

**COUNCIL WORK SESSION  
CITY OF WATERTOWN  
January 12, 2009  
7:00 P.M.**

**MAYOR JEFFREY E. GRAHAM PRESIDING**

**PRESENT:**           **COUNCIL MEMBER ROXANNE M. BURNS (left at 8:20)**  
**COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH M. BUTLER, JR.**  
**COUNCIL MEMBER PETER L. CLOUGH**  
**COUNCIL MEMBER JEFFREY M. SMITH**  
**MAYOR GRAHAM**

**ALSO PRESENT:**   **CITY MANAGER MARY M. CORRIVEAU**

**Presentation**

**Ornamental Street Lights – Michael A. Lumbis, City Planner**

Mrs. Corriveau told Council that over the last six months to one year the City has been in talks with National Grid regarding replacing the ornamental street lights on State and Sterling Streets.

Mr. Lumbis stated that the reconstruction projects prompted the discussions and National Grid offered to take down and put back into place the current lights. Given the current condition of many of them, however, replacements are being reviewed. Mr. Lumbis pointed out that National Grid recommended the halophane fixture, which features a keyless entry with top access to replace bulbs.

Council Member Burns asked how bulbs are accessed in the current fixtures.

Mr. Lumbis noted that a small screw is needed to open the current ones which is difficult to do as workers are required to wear rubber gloves. He also told Council that the new lights meet the ‘dark sky’ standards, which means they illuminate where they should. The recommended fixtures, he noted, do not really match the fixtures currently in place. Upon more research the King Luminaire light was found which is a closer match and meets the National Grid requirements.

Council Member Clough asked who pays for these new lights and if the poles will be replaced as well.

Mrs. Corriveau said they are paid for under contract with National Grid. She noted that it is important to keep the lights consistent block by block and has concerns with mixing the different styles of lights. Mrs. Corriveau added that there has been no schedule drawn up for replacing the lights across the City. She told Council that the poles will be replaced along with the fixtures.

Council Member Smith asked if the bulbs will be energy efficient.

Mrs. Corriveau said they have not discussed that option yet.

Mr. Lumbis noted that the new lights will offer a better light distribution pattern.

Council Member Butler asked what will be done with the old lights.

Mrs. Corriveau said they belong to National Grid.

Council looked at the new King Luminaire fixture.

Mrs. Corriveau noted that the new fixture will be dull on the side that faces homes so much less light will shine in that direction.

Council Member Burns noted that she is concerned with the new poles being top heavy.

Council Member Butler asked if only the existing lights will be replaced.

Mrs. Corriveau said that is correct. She noted that the new lights have keyless entry to the photo-eye.

Council Member Burns asked if the new poles will have festoons.

Mr. Lumbis replied that he believes so, and will check.

Council Member Butler asked how many poles are in the City.

Mrs. Corriveau said there are 710.

Council Member Butler asked who initiated the discussion to replace the lights.

Mrs. Corriveau said both parties were interested in replacing the fixtures and poles.

Mayor Graham asked about the time frame for this project.

Mrs. Corriveau said she was not sure how long it would take but that it had taken three to four months to receive the luminaires the last time the City replaced lights which was 15 years ago.

Council discussed the street lighting buyout in 1991 and the pay rate for the poles.

Mayor Graham inquired if the situation with the lights downtown is a failure to perform when they are not working.

Council Member Clough asked when the lights in public square will be fixed.

Mrs. Corriveau told Council that she spoke with someone this afternoon on the issue and was told that most of the major issues will be taken care of. She noted that 14 lights around the square were partially lit. Mrs. Corriveau said that the lights on the southeast side of the square by the elderly housing units have been fixed. She said that the lights used in the square were ones picked by the City, approved by National Grid and added to their inventory.

Mayor Graham stated that he feels there was some miscalculation made with the street lights and it sounds like a manufacturer error.

Mrs. Corriveau said all wiring and installation was the responsibility of National Grid's third party contract.

Mayor Graham commented that with this failure to perform, the City will not pay until the lights are fixed.

Council Member Smith asked if there was any way to contract with the City's electric department.

Council Member Burns inquired when the lights were up and ready for use.

Mr. Lumbis replied that they were up by late October, early November and that the center island lights were up last year.

Mayor Graham stated that the lights should work when you buy a streetscape.

Council Member Smith said this should go higher than the City's customer service representative.

Mrs. Corriveau said she has met with the customer service representative's supervisor.

Mayor Graham said they need to be made aware there is an egregious issue and not just an annoyance regarding these lights. He also wanted Council Member Butler to get the name of the head of the electric company.

Council Member Burns wished to reiterate her thoughts that the new fixture looks good but is concerned with interspersing the two models.

Council Member Butler asked if a resident could replace a street light in front of their house and spread the cost out over a five to 10 year period.

