

**CITY OF ROCK ISLAND
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION
May 9, 2022 - 5:00 p.m.**

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

5/9/2022 - 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 Judith Gilbert, Jenni Swanson, Dylan Parker, Mark Poulos, Bill Healy, and Mayor Mike Thoms.

Alderman Randy Hurt joined the meeting at 5:14 p.m. and Alderman Moses Robinson joined the meeting at 5:17 p.m.

Absent: None. Staff: Interim City Manager John Gripp, City Attorney Dave Morrison, City Clerk Samantha Gange, and other City staff.

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

PRESENTATION FROM MIKE BARTELS, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS ON RECYCLING

Mike Bartels, Public Works Director addressed Council regarding an update on recycling. He remarked because of the elimination of the sites, some residents have formed the Bring Back the Bins Coalition in an effort to restore drop-off recycling on the Illinois side. He noted the reasons why the sites were eliminated, which include the high costs of maintaining and policing for illegal dumping as well as the labor and time it takes staff to clean-up.

Luke VanLandegen, Public Works Superintendent who oversees the recycling in the City, provided background information on the Rock Island County Waste Management Agency (RICWMA). RICWMA is a municipal joint action agency serving 13 governments to assist and

coordinate waste management in the county, including the recycling drop-off site. RICWMA is funded through fees charged for every ton of trash that goes into the landfill. Additionally, RICWMA administers the Solid Waste Assistance Grant (SWAG), which assists member governments in providing efficient solid waste management and education to the community, among other things. The money is distributed to all cities throughout Rock Island County based on population. The total amount received by Rock Island is \$27,312.60 and this money is used for special pickups and bulk waste disposal.

Mr. VanLandegen discussed the reasons why RICWMA decided to eliminate the recycling drop-off sites, which include: a decline in revenue due to less tonnage going to the landfill because of recycling; the future of recycling is now curbside; drop-off centers are magnets to illegal dumping and are costly to maintain and clean-up and these costs are not offset by RICWMA funds; and because of illegal dumping, contamination can cause materials not to be recycled.

Next, Mr. VanLandegen provided the details of the financial and opportunity costs for a drop-off recycling site. The financial costs include security camera installation, cleanup and maintenance, labor, and landfill fees. The opportunity costs are for every resource spent at the drop-off center is a pothole not getting filled or a tree not getting trimmed, among other things.

Currently, the City offers curbside recycling to any residents, including condo associations and businesses. Curbside recycling is voluntary and the cost is \$4.39 a month with the option of having a second recycling cart at no additional cost. Mr. VanLandegen noted the trend across the United States is curbside recycling and all of the surrounding communities have implemented citywide recycling with Rock Island and East Moline offering curbside on a voluntary basis. The current curbside recycling participation rate in the City is 27% and if citywide recycling were implemented, that number would increase to approximately 80% participation.

Mr. VanLandegen concluded drop-off recycling centers are relics of the past, promote illegal dumping, are more prone to contamination, subsidize commercial and non-residents, and create financial and opportunity cost burdens on Public Works. Curbside recycling is the trend of the future, involves no illegal dumping, has limited contamination, doesn't subsidize commercial and non-residents, and results in no additional financial or opportunity costs. He noted if Rock Island were to implement citywide recycling, this would match the drop-off center recycling in approximately 2.5 months. Public Works does not recommend the return of drop-off sites as curbside recycling is more efficient and less costly. He remarked Council could opt for citywide recycling.

Aldersperson Gilbert and Aldersperson Swanson confirmed the amount it costs residents for curbside is approximately \$60 annually and residents can get more than one free large recycling bin. Aldersperson Swanson asked if residents still get one free bulk pickup annually. Mr. VanLandegen responded affirmatively.

Mayor Thoms recognized several guests in the audience and noted he would allow them to speak.

Bev Wilt approached Council. She said since the drop-off recycling sites have been eliminated in Rock Island County, she goes over to Davenport, Iowa to use theirs. When she is in Davenport, she shops and gets gas in her vehicle, which takes away from businesses and tax dollars in Rock Island and the Illinois side of the river.

Shirley Johnson came to the podium to address Council. She remarked she lives in the county and curbside is not an option. She said they would like one drop-off site on the Illinois side.

