

CITY OF NORWALK
PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE
JANUARY 5, 2010

ATTENDANCE: Andrew Conroy, Chair; Fred Bondi;
Douglas Hempstead; Nora King; Kelly Straniti;
John Tobin

STAFF: Hal Alvord, Director

OTHERS: Diane Cece; Larry Ruttenberg

Mr. Conroy called the meeting to order at 7:34 p.m.

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. PROJECT UPDATES

Drainage/Sewer Extension: Buckingham/Lockwood pipe replacement

Mr. Alvord reported that Yankee Gas is working and is relocating lines. Mr. Alvord said that he expects to get the bid package out later this month, because they are working with the Church on the corner on easements. Mr. Ruttenberg said that there are blue flags on his property. He was told that the blue flags are for water and gas is yellow. Mr. Alvord explained how "call before you dig" works.

Olmstead Place Drainage Improvements

Mr. Alvord explained that they have to remove one dead branch, but it will be done shortly. Mr. Bondi asked about the meeting following the last meeting. Mr. Alvord said that he met with the neighbors and that Ms. Lindstrom was there also.

James Street over Silvermine River

Mr. Alvord reported that the DOT held a public information meeting and took all of the comments.

Old Tokeneke Bridge – removal

Mr. Alvord reported that Mayor Moccia wrote to David Campbell, Darien's First Selectman. Mr. Alvord said that he received a call from Darien's Public Works director. Mr. Alvord distributed photos of the arch stones in the Bridge comparing October 2008 and December 2009. He said that there is one pressure stone holding the arch in place. He said that the Bridge is in bad shape and that needs to be addressed.

Mr. Conroy asked if there had been a "Danger" sign posted at the Bridge. Mr. Alvord said that the Sign Department is creating one. Mr. Alvord said that depending on how the Bridge collapses, could create flooding. He said that there is no safe way to push the stones back. He said that if they remove the Bridge, they would probably knock it into the River.

Ms. King said that she was not in support of dumping debris into the River. Mr. Alvord said that the best way is to build a false arch under the Bridge. He said that they would remove as much as the superstructure as they could without putting the stones in the water.

Mr. Hempstead asked if they would remove any stones from the water and Mr. Alvord said that they would. Ms. Lindstrom asked Mr. Alvord if he anticipated that the Bridge would fall before they could remove it. Mr. Alvord said that he does; there is no money in to remove the Bridge.

Ms. Lindstrom asked about the liability and who was responsible for the Bridge. Mr. Alvord said that the liability is equally shared between Norwalk and Darien. Mr. Conroy said that Darien sent a letter to the City during Mayor Esposito's administration saying that it does not have the right to repair the Bridge and that they did not want the Bridge repaired.

Mr. Alvord said that Mayor Moccia included the letter he sent to the former First Selectwoman of Darien and her response. She said that she agreed to put the repairs into their budget, but came back and said that they could not afford to do so, because they had a flooding issue to address.

Mr. Conroy said that Darien threatened to sue Norwalk if they fixed the Bridge. Mr. Alvord explained that in 1936 the DOT deeded the Bridge to both towns. Ms. King asked why no one renovated the Bridge to make it usable. She asked if the Historical Society knew about this. Mr. Conroy said that pictures were provided, but there was never a response from the Rowayton Historical Society.

Mr. Alvord said that this project will require various approvals, including the Army Corps of Engineers. Mr. Hempstead asked for an estimate to re-hab the Bridge vs. a tear down. Mr. Alvord said that he could give a thumbnail

estimate. He described the necessary repairs. Mr. King said that she was curious to see what Darien wants to do,

Ms. Straniti said that she is very excited about the redesign of the traffic signal at Route 123. Mr. Alvord explained that is a State signal. He said that CL&P is removing the old conduits and will be installing new ones. They are looking at an August 2010 opening,

Westmere Bridge over Farm Creek

Mr. Alvord said that he is going to try and schedule a public information meeting in February.

Old Police Headquarters

Mr. Hempstead asked Mr. Alvord if he received input about cost. Mr. Alvord said that the cost estimate is lower than in other years.

