

City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, March 25, 2021

6:30 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Thomas F. Powers, Chair
Stephen L. Hooper, Vice Chair
Raleigh C. Ormerod
Bettina A. Chadbourne

Members Not Present:

Michael Remy

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney
Beth Fox , ACM/Human Resources Director
David Hickling, Airport Director
Aaron Costa, Operations Manager
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works
Director/Emergency Management Director

Chair Powers called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

1) Farmer's Market of Keene – Requesting a Waiver or Reduction in Fees

Economic Development Director Med Kopczynski addressed the committee first and stated the Farmer's Market comes before the City each year with a request to utilize spaces. Formerly, they used spaces in the Commercial Street lot, but have now moved to Gilbo Avenue. This year they are requesting two things; utilization of spaces and any help the City can provide with reference to the cost of parking and the cost of their electrical access.

Mr. Kopczynski noted this year has been difficult for all businesses; these businesses will need help get themselves back on their feet. He added anything the City can do to do to bring traffic downtown would help. He explained the Farmer's Market brings people downtown and they pay for parking spaces, which would otherwise go unused. Their patrons visit local restaurants and might do some local shopping.

Councilor Hooper asked whether the Market would still be open on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Mr. Kopczynski answered in the affirmative.

City Manager Elizabeth Dragon stated staff is in support of this request. She indicated the City is in support of providing free parking for the Farmer's Market but anyone who visits the market will be required to pay for parking. The Manager noted the parking fund has been struggling financially since the pandemic. The parking fund is entirely self-funded and any revenue received pays to run the parking program as well as many of the beautification efforts and maintenance downtown. The Manager stated this year the City will be receiving some Covid-19 relief funds to offset this loss and he felt Federal relief will help with providing this financial assistance.

Councilor Ormerod noted the City made some concessions last year and asked how the City can determine if providing this assistance will make good economic sense moving forward. He clarified the relief funds will offset the assistance the City is providing. The Manager agreed, in that the parking fund will be able to recuperate some of the lost expenses, staff feels it makes sense to grant this request.

Councilor Chadbourne clarified the City will be waving both the electric cost and the parking cost. Mr. Kopczynski answered in the affirmative. The Councilor went on to say the City has had a long standing relationship with the Farmer's Market and at one point the City was looking for land on Water Street, or an area next to the Ashuelot Park and for each of those instances, the Market was going to receive free space. She felt the City has always looked at helping the Farmer's Market and they have been included in many decisions.

Councilor Hooper made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Ormerod.

On 4-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends a waiver of the parking rental fee of \$932.00 as well as the \$60.00 access fee to the City's electrical service for the 2021 season of the Farmer's Market.

The City Manager addressed the committee and stated she had just received an email from the Economic Development Director regarding the Farmer's Market item, which calls for a specific amount for parking (\$900). Mr. Kopczynski does not feel this is an accurate number for the spaces they would need. The Manager asked whether the motion could be amended to say "waive the cost of parking for the footprint needed for the Farmer's Market" which will give staff more flexibility. The Manager asked for the City Attorney's opinion.

Attorney Mullins stated because the meeting has not adjourned and this is a committee process, he felt it would be appropriate to reconsider the first motion, second the motion and take a vote on that motion.

Councilor Ormerod made a motion to reconsider the motion for the Farmer's Market Requesting a Waiver or Reduction in Fees. The motion was seconded by Councilor Chadbourne, which motion was unanimously approved by a roll call vote.

Councilor Hooper made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Ormerod.

On 4-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends a waiver of the parking rental fee as well as the \$60.00 access fee to the City's electrical service for the 2021 season of the Farmer's Market.

2) Request to Accept 2021 Wellness Grant - Human Resources Director

Human Resources Director Beth Fox stated she was here regarding the Wellness Grant from Health Trust to assist with employee activities. Last year the City received \$2,000 and organized activities the Health Trust was offering as the City. She noted the City was not able to organize the usual activities because of Covid-19. Some of the funds were used for healthy food and to build employee morale.

This year the grant has been increased to \$2,375 because the City met the goals set for the organization. Ms. Fox expressed her appreciation for these funds.

Councilor Hooper made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Chadbourne.

On 4-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommend that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept the wellness grant from Health Trust to be used for employee wellness activities in 2021.

3) Report on 2020 Donations and Request to Solicit Donations for 2021 - Human Resources Director

Ms. Fox began by expressing her appreciation to the organizations who provided donations this past year. She noted to a donation from Delta Dental who donated 200 oral care kits and Target donated gift cards to purchase toiletries. The City also received gift cards, which the City used to provide incentive to employees for getting their flu shots.

