

COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

The Council Committee of the Whole met by video conference on April 13, 2021 at 6:02 p.m., with Council President Hare presiding. Members of Council present via video or telephone were Mr. Anderson, Mr. Neil, Mr. Slavin, Mr. Rocha, Mr. Taylor, and Mr. Lindell. Mr. Sudler was absent. Mayor Christiansen was also present. Civilian members present for their Committee meetings were Mr. Caldwell and Col. Dix, Retired, (*Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement*).

A moment of silence was held for Mr. Dazhmier Brooks, former Dover High School athlete, who was killed on April 12, 2021.

PARKS, RECREATION, AND COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

The Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee met with Chairman Anderson presiding.

Adoption of Agenda

Mr. Neil moved for adoption of the agenda, seconded by Mr. Rocha and unanimously carried.

Review of Recommendations from Mayor's Blue Ribbon Task Force to End Homelessness Report (Actionable Items)

Mr. David Hugg, Director of Planning and Community Development, and Mayor Christensen provided an update regarding the recommendations from the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Task Force to End Homelessness Report.

Staff recommended referring this item to Staff for further review.

Mayor Christiansen advised that one of the recommendations that came to fruition was the formation of the Central Delaware Housing Collaborative, which brought about the creation of a women's shelter at 801 West Division Street. He noted that it is up and running and is a multifaceted process. Mayor Christiansen stated that it was also the mission of the Blue Ribbon Task Force to end veteran's homelessness. He noted that during the pandemic, Mrs. Tracey Harvey, Planner/Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Administrator, was helpful to the homeless community and provided vouchers and did human work through funds that were given to the City by the previous administration through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Mayor Christiansen noted that they have not conquered the issues, but the spirit and the nature of the Blue Ribbon Task force, is still there.

Ms. Jeanine Kleimo, Chair of the Dover Interfaith Mission for Housing, provided the following information regarding the Recommendations from the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Task Force to End Homelessness:

- The Central Delaware Housing Collaborative, a non-profit group, was created. It is a collaborative including Dover Interfaith, People's Place, National Council on Agricultural Life & Labor Research Fund, Inc. (NCALL), and the Chamber of Commerce which created the women's shelter at 801 West Division Street. That shelter is targeted to single women or women without children present because the other shelters open to women in Dover focus on women with children and there was a lack of assistance to the growing number of single homeless women in the community.

- One recommendation was that there would be a larger permanent shelter for the Dover Interfaith Mission for Housing and they have been pursuing that.
- The third recommendation was that the task force include officials from the City and County to work with leaders of the organizations concerned with homelessness and try to implement the plan that was outlined in the Pathway Report.
- There were also recommendations for more affordable housing in the City of Dover, since the lack thereof is a critical reason why people become homeless, they cannot afford a place to live.
- There were some more minor recommendations such as having lockers and storage facilities for those who are homeless, a daytime space where homeless people might gather and obtain services outside of the Dover Public Library.
- Services at the Dover Interfaith Mission for Housing are provided not only to shelter residents, but also to those who are still on the street, case management services in particular and health and mental health services are available to people who are unsheltered.

Ms. Kleimo stated that she was willing to continue to work with anyone who would be willing to be a part of that committee or next phase task force but they have no unique resources either at the Dover Interfaith Mission for Housing or on the part of the earlier task force to undertake the recommendations on their own.

Mr. Neil expressed his concerns regarding homelessness, affordable housing and leased land. He proposed that if money is received from federal sources that it be used for housing.

Mrs. Harvey stated that NCALL was interested in receiving some of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding to build affordable rental housing in the City of Dover. She also received notice from HUD that they were collaborating with Veterans Affairs (VA). Mrs. Harvey stated that she believes that they will issue some ARP funding as well, in the amount of \$10 billion, to assist those that are experiencing homelessness. She advised that another fund was recorded to build affordable homes within the City but she was unsure of the amount. Mrs. Harvey advised that more information would be forthcoming.

Ms. Rachel Stucker, Executive Director of Housing Alliance, Delaware, provided information regarding the Housing Alliance. Ms. Stucker stated that homelessness has gotten worse, not better. She stated that the good news was that they have significant resources coming to the state that they can use to house people in innovative and creative ways.

Mr. Anderson stated that one of his concerns was that they do not seem to get the proper share of money to Kent County, either for people who fall below the rent-to-earning threshold or the percentage of the homeless population. He stated that they needed to look at how they make sure they get at least something resembling their share in Kent County. Mr. Anderson asked if they had preliminary numbers on how much of a problem there was in Kent County currently. Responding, Ms. Stucker stated that this was not Dover specific, but anywhere between 20 and 25 percent of people and families experiencing homelessness are identified to be in Kent County. She advised that in terms of resources, there were similar percentages in Sussex County and then the majority was in New Castle. Some of the homeless assistance funding that is received is on a block grant style; based on population poverty rates, and calculations made by HUD. Other

funding is competitive, so there are different ways to think about how to increase allocation to certain communities, whether it is a lack of capacity to take on the types of projects that would be competitive.