Ms. King asked about the schools. Mr. Alvord said that everything on the list is managed by the DPW. He explained that building management for the schools is overseen by the Norwalk Facilities Construction Committee. He said that the Board of Education is eligible for e-funds, but the DPW is not.

Noah's Lane Drainage

Mr. Alvord said that Mr. Hempstead had complaints from Noah's Lane.

Five Mile River

Ms. King said that she wanted this on the agenda. She said that she gets 10 calls each month about this. She said that she needs to see the study and that a wait and see approach is not the right solution. Ms. King said that she does not like that information is being kept from people. Mr. Alvord said that he had not seen the study from New Canaan. He said that it is not a watershed study.

Mr. Bondi said that when the Army Corps of Engineers knocked down the mill, it began flooding problems behind Goodwives Shopping Center in Darien. Ms. King said that Mayor Moccia and Christopher Shays were supposed to commit to doing a study. Mr. Bondi said that the State did not come through. He said that there were a lot of public hearings held on this, and there was a lot of discussion, but nothing came of it

Mr. Alvord said that he has been in meetings with the Army Corps and it would be a 65/35 cost share and they would have to do a benefit cost ratio. Before they could do a study, they need proof that people have had claims and received payments from their insurance companies or FEMA. Mr. Wagman was asked to check with the residents and no one has received payments. Mr. Alvord said that the City does not own the River, so public funds cannot be spent.

Mr. Conroy asked if there was a transcript of the meeting with Mr. Shays. Ms. King said that this has to be addressed; there are 60-70 people who are part of this group and they believe that the City does not want to pay for a watershed study. Mr. Alvord said that he spoke with most of those folks, but when he asked for proof, no one can demonstrate that they have experienced flood damage, except for Mckendrie Court. He said that FEMA will not assist those residents because the house is in the middle of a flood plain.

Safe Routes to School

Ms. Lindstrom said that she wanted to focus on this. Mr. Alvord said that the problem is that the staff is handling far too many projects. Mr. Conroy asked what the solution to this would be. Mr. Alvord said that after meeting with Finance, they may be losing some engineering staff. Ms. King suggested outsourcing the work since the money is there. Mr. Alvord explained that the money granted was based on doing the design in house and they need to have a program manager oversee the consultant. He said that the DOT is in the same shape in that they have a hiring freeze.

Ms. King suggested hiring someone to manage one, two or three things for him. Ms. Lindstrom added that the money is depreciating. She said that she can't see that money sitting there for another year.

Mr. Tobin asked if they could direct which project to do. He said that he does not know why this has been sitting for three years. Ms. Lindstrom said that they listen to Mr. Alvord. Mr. Tobin said that Darien is waiting and Norwalk is waiting and now the Bridge is going to fall. Ms. Straniti said that she has been on this Committee for four years and Ms. Lindstrom brings this up all the time, but it is not moving.

Mr. Bondi asked Mr. Alvord if he could designate someone to work on this project. Mr. Alvord said that he could, but then he would have to pull that person off of another project. Mr. Hempstead said that from the Common Council side, they need to figure out how to manage this because the City is not going to hire more staff.

Mr. Conroy said that it is not their job to tell the Director what to do, but they could encourage him to hire someone. Mr. Hempstead said that this is not directed to Mr. Alvord.

** MR. CONROY MOVED THAT IT IS THE SENSE OF THE COMMITTEE
THAT THE DIRECTOR SHOULD INVESTIGATE HIRING A
CONSULTANT FOR THE SAFE ROADS TO SCHOOL PROJECT
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

Pavement Management 2009

Mr. Conroy commended Mr. Alvord on getting the paving done. Mr. Bondi asked for an updated list of the roads to be done. Mr. Alvord will provide that information at the next meeting.

Mr. Hempstead suggested offering overtime to work on projects. Mr. Alvord said that this is a budgetary issue. He added that people are working long hours and are not asking for overtime.

Mr. Bondi said that DPW and Recreation and Parks are coming in with zero budgets, but there are heavy weight salaries in Education and it is not the teachers. He said that they have to start combining positions.

