

The joint meeting of the Clare City Commission and Clare City Planning Commission was called to order in the City Commission Chambers, at 6:40 p.m. by Planning Commission Chair Josh Clark who led the Pledge of Allegiance. Present were: Commissioners Steve Barnes, Bob Bonham, Glenda Carmoney, Josh Clark, Angie Cozat, Elaine Demasi, Pat Humphrey, Brett Moser, Jean McConnell, Karla Swanson, Jan Winter and Nick Wyman. Absent: Darren Acton and Carolyn (Gus) Murphy. Also present were Ken Hibl, City Manager; Steve Kingsbury, Treasurer and Finance Director; and Diane Lyon, City Clerk.

**APPROVAL OF JOINT AGENDA:**

Moved by Commissioner McConnell second by Commissioner Swanson to approve the agenda. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: Darren Acton and Gus Murphy. *Motion approved.*

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** None.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** None

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**PLANNING COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT**

The Planning Commission submits an activity report to the Clare City Commission on an annual basis outlining the Commission's major accomplishments; highlighting difficulties (if any) encountered; and offering recommendations for meeting the objectives and goals of the City's Master Plan and enforcement of the City's Zoning Codes. The report was submitted to the City Commission by Chair Josh Clark on behalf of the Planning Commission.

**JOINT DISCUSSION**

The Clare City Commission and the Clare City Planning Commission were scheduled to hold a joint meeting on Wednesday, January 13, 2016, to discuss a number of important topics of mutual interest and benefit of both governmental entities and the City as a whole.

Introductions were made prior to the Planning Commission presenting their annual report to the City Commission and opening discussion on topics for the evening.

Following presentation of the annual report by Planning Commission Chair Josh Clark, Mayor Humphrey commented that the report was well thought out and complete. He further expressed appreciation to the group for their hard work and dedication as they rely on the Planning Commission's complete review of Ordinances, Master Plan, and other projects and tasks prior to them coming before the City Commission. Mayor Pro Tem McConnell offered that the Planning Commission's thoroughness made it much easier for the City Commission to do their job.

**Code Enforcement/Blight/Rental Code**

The first and lengthiest topic of discussion was code enforcement. The Planning Commission expressed concern about expending a great deal of time and energy considering and adopting ordinances and then not having those ordinances enforced. Manpower and the allocation of funds have not been available for code enforcement for the last few years and it is evident when you drive through certain areas of the city. The appearance of the city, particularly in our main corridors, affects tourism which in turn impacts all residents. While commissioners agree that city staff is doing the best they can with the resources available, it's just not enough to keep violations in check.

Currently, code enforcement is complaint driven which is not an effective way to address the enforcement. C/M Hibl offered that consistency in enforcement is key. Once residents became aware that there was no code enforcement officer out there checking for violations on a regular basis, blight issues blossomed, primarily in rental areas. Having a code enforcement officer doing rounds once or twice a week puts residents on notice that we are keeping an eye out for violations.

While a formal study has not been completed, it is estimated that it would take a minimum of two full eight hour days to address enforcement issues; once a violation is discovered and noted, the resident or business owner must receive notice (typically a verbal warning first) and allowed time to correct the issue which then requires follow-up. At times there could be multiple notices requiring repeated follow-up. Ideally we would like to find someone who is retired and looking to work two or three days a week, who is familiar with codes, possesses good communication skills, is compassionate, and is able to handle adversity with diplomacy. The C/M estimates it would cost 12-15k a year.

From a financial standpoint, Treasurer Steve Kingsbury pointed out, that we've not yet recovered from the economic downturn of the past few years and while the north industrial park is anticipated to help the city's financial outlook, the Little Tobacco Drain assessment will be coming along soon. The state should be providing additional funds from the road funding package in 2017 which should help relieve pressure on the general fund; however, the city's current staff has not received a wage increase in five years and is paying more for healthcare.

Blight issues are being addressed five at a time right now because that is all we are able to handle at one time. The resident receives notice and is given a period of time to correct the issue. If it isn't corrected they receive a letter from the city attorney and if it still is not corrected within the timeframe allowed it then goes to court.

Much of the blight in the city comes from rental properties. Both the City Commission and Planning Commission would like to see a rental code in place. Rental properties would require an annual inspection and landlords would be required to pay a fee for a permit which then would cover the cost of code enforcement.

The current sign ordinance needs revamping due to inconsistencies and holes in the current ordinance.

Currently the City Manager addresses code enforcement issues when they come up but it takes time away from other duties required of him.

It was suggested that volunteers or high-school interns assist with code enforcement, locating problems and writing letters, however code enforcement would still have to go out and personally view the violation and address it with the homeowner in person and in the event that the violation was taken to court, that person needs to have firsthand knowledge of the violation and issues that have been addressed with the homeowner.