Col. Dix asked if they had explored the avenue of helping people that would like to leave the area to relocate rather than trying to house them. Responding, Mr. Anderson stated that some people have been helped in that way, but it has not been formalized. He noted that a lot of the homeless population is not from Delaware.

Responding to Col. Dix, Mr. Anderson stated formalizing it is something that the Staff could review. Mayor Christiansen advised that his office has personally done that for quite a few people.

Mr. Hare moved to recommend referring this item to Staff for further review. The motion was seconded by Mr. Neil and unanimously carried.

Discussion - American Rescue Plan (ARP) and a Framework for Community Development (Actionable Item)

Mr. Randy Robertson, City Manager, advised that the amount of funding that the City of Dover would receive had not yet been determined. He stated that the numbers they had were just a baseline that had been expressed. Mr. Robertson noted that he met with Senator Coons' District Chief and that the number that had been offered was in the \$18 to low \$19 million range. He advised that as of yesterday, he had not heard anything different. Mr. Robertson stated that the treasury department had not issued definitive numbers or indicated how those funds would be earmarked. He stated that they heard of issues regarding affordable housing, police body cameras, fire department needs and some infrastructure money unallocated in the City. Mr. Robertson advised that until they have guidance there is nothing but mere speculation, not only to the amount for Dover, but on how it will be allocated.

Staff recommended referring this item to the City Manager's Office for further discussion and development.

Mr. Taylor reviewed a list of ideas about what to do with the money and what it would look like at the end after resources had been allocated and implemented. He advised that over the course of two years some of the options that they would like to see implemented made the list. Mr. Taylor provided the following ideas for discussion: Basic framework of business and growth jobs, Opioid Crisis and the homeless population, a Strategic Plan, a Marketing Strategy to promote Dover as safe, clean, welcoming and inclusive, the Mayor's Crisis Awareness Funds, partnering with NCALL and Restoring Central Dover for micro grants, increase cadet pay, an air purification system at Schutte Park, sanitation stations throughout the City, City Council pay raises, and an app for the public to see what exactly Council does.

Mayor Christiansen asked for Council to consider putting 5% of the money away in a contingency fund for some type of disaster. Responding to Mr. Taylor, Mayor Christiansen stated that they were receiving reimbursement for the tornado damage from the state in bits and pieces at a time. Mayor Christiansen advised that there are still citizens who were greatly impacted by not having enough insurance on their property.

Mr. Taylor provided the additional ideas of a civil air terminal and a riverwalk. He provided and reviewed photos of the riverwalk in Milford and land in Dover that could be developed as a riverwalk (**Exhibit #1**).

Mr. Taylor stated that he would like for the Council members to go and walk the sites and use their imaginations to come together and figure out the best way for them to create a riverwalk. He noted that any feedback was welcomed.

Responding to Mr. Lindell, Mr. Anderson stated that they knew to a large degree of what the restrictions were on the money. Mr. Anderson advised that according to the law, there are different pots of money and the money they were talking about was money with the least restrictions. He noted that all of the items that Mr. Taylor mentioned deals with infrastructure. He stated that all of them fit within those recommendations that they had and there are other monies with other pots with different restrictions. Mr. Anderson stated that he could send the criteria that comes from both the National League of Cities and the counties.

Mr. Lindell stated that those details needed to be shared before they start discussing ideas to find out exactly what they can and cannot do. He stated he would highly doubt a raise for themselves, which he did not think they deserved. Mr. Lindell expressed his concerns that any of the money that is spent needs to be within the parameters and what they are given needs to be put toward one time expenses so that they are not attaching themselves to fund different programs in future budgets. Mr. Anderson noted that the money needs to be spent by December 31, 2024.

Mr. Robertson advised that he, Mr. Matthew Harline, Assistant City Manager, and the City Engineer went to some of the areas in the photos provided by Mr. Taylor. The sites have been owned by the City and he advised that there is a strong potential for extensive mitigation activities. He stated that all of that property down there is one of the congressional asks. Mr. Harline noted that it was \$8.5 million for stormwater work and that does not count the voluntary cleanup program. He noted that they have three out of six projects that are closed and signed off on. Mr. Harline advised that the money may arrive at any time, but he was not certain that they had received a dime yet from Hurricane Isaias.

Mr. Slavin noted that the large concrete round areas was were they processed sewage when the City was in that business. Then they connected to the County and that became an abandoned site, but it has been remediated and is now at their disposal. He advised that there have been some good thinking about this and that Mr. David Hugg, Director of Inspections and Community Development, or Mrs. Traci McDowell, City Clerk, could look into the study that Mr. Anderson referred too. Mr. Slavin stated that Delaware Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) have been excited about the possibilities and that they are responsible for putting up the dock for the City.

Mr. Slavin stated that Kent County is getting the short end of the trail systems that are very successful in New Castle County and down at the beaches. He noted that they have the makings of one that could begin at Silver Lake and go all the way down to Puncheon Run, almost all the way down to the Air Force Base. Mr. Slavin stated that the middle piece that was never developed is planned to run from Legislative Hall out to behind the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT).