### **Items for Discussion**

#### **Crow Abatement Program – Bryan White, Confidential Assistant to the City Manager**

Mayor Graham asked about having the USDA visit to move the crows around again this year.

Council Member Smith wondered about contacting DEC about reducing crow numbers by baiting.

Mr. White told Council that he spoke with officials in September and October about a pilot program for next year. He noted that baiting is not an option at this point and that decreasing the population is not the avenue to take right now.

Council Member Butler asked what other communities are doing to control the birds.

Mr. White replied that other areas are doing the same things the City is doing.

Council Member Burns asked if other municipalities shoot the crows.

Mr. White told Council that they did shoot them, but it did not do much good since the populations reach 50,000 crows or more.

Council Member Burns noted that this issue has to be addressed and that this amount of money cannot be spent every year.

Mayor Graham questioned how three days of fireworks will make much difference in the crow's location.

Mr. White noted that this process should have been done earlier but it will make a difference in displacing them.

Council Member Burns stated that even though two months does not sound like a long period of time, the damage that can be done by crows is significant if they stay in one place.

Mayor Graham asked how long this process has taken in the past.

Mr. White said that past programs lasted for five days, Monday through Friday, then the USDA will come back once a month or so.

Mrs. Corriveau noted that the \$5950.00 is the cost for the first three days.

Mayor Graham asked if the City could replicate this process ourselves.

Mr. White said it could be done that way but after the training process the cost would be about the same.

Mayor Graham asked if it was the Council's will to support it.

The consensus is to support the program.

## **Recording City Board & Commission Meetings – Bryan White**

Mr. White told Council that in addition to Mr. Weed's camera setup, a single camera is being run to show Council what that would look like.

Mrs. Corriveau told Council Mr. Weed watches the cameras and keeps track of who is speaking while controlling the camera angles.

Mayor Graham commented that combining shots from three separate tapes in post production is not recommended and that a multi-camera setup looks better. He asked if the end goal is to record other City meetings.

Council Member Clough reviewed the minutes from September 25, 2006; April 9, 2007; and November 5, 2007. He stated that he has no problem with Mr. Weed but that the total cost of buying our own equipment would be a fraction of what the City pays Mr. Weed. Council Member Clough added that the City would be able to record other meetings as well.

Mr. White said that no staff time would be used to run a one camera set-up but that some work is involved in downloading the video.

Mayor Graham commented that there is some interest in Council meetings and that those interested in other meetings can come to them if they choose to. He added that it is an option to record them for archival purposes. Mayor Graham also said that he has been involved in television production in the past and that there has to be an understanding of the flow of events. He asked if Council wants fully produced coverage or something lesser.

Council Member Burns stated that she cannot imagine that there is much interest in transportation meetings and that taping other boards and meetings is not that great a service to that many people. She added that if the City makes the decision to provide a service to the public so they can view what the City is doing, it is better to do it professionally.

Mayor Graham noted that he would not want a City employee sitting in the back of the room recording the meeting.

Council Member Smith said he has no argument with the production Mr. Weed is providing but noted that there is a long term savings if the City purchases its own equipment and added that other meetings could be covered.

Mayor Graham stated that he thought the present system is fine and that if Council is committed to transparency in public government they will support the current program.

Council Member Clough commented that he does not agree with that sentiment and that the \$8,000 price tag for the equipment would pay for itself in a little over one year. He added that it may not seem important but that controversy has occurred in meetings and a video record would have been helpful. Council Member Clough remarked that some items have not always been

covered in the minutes. He also asked if Mrs. Dutton or one of her staff is being paid overtime to work at the meetings.

Mrs. Corriveau told Council that the minutes recorded for City Council meetings are some of the most comprehensive in local government and that neither Mrs. Dutton nor her staff are being paid overtime to cover the meetings.

Council Member Burns voiced her concern about how much time would be involved in having a City employee record and process the meetings and noted that there are too many unanswered questions.

Council Member Smith stated that this is a budgetary item which needs to be addressed now for the upcoming budget.

Council Member Clough said his intention was not to make this decision tonight and that he does not disagree. He said that if the City already had the equipment Council would not be looking at cutting the program out.

Mayor Graham remarked that the City could have a fixed setup but reminded Council not to minimize the difficulty in producing such things. He said it does not bother him to use the current setup.

Mr. Weed addressed the Chair reminding Council to keep in mind that for a two hour meeting at least six to eight hours are spent in post production getting it prepared for viewing on the Internet.

Council Member Butler asked Mr. Weed how many hours he puts in to a meeting on average.

Mr. Weed replied that he spends approximately eight hours on average.

Council Member Smith stated that he agrees with Council Member Burns in that there are some unanswered questions. He inquired if a salaried employee could run the camera for meetings two to four days a month to cover regular Council meetings and work sessions.