WPCA

Mr. Alvord said that his staff manages those projects.

Parking Authority

Mr. Alvord said that his staff manages those projects.

GIS Master Plan

Mr. Alvord said that this is going well.

Mr. Bondi said that there is work being done at the Smith Street Barn and the trucks need to be removed.

2. NORWALK TRANSFER STATION

Mr. Alvord reviewed the tonnage report. He said that they are beginning to see an impact from marketing recycling to the residents and schools. He said that he is meeting with school principals to push recycling in the schools. Ms. King said that based on the increase in revenue that could offset the cost for yard waste pickup. Mr. Alvord said that he has no control over revenues. Ms. King asked if they were making money selling the green recycling containers. Mr. Alvord said that are not, because they are being sold at cost.

3. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ITEMS

Mr. Alvord said that the motors were tested and the test went well, They do not anticipate any closures at the Stroffolino Bridge.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PORTION

Public input (Visitors to the Committee meeting may speak to any item on the agenda. Comments shall be limited to no more than five (5) minutes per speaker)

Ms. Diane Cece, Olmstead Place wished everyone a happy new year. She said that to the best of her knowledge, Penna has not removed the debris. She asked Mr. Alvord if he could confirm. She said that one of the piles of debris causes flooding.

Ms. Cece said that the former pond flooded during the last major rain storm. She said that she contacted customer service. She said that she knows that there is nothing in the budget, but said that there has to be a way to get a response from customer service. She said that they should be able to handle the calls and get the information.

Ms. Cece said that I-95 flooded during the last storm at Exit 16 and this only started happening since the flood work began. Mr. Alvord said that he called the State and they did not know what he was talking about. Ms. Cece said that the State closed the road. Mr. Alvord said that none of the drainage on I-95 is connected to Olmstead Place.

Ms. Cece said that she feels that the Aptec filters that were installed in the backyards are useless. She said that there needs to be follow up maintenance. Ms. Cece said that she needs an answer from Mr. Alvord on the flow rate.

Ms. Cece said that if the City could authorizing spending money on storm drain filters, they have to understand the benefits and maintain the filters. In response to Ms. King's question, Mr. Alvord said that there are over 200 filters throughout the City.

Mr. Alvord said that the storm drainage system is supposed to be cleaned annually, but the City is at 15%. Ms. Cece said that she read that the life span for the sponge material is 2-3 years. She said that she was not sure why the filter was put in her yard; it may give people a false sense of security. She said that she is not happy with the filters. Ms. King suggested publishing a pipe cleaning schedule on the City website.

Ms. Cece said that the City is non-compliant with the MS4 permit. She said that the City has to comply with that for a number of reasons. She said that the Director publically admits that Norwalk is non-compliant. Ms. Cece said that the fines could add up to a lot more than putting money into the budget for pipe cleaning.

Ms. Cece said that Mr. Ruttenberg had to leave and asked her to comment. He said that he felt that the City's exposure is too great. Ms. Cece said that the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association is finalizing their position on the Safe Routes to School program and asked that it be made a priority. They are suggesting that alternatives be examined.

Ms. Cece thanked Mr. Alvord for the new road system map.

BUSINESS PORTION

1. APPROVE THE MINUTES OF PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2009 (tabled pending revisions from Diane Cece)

The following corrections were made to the minutes:

Page 6: third paragraph, last sentence: Mr. Alvord said that he would check if no parking signs were previously approved for this location.

** MR. BONDI MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS CORRECTED
** MOTION PASSED WITH TWO (2) ABSTENTIONS (MR. BONDI AND MR. TOBIN)

2. APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2009

The following correction was made to the minutes:

Page 2: first paragraph, first sentence: add to be done in the spring

Page 4: fifth paragraph, fourth sentence should read: Mr. Conroy said that he would prefer to have a separate meeting about the issue, and agreed to meet with Ms. Cece on Friday, December 4th at 2:00 in the DPW conference room. Ms. Lindstrom said that she would also attend.