Responding to Mr. Slavin, Mr. Harline advised that they had not addressed all the environmental remediation. He noted that they are still in the voluntary cleanup program and there is a plan to make a wetland meadow which could work very well with this program.

Mr. Rocha stated that in addition to a beautiful riverwalk opportunity, there may be an opportunity for economic development as well.

Mr. Taylor asked if it would be feasible for them to use one of the institutions of higher learning. He stated that it could be a project for one of the students or a group of the students for a grade. He noted that they could even turn it into a competition to make a few dollars.

Mrs. Tracey Harvey, Planner/Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Administrator, stated that the City received about \$475,000 in CARES Act funding for motel vouchers for the homeless with only \$12,000 left. Mrs. Harvey requested consideration for an additional \$200,000 to be added to that so that those families will not be put out on the streets and something permanent can be made possible within that timeframe.

Ms. Donyale Hall requested that Council consider setting aside \$75,000 for the successful deployment of the summer project for the Innovative Readiness Training (IRT). She noted that it would help with housing of the personnel through the Air National Guard and to also have a fabulous public relations blitz.

Responding to Mr. Anderson, Ms. Hall stated that it would include police overtime.

Mr. Neil moved to recommend referring this item to Staff for consideration. The motion was seconded by Mr. Rocha and unanimously carried.

Tree Planting Update (Informational Item)

Mr. Robin Eaton, Parks and Recreation Director, provided the following information regarding the Tree Planting Update:

- Arbor Day is on April 30, 2021 and Earth Day is on April 22, 2021.
- There will be some tree planting events, the first at Mallard Pond on April 22nd from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. and Dover Downs Hotel and Casino Staff will be assisting with a park cleanup, creating a flower bed and planting three trees.
- There will be an event at Mill Creek on April 30th and the North Starbucks staff will be assisting with planting three trees to replace ones that have died.
- On Saturday, May 1, 2021 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. they will be at Williams Park with a group of volunteers from Dover Air Force Base planting three trees. Everyone was welcomed to participate.
- They received notification of a grant from DNREC the previous week for \$2,356. That money will be used on specific locations. Mr. Roger Ridgeway, Jr., Field Supervisor II, went around with DNREC to identify some of the tornado areas of Westview Terrace, where they lost a tremendous amount of street trees. There are some trees going into Williams Street, which were taken down as part of a water main replacement project and then some trees are going into the Hamlet park, where they lost some due to the tornado.
- Last fall they identified trees in all of the parks, most of them were planted trees within the last two or three years, that did not survive and they removed them. Those are some of the ones being replaced as part of these plantings and then Staff will continue to plant and replace those trees in the parks.

- They have a big project coming up on Bradford Street and have opportunities for grants for that project as well. It will be determined by how many trees coming down, when they are going to come down and what grant cycles they can apply in to replace many of the trees on Bradford Street.

Responding to Mr. Rocha regarding how the trees are planted so they do not uproot the sidewalk, Mr. Eaton stated that they have been trying to determine and pick specific trees with root systems that do not necessarily want to be at the surface, but want to go down. He noted that he has not gotten there, but at other places he implemented root deflectors, which is a polyvinyl material. They would plant it based on size of the tree and in the early growth stages it directs those roots down as well. There are some spaces that a tree should not be planted as it is not wide enough in design. Mr. Eaton stated that they do have a tree standard ordinance that determines how far they need to be from corners and fire plugs. He noted that they also always look up to make sure what kind of power lines may be overhead.

Mr. Eaton advised that there was going to be a meeting on April 24th and one of his topics is the trees in the City.

Col. Dix requested that the City submit an application to the Department of Agriculture for matching funds of \$25,000 for the City to cut the trees in Continental Park. He recommended that they cut the young saplings under trees that are less than three inches and go into the woods with a wood chipper and chip those up to curtail the growth of the invasive plants. He stated that it would also open up the woods so that a person can actually go into the woods and get between the trees and do what is called “forest bathing.” Col. Dix noted that there was a deadline in the middle of the month.

Mr. Eaton advised that Col. Dix did communicate that request to him and it was forwarded to the City Manager’s Office. He noted that they are in the budget cycle right now and Col. Dix was asking for \$25,000 matching funds that were not accounted for when they did the budget back in December and January. Mr. Eaton noted that there are about 14 residents there who are highly against opening up that wooded area. Mr. Robertson noted that they would need to ask the community again what they would want.

Mr. Rocha noted that the project sounded as if it would be recurring. Responding to Mr. Rocha, Mr. Eaton stated that he was not sure of the grant cycle and where the funds were coming from and if they were recurring or not.

Dover Interfaith Mission for Housing Report (Informational Item)

Due to the absence of Ms. Jeanine Kleimo, Chair of the Dover Interfaith Mission for Housing, no report was given.

Mr. Hare moved for adjournment of the Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Neil and unanimously carried.

Meeting adjourned at 7:44 p.m.

Mr. Neil moved for adjournment of the Council Committee of the Whole meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Slavin and unanimously carried.

Meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

William F. Hare
Council President

WFH/TM/jt

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Attachments

Attachment #1 - Photos submitted by Councilman Taylor

