Mayor Graham asked if the employee would be someone from the IT department.

Mr. Weed said it does not matter how many cameras are used to record the meeting but that post production is the time consuming part. He explained that the meeting is transferred from DVD to computer, cut into video segments, sent to a server then put onto the website for it to be viewed via links.

Mr. White remarked that from this discussion he does not have much direction from Council.

Council Member Smith suggested having Peter Keenan come to a meeting with a report on what it would entail to have the IT department produce the meetings.

Mrs. Corriveau stated that she is not aware if Mr. Keenan has any production experience.

Mr. Weed said that he connects to the Internet through the City's system and streams live during regular Council meetings.

Mrs. Corriveau said being on a website is not an issue and will look at a four camera setup for Council meetings and a single camera for board meetings. She noted that the library board may want to still hold their meetings at the library rather than come to the Council Chambers.

Mr. Weed reminded Council that the meetings would also have to be processed for Time Warner Cable.

Council Member Butler stated that there is very little interest in some of those meetings and that the IT department has other things to do. He added that not much money will be saved if City employees will be paid extra to do the work Mr. Weed is doing and that the suggestion is a misallocation of resources.

Council Member Smith remarked that there are a great number of people who watch these meetings, although you cannot tell by the number of people in the audience.

Mayor Graham expressed his agreement with Council Member Butler.

Council Member Butler said he supports getting all the information we can on the subject but that salaried employees have better uses of their time.

### **2010 Revaluation – Brian Phelps, City Assessor**

Mrs. Corriveau reminded Council that it has been a few years since the City has opted out of the reassessment plan.

Mr. Phelps told Council that he is looking for direction regarding the revaluation.

Council and staff discussed the under assessment of houses in the City.

Council Member Smith asked if there are legal issues if commercial properties are taxed higher.

Mr. Phelps said that is allowed under real property tax law. He noted that there is a great disparity in residential and commercial class taxes.

Mr. Phelps explained to Council the equalization rate used in towns.

Council Member Butler asked how the downturn in value can be accounted for.

Mr. Phelps told Council the rate this year is 92.5% down from 97% and that the equalization rate will level off.

Mr. Phelps said that new construction is applied separately to trending.

Council Member Butler commented that there is a large disparity between houses in neighborhoods that are similar in square footage. He gave an example that one house may be \$180,000 and another may be \$120,000.

Mr. Phelps replied that different neighborhoods moved at different rates.

Council Member Butler remarked that the most effective evaluation is to do a physical inspection of a property.

Mr. Phelps agreed but noted that it is a very time intensive process.

Council Member Butler concurred but said that it is important to get it right.

Council Member Clough said that his biggest concern is that some areas were physically inspected and some were trended.

Mr. Phelps said he has received equal complaints from both sides, explaining that each wished they could have had the other process done. He noted that if trending is done properly it is not that big a disadvantage.

Council Member Butler noted that those complaints were brought during a rising market.

Council Member Smith commented that some people felt the market was exploding and that point in time was a balloon. He questioned why if a person lives in a house for 30-40 years and just maintains their home and has no plans to move, why their assessment goes up.

Mayor Graham remarked that it would be nice if the exemptions could be phased out.

Council Member Butler said there should be a program in place that addresses the volatility of the market.

Mr. Phelps told Council that the problem with periodic revaluations is that a lot of time is needed to complete the process as there are a lot of manual steps. He added that although the City hired an outside firm years ago, one would not be needed now. Mr. Phelps suggested aiming toward a revaluation for the 2011 roll year.

Council Member Clough asked at what point the state steps in and if by 2011 all properties will be at or near 100%

Mr. Phelps said that the state does not step in and that the goal is to be near 100% level of assessment.

Council Member Clough inquired about starting the process this year and asked if anything would change before everything is revaluated.

Mr. Phelps replied that nothing would change until all properties are revaluated.

Mayor Graham commented that he hopes someday this system passes out of relevance as this is not a primary source of funding like it once was.

Mrs. Corriveau told Council this topic will be put back on the agenda for another work session.

**Capital Budget Discussion – James E. Mills, City Comptroller**

Council Member Clough asked that this discussion be delayed again since Council Member Burns is absent.

Mrs. Corriveau told Council that there are not a lot of items on the agenda for next Tuesday's Council meeting so this could be put on for discussion.

Council Member Smith expressed his displeasure regarding the cuts made to the recreation department. He also commented that he is frustrated at the ways the City seems to be finding ways to spend money, mentioning the new GPS systems in the plows.

Council Member Clough requested again that discussions on this topic be held next week.

Mrs. Corriveau told Council that regarding the arena, the City is waiting for a report from Bernier & Carr. She also reminded Council that a lot of programs in various departments were cut, not just in recreation.

Meeting ended at 8:52 p.m.

Amanda C. Lewis  
Deputy City Clerk