

**CITY OF ROCK ISLAND
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION
January 23, 2023 - 5:00 p.m.**

**City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3rd Floor
1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL**

1/23/2023 - Minutes

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Thoms called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

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.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Thoms asked City Clerk Samantha Gange to call the roll.

Present: Alderpersons Randy Hurt, Judith Gilbert, Jenni Swanson (virtual), Mark Poulos, Bill Healy, and Mayor Mike Thoms.

Alderman Moses Robinson arrived at 5:05 p.m. and Alderman Dylan Parker arrived at 5:42 p.m.

Absent: None.

Staff: City Manager Todd Thompson, City Attorney Dave Morrison, City Clerk and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Program Manager Samantha Gange, and other City staff.

CLOSED SESSION

MOTION:

Alderman Poulos moved to go into Closed Session; Alderman Healy seconded.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 6-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Gilbert, Swanson, Poulos, Healy, Robinson, and Hurt. Nay: None. Absent: Parker.

The Closed Session ended at 5:40 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Thoms asked if anyone in the public wished to speak. No one volunteered to speak in person or virtually.

ARPA PRESENTATION

ARPA Program Manager Samantha Gange provided an update on recent focus group discussions, non-profit organization discussions, an ARPA webpage, and also housing rehabilitations and demolitions. She discussed projects from other cities to illustrate similarities with Rock Island.

Ms. Gange provided an update on the group focusing on homelessness, noting that Alderperson Swanson was the Council representative. She said Christian Care is a shelter within the City, and they do require sobriety to receive services. Many individuals are also going to the Humility shelter in Davenport, Iowa. She noted the needs of local shelters to accommodate the homeless population. She provided an update on the group focusing on mental health, noting that Alderperson Hurt was the Council representative and many members of the community contributed to the discussion. She noted that the COVID-19 pandemic made access to mental health services difficult, and there are many professionals that have left the industry. There are also limited resources available in the City and area not just after business hours, but in general.

Ms. Gange discussed recommendations of the focus groups in question, reminding Council that the funds were unrestricted in these areas, and did not have to be expended on a deadline. The main recommendation is to continue exploring options including potential partnerships and options to make long-term impacts.

Ms. Gange discussed the recommendations of the tourism focus group, noting that Alderpersons Dylan Parker and Judith Gilbert were Council representatives. The discussion centered on tourism as a regional approach, and referenced the participation of Visit Quad Cities. She said the focus group found that there is a need for staples event or attractions, and an inventory of unique City assets, among other things. The recommendation based on meeting with the group and Council representatives was to assess the feasibility of establishing a destination management and marketing organization through the RFP process. Alderperson Gilbert said there is a need for local tourism efforts specific to Rock Island, and this would be the way to do that. Alderperson Parker said the discussion came down to who would operate such an effort, and how would it be funded. He noted the goal is to have a sustainable local tourism solution.

Ms. Gange reviewed an effort to create a webpage or dashboard for updated information regarding ARPA in the City and the current status of projects. She discussed the nature of content that will be available via this source to make it easier for residents to stay current.

Ms. Gange provided an update on non-profit recommendations for ARPA funding. She noted the results of the previous discussion in September of 2022, which aimed to provide more data regarding four non-profit entities considered by Council. These include the Quad City Botanical Center, Backwater Gamblers, the Martin Luther King Jr. Center Fun Day, and Quad City Arts, and referenced a slideshow providing additional information. She clarified there is an additional \$50,000 needed for the MLK Center to assist with the West End Renaissance project on top of the recommended \$40,000 for the Fun Day.

Ms. Gange discussed the \$250,000 allocated from ARPA funds for housing rehabilitation. Staff recommendations include incorporating that amount into the existing owner-occupied housing for low-to-moderate income (LMI) households. \$250,000 have also been allocated to assist with demolitions of existing properties.

Ms. Gange looked for Council recommendations regarding tourism, housing rehabs, demolitions, and non-profits. Alderperson Poulos asked about the actual amounts allocated for both housing rehab and demolitions. Ms. Gange clarified that \$250,000 was allocated for each, and there were specific allowances from the government to do so. Alderperson Robinson asked how many houses were planned for demolition. Community and Economic Development Department Director Miles Brainard addressed the question, stating it depends on the size of the house and what needs to be done for remediation. The usual amount needed for a demolition is \$20,000. Alderperson Parker asked when Council could expect policies governing properties selected for demolition. Mr. Brainard said that was in progress, and some draft policies have been prepared by the building official. Alderperson Gilbert requested a check of whether a property at 7th Avenue and 17th Street was on the list for demolition. Mr. Brainard said he would check, and added that there is not a set list of demolitions at a given time, but instead a list of monitored properties ordered by severity. The majority of properties considered for demolition are vacant or abandoned properties.

Alderperson Healy asked if housing rehabilitation was considered to be fully funded by the City, or perhaps matched. Mr. Brainard said the goal is to proceed the exact way as is already done under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) rehab program. The main issue to consider is whether or not to offer forgivable loans. Mayor Thoms asked if the City had placed liens on the property prior to demolition. Mr. Brainard said that is often done, but money is very rarely collected. City Attorney Morrison noted that liens on properties cannot always be transferred to another location under the same property owner.