#### Rehabilitation of the Clare RR Depot.

Thanks to Commissioner Winter's leadership and guidance, construction activity in the basement of the depot is near completion and the Clare County Arts Council will have its first permanent home. The building will not be open to the public until the sprinkler can be turned on without fear of it freezing in the upper level of the depot. There is no heat in the upper level because that portion of the depot has not yet been renovated and the cost of heat tape to cover the lines would be very expensive.

#### Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Parks & Recreation Director Joy Simmer has been working on updating the P&R Master Plan. The Draft Plan should be complete by January 15<sup>th</sup>. There is a 30 day public comment period. Once that is complete it will go before Parks & Recreation Board, Planning Commission and City Commission for approval. It should be completed in time to apply for a DNR Trust Fund Grant this spring.

#### Recreation Complex

An Operators Union has offered to complete the earthwork at no cost to the city except for fuel and mobilization. The estimated value of this service is \$400k.

#### Master Plan Update

McKenna & Associates are assisting with the Master Plan Update. One of the first actions they took was to hold meetings for five separate focus groups to identify what people like about this community and where we could improve. McKenna then presented the results to the Planning Commission. Some of the negative perceptions brought out were the health and welfare of the residents (Clare County ranked in the top 5 unhealthiest counties), a poor (educational) school system, lack of senior activities, and no indoor recreation complex.

Commissioners recommended capitalizing on and marketing our recreational assets to improve health and wellness within the community. Group events were suggested for rides on the rail-trail and 127 bike trail that will be coming to Clare. The City is currently in the process of creating new recreational facilities. It was suggested that the city might need to increase marketing of recreational activities available in the community via the city's website, MAC TV, and social media for our younger population. During the winter months there is little to do in terms of indoor activities. While an indoor complex would be ideal the expense to build and maintain an indoor facility is cost prohibitive at this time and is not an option. Commissioners discussed working toward a partnership with the school in order for the community to use their recreational facilities. However, school facilities may not be available due to current athletic program schedules in the gymnasiums and workout room. While use of school athletic facilities

have been closed off to the general public for some time, commissioners believe that the subject should be brought up with the new school board.

#### Pere Marquette Rail-Trail (PMRT)

The city is meeting with Clare County Parks & Recreation, Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Friends of the Rail-Trail on January 22, 2016. Clare County Parks & Recreation has some money set aside as do Friends of the Rail-Trail. We believe that we have approximately 80k set aside for matching funds for a grant. The State has set aside funding for the Ithaca to Alma and Shepherd to Mt. Pleasant (north/south) rail trail. Funding for the north/south trail will tie in to the PMRT and will be written into the grant application.

#### Northern Clare Development

Providing a name for development on the north end of Clare will be part of the Master Plan update. The developers who own the commercial property at the north end of Clare where Walmart intends to build have named that development Clare Commons. The developer is building a roadway which will link Clare Avenue, the industrial park, and Colonville Road.

#### Roundabout

The north roundabout is anticipated to cost 2 million. Middle Michigan Development Corporation (MMDC), Clare County Road Commission, the City and their Engineer of record, the developer, and MDOT are meeting on January 20 at the Mt. Pleasant Transportation Service Center (TSC) to discuss funding for the roundabout. While MDOT is requesting we build this roundabout they don't want to pay for any portion of it even though they own four legs of the roadway and two of those legs are the entrance and exit to US127. The City has been granted 375k to improve the roadway at the north end of Clare but we cannot afford to build a 2 million dollar roundabout. All of the players need to come to the table because after 2017 the 375k grant will go away.

#### Walmart

City staff will be meeting with Walmart's engineers on January 21 for a staff site plan review. They will be signing off on the property next week and have begun the hiring process for the Clare store.

#### Road Improvements

To completely redo one block of city streets, including curb and gutter, the estimated cost is 80k-90k. According to the street study conducted two years ago, we would have to put in 450k per year in order to maintain our city streets. The local road millage that will be placed on the ballot is key to the city maintaining the condition of our streets. Brick streets are not affordable. Potholes have a great deal to do with soil conditions. Waves in the roadway (Wilcox) are caused by differing compaction rates after sewer leads are put in and the ground freezes and thaws.

#### Master Plan Update

The City Commission had no concern with the Master Plan, putting full faith in the Planning Commission's ability to complete any needed updates.

**ADJOURNMENT** - Moved by Commissioner McConnell and seconded by Commissioner Swanson to adjourn. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: Darren Acton & Gus Murphy. *Motion approved.* Meeting adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

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Diane Lyon, City Clerk