Councilor Hooper made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Ormerod.

On 4-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to accept donations associated with 2021 solicitation efforts, should they occur related to employee activities.

4) Lease agreement for Airport Amusements – Runway Fund Park, LLC - Airport Director

Airport Director David Hickling was the next speaker who stated there is a group that is interested in acquiring the land on Old Homestead Highway and turn it into the same type of use the site previously was used for; restaurant, go cart activities etc. The City has an appraiser to obtain a fair market value to begin negotiations.

Councilor Chadbourne asked if the City has ever considered selling this land and asked if it was beneficial for the City to continue to be property owners. Mr. Hickling in response stated because this property was purchased with FAA monies, the City will need to put those funds towards the Federal share of capital projects and any revenue received from the sale of the property could not be put towards the general fund; however, by leasing the land the funds would go towards the operating budget.

Councilor Hooper noted this is another effort to build up the airport and thanked staff for their efforts.

Councilor Ormerod stated this will help bring people into the area and is an economic development multiplier.

Councilor Hooper made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Ormerod.

On 4-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommend that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute a lease with Runway Fun Park LLC for a parcel of land at the airport.

5) NPDES Technical Assistance Change Order 2 - WWTP Operations Manager

WWTP Operations Manager Aaron Costa was the next speaker. Mr. Costa explained the City's Wastewater Treatment Plant is permitted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to discharge treated wastewater into the Ashuelot River and this process is done 24/7 365 days of the year at an average flow of about 3 million gallons per day.

The City executed a \$95,000 contract with Weston and Sampson Engineers in 2016 for technical assistance. Since that time the City has been preparing for the permit renewal process. On May 20, 2020, the City received its draft NPDES permit. In August 2020, the City executed Amendment 1 with Weston and Sampson for additional technical assistance on this permit renewal. Those funds have been spent. Due to ongoing negotiations with the EPA extra funds are needed for engineering and legal assistance.

Weston and Sampson has provided a scope for Amendment 2 for an amount not to exceed \$25,000 for the additional work which includes meetings with Public Works staff, City Manager and outside legal counsel, develop documents and utilize their engineering expertise for specific technical issues as needed.

Mr. Costa noted the change order exceeds the City Manager's authority and hence Council approval is required for this change order.

Councilor Hooper noted the amount of money always stuns him and asked whether this permitting was a complex process. Mr. Costa agreed this was a complex process; the permit has many different facets to it and has many different technical aspects. There is also expertise in the field that are required that City staff does not have. He added there is also legal counsel, Drummond & Woodsum Attorneys at Law assisting with this process. The Councilor clarified this work is mandated. Mr. Costa stated the EPA issues a discharge permit for the wastewater treatment plant, which is good for five years. However, it ends up being more like 10 – 12 years. The last time the City was issued a permit was in 1994, the current permit was given to the City in 2007 and the final permit is likely going to be received this year.

Councilor Ormerod stated he appreciates the complexity of this item and hoped the City is budgeting for this work appropriately. Public Works Director, Kurt Blomquist stated the last permit cost the City close to \$300,000 in technical and legal expense. At the present time, the City is doing fairly well with the cost. The last time there was an appeal the City pursued through the courts. Mr. Costa noted the City has spent \$147,000 in technical and legal expenses.

Chair Powers noted if the City is discharging 3 million gallons into the Ashuelot River, it is the City's responsibility to make sure it is done correctly, and the way to do that is to obtain this type of technical assistance.

Councilor Hooper made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Chadbourne.

On 4-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute Change Order 2 with Weston & Sampson Engineers to perform technical services for the City's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit renewal process for an amount not to exceed \$25,000 for contract 04-13-18.

6) Reallocation of Bond Funds – WWTP
Permit Resolution R-2021-14

Mr. Costa stated this Resolution refers to what was discussed previously. This agenda item requests the reallocation of bond funds from an older completed project; the Waste Water Treatment Plant Advanced Treatment 2 project to the NPDES project. He indicated there is a total of \$73,075.48 remaining of bond funds which staff is looking to reallocate to the NPDES project.

Councilor Ormerod asked why the entire \$73,075.48 is being reallocated and not just the \$25,000 required for the NPDES project. Mr. Costa stated any remaining funds will be used for additional technical and legal expenses.

Councilor Hooper made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Ormerod.

On 4-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the adoption of Resolution R-2021-14.

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 7:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker