the West Side could be applied City-wide. Alderwoman Swanson said once a consultant is brought in, it could then be determined how many staff would need to be hired for the process.

Mr. Tweet asked Council if they preferred to wait until surveys are finished before acquiring direct public input. Alderwoman Swanson said communication and education is needed to determine which requests are possible. Alderman Poulos noted the problem of biased results with regards to surveys. He suggested a consultant could assist Council in developing the right questions to avoid bias. Mayor Thoms said public discussion should not be limited to the use of ARPA funds. Alderman Poulos asked who would be running public meetings in order to avoid Open Meetings Act (OMA) violations. Mr. Tweet said they would be public meetings, and there would be no OMA violation. Alderman Hurt said the City should be clear that the public meetings would be designated specifically for ARPA concerns. Mayor Thoms added a clarification that Unplugged was a town hall-style meeting where all members of the public can attend.

Alderman Geenen said a consultant may be able to weigh in on whether a town hall-style of meeting would be necessary. Alderman Hurt said Council would still need a way to know resident concerns. Alderman Parker said Council needs to communicate to the public what the plan and process is. Alderman Robinson said a public meeting would build trust with the community and keep them engaged. Alderwoman Gilbert said residents are very interested in knowing what will happen with ARPA funds. Alderman Robinson suggested having a meeting at Rock Island High School as a central, large location. Alderwoman Gilbert asked about the capability of locations to carry video of a meeting. Council suggested various locations to hold meetings.

Mr. Tweet summarized what the discussion had been to that point in the meeting. He suggested having three Unplugged meetings at various times and locations. Alderman Hurt asked if the ARPA guidelines from the U.S. Treasury were currently on the City's website. Mr. Tweet confirmed they were not yet there, but would be. Alderman Hurt suggested directing residents to the City's website on a mailer card in advance of the meetings for further preparedness. Alderman Geenen said the legislation for ARPA was written in such a way that provided flexibility

and creativity for municipalities. Mr. Tweet said new guidelines are forthcoming from the Treasury, and he would get the information to Council members. Alderman Geenen asked if all Council members would need to be present at each public meeting. Mr. Tweet responded it was up to Council, but he would like as many as possible. He encouraged Council to also have their own Ward meetings.

8. Strategic Planning Discussion

Mayor Thoms mentioned this item had been covered in the previous discussion about the ARPA.

9. Other Business

Alderwoman Gilbert discussed the ARPA process outline she had shared with other Council members.

Alderman Geenen asked what was considered lost revenue under the guidelines for ARPA funds. Mr. Tweet replied it was the City's lost revenue, and discussed how it would be calculated. He said the funds would not be absorbed into the General Fund, but would instead be a line item that required the same approval process as any funds. He noted the funds would be available within the General Fund until it runs out, and must be spent. Alderwoman Gilbert noted her handout provided criteria for evaluating any requests for funding, be it non-profits or otherwise.

Mayor Thoms discussed the challenges in making internet access available to all residents. Alderman Poulos suggested a potential neighborhood hot spot for internet access. Mr. Tweet suggested working with providers to potentially enable residents to receive discounted rates on internet. Alderwoman Swanson noted even with internet access, not all residents had the necessary hardware to use it.

Mayor Thoms discussed the pending approval of the acquisition of Jumer's Casino by Bally's.

Alderman Robinson asked if there was knowledge of how Rock Island County planned to use ARPA funds. Mayor Thoms replied they have not made a final decision. He noted an upcoming meeting with local Mayors and City Managers to understand what other communities planned to do with their funding.

10. Motion to Adjourn

MOTION:

Alderman Hurt moved to adjourn; Alderman Robinson 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 8:07 p.m.

Josh Adams, Interim City Clerk