Laurie McCollum addressed Council. She said she lives in a condo and although she could get curbside, she would have to push the bin far up and down two hills to get it to the curb. A private company can provide recycling services, but it is much more costly than the City's curbside. She asked if the City of Rock Island could work with other cities like Moline to bring back a drop-off location to the Illinois side.

In response to a question by Alderperson Poulos, Mr. Bartels indicated he was not sure of the cost of recycling for Coal Valley residents, but they do have citywide recycling in place. Rock Island and East Moline are the only two cities that have voluntary curbside.

Mayor Thoms asked if recycling companies sometimes haul paper and plastics to the landfill and not recycle. Brandon Milton, Bi-State Regional Commission addressed Council. He indicated there had been some negative press on this as China adopted a new policy a few years ago that they would not accept foreign recyclables. However, he has spoken with Republic Services and they indicated the recycling rate is very high.

In response to a question from Mayor Thoms about whether Republic Services would pick up recycling at a condo, Mr. VanLandegen responded as long as the condo association allows them to and the road is accessible by the recycling truck. Mr. VanLandegen confirmed curbside recycling services are also available to apartment complexes.

Alderperson Swanson asked what the costs would be for a recycling center that was gated and manned by an employee. Mr. Bartels responded they have looked into it as well as the surrounding communities and nobody has the staff to man a site. Alderperson Robinson asked if there could be an automated gate with cameras with the ability to read license plates and a one-time pin for residents to use to access a site. Mr. Bartels noted Midland Davis has the staff and security and looking at possibly hosting a drop-off site in Moline that all Rock Island County residents could use.

Alderperson Swanson asked if the City has looked into eliminating the free special pick up or free leaf bags to help offset the citywide recycling for residents that might not be able to afford it. Mr. Bartels responded eliminating the free special pick up or free leaf bags would not be a popular decision.

In response to a question from Alderperson Healy as to whether or not Republic Services could meet the needs of citywide recycling, Mr. Bartels responded he did speak with them and they indicated they would be able to do so, however they would like ample notice before implementing.

Alderperson Parker asked for more information about the actual costs to host a secure drop-off site and whether the neighboring communities would be willing to help with the costs. Mr. Bartels responded he would get the information and report back to Council.

In response to another question about the surrounding communities and whether there was interest in drop-off recycling, Mr. Melton said the initial conversations included engaging Moline and Rock Island in possibly re-initiating a drop-off site and what that might look like as a joint effort. Money from RICWMA could be used for the pickup and disposal, however the costs have gone up significantly and the reason which is why they decided to eliminate the sites. Each city would have to pay for just a passive site without the fencing, security, and maintenance and labor. He noted the costs of approximately \$200,000. Denise Bulat, Executive Director of Bi-State Regional Commission remarked they do not provide funding as RICWMA is the organization that does. Alderperson Parker remarked there are several members of the Bi-State Regional Commission in Rock Island County and if you divide the \$200,000 by the member communities, it would be affordable. Ms. Bulat indicated Milan and East Moline are not

interested in participating or helping in a drop-off site again.

Aldersperson Healy asked if there was a way to decrease the monthly recycling fees for residents if citywide recycling is implemented or if there was assistance for residents that may not be able to afford it. Mr. VanLandegen indicated he would have to speak with Republic Services, but with increased gas prices and costs he didn't think they would be able to decrease rates.

Aldersperson Gilbert noted the poverty level in Rock Island is around 20 percent and with inflation, some residents would not be able to afford curbside recycling.

In response to a question from a member of the audience as to whether SWAG grants could be used to offset these costs for lower-income residents, Mr. Melton indicated Rock Island could choose to use SWAG grants to offset these costs. Mr. Bartels noted SWAG funds are used for special pickups and the funding has been reduced.

Shirley Johnson suggested having a drop-off site near Public Works as Davenport does. Mayor Thoms and Mr. Bartels reiterated a drop-off site is being explored in Moline.

Based on questions and feedback from Council, Mr. Bartels indicated he would reach out to other communities to see how they are able to offset curbside recycling costs for low-income residents and report back to Council.

PRESENTATION FROM MILES BRAINARD, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ON PROPOSED SOUTHWEST LAND DONATION

Community and Economic Development Director Miles Brainard presented a Proposed Donation of Land in the Southwest Area of Rock Island – Expanding the City, the Risks & Rewards to City Council. Mr. Brainard shared that The Riverstone Group would like to donate land to the City of Rock Island that they have previously utilized for stone quarrying. The land donation would consist of 23 separate parcels, approximately 538 acres. Riverstone is offering the donation as an all-or-nothing offer. If the City would like areas near the casino, we'd have to take the other parcels of land as well. Six of the parcels are currently in the City. Mr. Brainard explained that growth opportunities for the City are limited due to our hydrology and topography; therefore, any shot at growing the City should be considered. Mr. Brainard went on to show Council an aerial view of the parcels of land in reference and surrounding areas.