Page 7, third paragraph, third sentence should read: Ms. Straniti stated her concern with the impact on residents to have to pay to use the dump

Pages 8, third paragraph, add the following: Ms. King said that she was not in favor of taking part of the park to compensate for a lack of parking.

** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS CORRECTED

** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

3. DISCUSSION – PUBLIC WORKS FY 2010-11 OPERATING BUDGET

Mr. Alvord said that he tried to provide an overview of what capabilities were available at certain levels. He said that the budget guidance last year and this year was to not ask for additional personnel. Mr. Alvord said that they never recovered from early retirements and that they have lived with 8-9 early retirements. He said that they currently have 8 vacancies.

Mr. Alvord said that what he submitted to Finance is in compliance with their guidance. He said that his guidance to the staff is to maintain the City's infrastructure. He said that they struggled with yard waste this year. He added that they are struggling with snow plowing.

Ms. King asked if they could outsource yard waste. Mr. Alvord said that takes money. Mr. Conroy asked Mr. Alvord if he knew the cost to outsource. Mr. Alvord said that he had no idea. The Committee talked about yard waste and Mr. Hempstead said that between 1980-1990 the City used to sell leaf compost bins, which was a big savings. Mr. Alvord said that he has spent time looking at different ways to do yard debris disposal. He said that a lot of communities do not collect yard waste.

Mr. Conroy asked Mr. Alvord how the Committee could help with recycling. Mr. Alvord said that the schools need to get on board; the more information they can get out to them, the better. He said that there are teachers who do not want to use the blue bins. Ms. King suggested picking a couple of schools and having them team up with another school. Mr. Alvord noted that he does not run the schools and is not the one to make those decisions.

Ms. King said that she has concerns about 15% of the drains being cleaned. She asked what percentage of Stamford is tracked every year. Mr. Alvord said that he did not know. He said that he meets with others quarterly and they talk often. He said that she should not look at Stamford because they have real issue with recycling and garbage. Ms. King said that she is looking for a benchmark.

Ms. King said that expecting to clean 15% of the drains is scary and asked how Norwalk compares to other cities. Mr. Alvord said that the supervisor who is responsible for the drains has a plan, but he can't execute the plan because the staff is assigned to other projects.

Mr. Hempstead said that privatizing leaf pick up is a violation of the union contract. Mr. Alvord said that there is language in the current contract about contracting out anything. Garbage collection is a discretionary service and could be eliminated.

Mr. Alvord said that someone has to prioritize the list. Mr. Hempstead said that until the 1980's the City never picked up leaves. Ms. Lindstrom said that people would have to be educated if they start eliminating services. Mr. Alvord agreed.

4. DISCUSSION - PUBLIC WORKS FY 2010-11 CAPITAL BUDGET

Mr. Alvord said that that he has not received guidance for the capital budget. He said that he has too few people trying to manage too many projects. Mr. Alvord said that the footpaths are not cleaned, because they do not have the staff.

5. SCHEDULE A PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING THE ELIMINATION OF THE "THREE TONS FREE" POLICY AT THE TRANSFER STATION AND YARD DEBRIS SITE. PUBLIC HEARING TO BE CONDUCTED ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2010 AT 7:30 P.M. IN ROOM 101, NORWALK CITY HALL

** MR. BONDI MOVED TO SCHEDULE A PUBLIC HEARING

Mr. Conroy said that there were offers for 1 and 1 ½ tons. Mr. Conroy and Mr. Bondi said that they would propose that. Mr. Hempstead said that he would propose nothing. Ms. Straniti said that she would propose 1 ½ tons. Mr. Hempstead said that they have been having this discussion for the past two years. He said that this is a clean way to generate revenue.

Mr. Conroy asked Mr. Alvord to amend the public hearing notice to one ton free.

** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

Mr. Bondi asked if they should schedule the public hearing at 7:00 p.m. instead of at 7:30 p.m. Mr. Conroy agreed.

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, February 2, 2010
Room 101, Norwalk City Hall

** MR. BONDI MOVED TO ADJOURN

** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services