Alderperson Parker asked if it was possible to be more strategic and develop plans with regards to the improvement of housing stock in the City. Mr. Brainard responded affirmatively and said he hoped to have these discussions with the new Community Development Commission. He added that the number of rehab projects has gone up dramatically in the past decade, and is trending in the right direction. Alderperson Robinson said he would like to see a plan in place for demolitions in order to get another structure built on the property. Mr. Brainard said sometimes there is no alternative but to demolish the home due to safety. He added there are a number of planning documents such as the impediments to fair housing with regards to the need for housing, but only at a generalized level, and would like to develop a strategic housing development plan. This would include incentive programs and partnership ideas. Alderperson Gilbert asked who would take care of the vacant lots after the properties are demolished. Mr. Brainard said it is most often the City maintaining the lot despite not being the owner. He noted that vacant or abandoned properties incur a significant cost to cities such as Rock Island, which is why creative solutions like the Community Garden Program have been developed.

Alderperson Poulos asked if Council members could obtain a list of available housing for each ward. Mr. Brainard said City staff is not in a position to tracking all listed housings or those with rehab potential, but can share information on properties that have been cited. Mayor Thoms noted that discussions have taken place with Gorman & Company of Wisconsin for infill.

Alderperson Swanson asked if the \$50,000 allocated for the Martin Luther King Jr. Center West End Renaissance project could be combined with the other \$50,000 allocated to the MLK Center. She opined that the amount does not belong in the non-profit area. Ms. Gange responded affirmatively. Alderperson Gilbert discussed the \$400,000 allocated for tourism, stating the process was not open to all tourism-related organizations. She added that as there is a shortfall of nearly \$1 million on the 11th Street water main reconstruction project, and said

additional tourism money was not justified when it could fund half of the project shortfall. Alderperson Gilbert mentioned the \$100,000 savings from the parking garage demolition could be applied but there would still be a deficit and the City should pay for essential projects first. Mr. Thompson said direction was needed for the next steps from Council for the tourism and non-profit recommendations, and separate agreements would be drafted for each group depending on Council's preference.

Alderperson Parker said he was comfortable with the tourism recommendation, but not the non-profit recommendation. Alderperson Robinson said he did not like the process. Ms. Gange said a majority of Council had previously noted they did not want an application process for the non-profit organizations. Alderperson Robinson said the optics of the process look poor, as some on Council have connections to the chosen organizations. Mayor Thoms said it had nothing to do with connections. Alderperson Hurt said there was not an application to provide funds to Friendship Manor, and added that initially non-profit verbiage was kept out of the selection process. Mayor Thoms added there had been discussion of taking ARPA funds and increasing the dollar amount based on what those organizations bring back to the area. Alderperson Robinson said he would question the numbers regarding impact to the City. Mayor Thoms suggested placing some organizations under the tourism group instead of non-profit.

Alderperson Gilbert noted the 11th Street water main project was still behind, and ARPA funds were meant for water and sewer projects. Ms. Gange asked if Council had additional input regarding nonprofit funding, and asked for direction. Alderperson Hurt said he would like the funding removed from the nonprofit category. Alderperson Robinson recommended tabling the subject until further Council discussion could occur. Alderperson Gilbert agreed. Alderperson Swanson said she had difficulty with the City handing Friendship Manor funds without an application while Council discusses making other nonprofits complete one. She said Council should decide whether there should be an application or not, and the discussion should be tabled.

Alderperson Parker said he was an advocate for not moving ahead with the tourism category, and suggested starting an organization to strategically develop tourism programs and projects. Alderperson Poulos agreed, and noted there should be an evaluation as to which organizations are bringing tourists to the City. Alderperson Healy suggested focusing on what would bring in the most business and the most people to the City. Alderperson Poulos suggested letting the organizations provide the information on what benefit they can provide to the City. Mayor Thoms recommended the funding be recategorized to tourism instead of nonprofit. Alderperson Gilbert said that discussion has not taken place yet.

Ms. Gange said Council confirmed agreement regarding the tourism focus group recommendations from Alderpersons Gilbert and Parker. Mr. Brainard addressed Council and confirmed that all preceding recipients of Community Development Block Grant-COVID (CDBG-CV) funds filled out the available application. Alderperson Swanson said there was no application submitted by Friendship Manor, as she asked to see it. Mr. Brainard said that was correct, as Council had directed staff to pause any further applications at the time.

Mr. Thompson said it is not uncommon for cities to have funding applications, but also not uncommon for councils to identify specific needs. Mr. Brainard referenced Alderperson Parker's earlier comments regarding more detailed procedures and policies for demolitions and housing rehab, and asked if Council would be comfortable with what was presented. Council responded affirmatively.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

MOTION:

Aldersperson Hurt moved to adjourn; Aldersperson Poulos seconded.

VOTE:

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Josh Adams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "J".

Josh Adams, Deputy City Clerk