Additionally, Mr. Brainard explained the differences of a wetland in a general sense and a jurisdictional wetland. He went on to explain the regulations enforced by the Army Corps of Engineers if the parcels in the donation are considered jurisdictional wetlands. The Army Corps of Engineers has jurisdictional authority over certain wetlands which means they cannot be drained or filled without making up for it somewhere else. Permission to drain or fill wetlands can be obtained by buying wetland bank credits or by creating, restoring, expanding, or preserving wetland. Mr. Brainard shared that based on the feedback he received from conferring with experts regarding the proposed land, chances are good that most of the area is jurisdictional wetlands. Mr. Brainard explained site investigations have to be conducted to determine whether or not the wetlands are jurisdictional or not. Site investigations include gathering information for hydrology, soil types, plant species, animal species, topography, and drainage which are submitted in a report to the Army Corps of Engineers and then they make a ruling as to whether it is jurisdictional or not.

Mr. Brainard shared an image with the Council of the proposed land donation which illustrated different types of wetland environments identified by the DNR using aerial photography including Freshwater Emergent Wetland, Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetland, Freshwater Pond, lake and Riverine. He explained that this information could give clues about what may be a

jurisdictional wetland but that it is not accurate enough to be sure.

Mr. Brainard presented options for what to do with the donated land if accepted. These options include: donating a portion to the US Fish and Wildlife Service to expand their conservation area, a local entity may be interested in establishing its own wetland reserve similar to the model of Nahant Marsh in Davenport, the Parks and Recreation Department could take on the wetlands as a new type of parks space, or the City creating our own wetland bank. He went on to outline the risks associated with accepting this large of a land donation including the need for maintenance, the difficulty monitoring it, contamination or other environmental concerns, the City may hold the land indefinitely. Mr. Brainard explained the likely severity of each risk and ideas for addressing each individual risk.

Mr. Brainard remarked that he had previously received a question from a Council member regarding the amount of lost tax revenue from the six parcels of land already inside the City. He explained that based on the 2021 tax revenues for those six properties, the City would be losing \$5,075.32. He also identified what the next steps would be including executing the agreements and accepting the land, annex the properties now outside the municipal boundary, begin site investigations work for the properties near the casino, and exploring options for donating the wetlands, creating a wetland reserve, using the wetlands as a park space, et cetera.

In summary, Mr. Brainard said that this is a complex proposal which involves both risks and rewards. He said there is no more research that staff can do without expending funds on site investigations. He also explained that we are not in a rush even though Riverstone would like an answer sooner rather than later. Mr. Brainard encouraged Council to carefully deliberate as this would be the largest expansion of the City of Rock Island in decades.

In response to questions from Mayor Thoms and Alderperson Gilbert about the TIF funds surrounding this area and the casino, Mr. Brainard indicated there is sufficient TIF funds for investigations of emergent wetland areas, but not the entire area.

Alderperson Swanson asked if anyone has reached out to the Rock Island County Forest Preserve. Mr. Brainard responded they had not, but he would contact them.

In response to questions about the tax revenue affected, Mr. Brainard noted he only looked at the City portion and did not include the County. The potential for a truck stop, or cannabis dispensary, or another type of business would outweigh the lost tax revenue.

Alderperson Parker asked if Riverstone would be willing to incur some of the costs associated with the site investigations. Mr. Brainard responded he would ask, but it was his understanding they were only interested in donating the land. He indicated staff could provide Council with the cost of a site investigation for all 23 sites as well as the associated timeline.

In response to questions about using staff time for this project, Mr. Brainard and Mr. Morrison indicated they took about 3-4 months to research and it wouldn't take much more time to determine the cost of the site investigations.

It was concluded that Mr. Brainard would get cost estimates for the site investigations and come back to Council to determine how to proceed.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

MOTION:

Aldersperson Poulos moved to adjourn; Aldersperson Hurt seconded.

VOTE:

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

The meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

Samantha Gange

Samantha Gange, City Clerk