

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
April 9, 2019
7:00 p.m.**

Mayor Joseph M. Butler, Jr. Presiding

Present: Council Member Sarah V. Compo
Council Member Ryan J. Henry-Wilkinson
Council Member Cody J. Horbacz
Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero
Mayor Butler

Also Present: Richard M. Finn, City Manager
Robert Slye, City Attorney

City staff present: Justin Wood, Michael Lumbis, Shawn McWayne, Christine Shipley, Petranella LaTouche, David Wurzburg

DISCUSSION

Thompson Park Pool Update

Justin Wood, City Engineer, started the presentation by introducing Mr. Ron Jackson from C & S Engineering. He reminded Council that in December the cost was projected at \$2.1 million. He explained to Council that since that time the designs have been updated and finalized and now the cost is estimated at closer to \$3 million. He told Council that knowing the cost is now over the original estimate, they have worked on changes to get back to the budget. He said that some of the changes would be a smaller pool and deck area, mechanical equipment and a few other items that could bring the cost down to roughly \$2.3 million for construction of the pool and bathhouse. He pointed out that when you add in the design, demolition and inspection the cost jumps to roughly \$2.8 million. He suggested to Council that at this time he is looking for recommendations from them on whether to keep things as is with a higher budget or reduce the scope.

Council Member Ruggiero mentioned that, in December, the bathhouse was proposed to be 4,000 square feet and asked if there are any proposed changes for it now.

Mr. Wood said the fixtures for the bathhouse will raise the price, but if the size of the pool is reduced it will cut down on the number of toilets that will be needed in the bathhouse, noting it would not be a drastic savings.

Mr. Jackson added that the size of the bathhouse has not changed. He explained what the bathhouse will consist of and expressed concern that changing the square footage would not serve the project well and there is not much opportunity for change.

Mayor Butler asked if the mechanical room was in the bathhouse also.

Mr. Jackson said it was, confirming that the square footage of the mechanical room will use about one third of the bathhouse.

Council Member Ruggiero pointed out to Mr. Jackson that in December, she felt comfortable with the \$2.3 million estimate and was under the impression that there would not be any surprises, noting that fencing and gutters were also included in that estimate. She wants to know how and who messed up the numbers.

Mr. Jackson explained that the changes basically come in three parts, the first being the designers were anxious to give the City a beautiful product while trying to keep the project within the bounds of the scope. He explained that the mechanical system and the finish on the building were of the highest quality and they wanted to keep the dignity of the historic park in the design. The second part was that when the project was presented in December and when it was finished in mid-January, they did expand some of the site work which included reconstructing the parking lot, expanding the connecting trails and updating the lighting and security cameras. He said the third part involves C & S Engineering and explained that in 2018, project costs were coming in very high, and he explained that while he was overseeing this project, he factored in the increased percentages of contractors overhead and profit .

Council Member Horbacz wished to know why this was not the design Council saw in December.

Mr. Jackson said it was the design conceptualized in December, however, when the design was finished, the new numbers came into effect.

Council Member Horbacz stressed that the budget is \$2.4 million and the City needs a pool and bathhouse that will come in at, or under budget. He added that there will be no support for anything over the budget. He suggested renovating the original bathhouse or taking out the heated floors, reiterating the project has to come in under the \$2.4 million budget.

Council Member Ruggiero added she was disappointed with the news and repeated she had been happy with the cost and plans from back in December and she is confused how such a big cost increase had occurred.

Council Member Horbacz stressed to Mr. Jackson that the design that was presented in December was the design Council thought was going out to bid. He stressed that Council was not aware there would be additional designs made. He expressed his frustration.

Mayor Butler added that it is a significant increase, and asked Mr. Jackson if it is reasonable to think they will get a good product for \$2.4 million.

Mr. Jackson said it is possible, explaining that the pool can be scaled down by eliminating the zero entry water play area. He said the exterior finish would be scaled down, the air conditioning would be removed and they would go with a less expensive heating unit. The interior would no longer have top of the line lockers and the dividers between the changing stalls will be metal instead of HPV style, along with additional cutbacks.

Mayor Butler asked if it is a tile floor.

Mr. Jackson said it is concrete.

Mr. Jackson then summarized other details that will cut costs but noted that everything will still be within the standards of Americans with Disabilities Act. He pointed out that a lift will be added to accommodate wheelchairs.

Council discussed at length the details of ways to cut cost in the project and asked Mr. Jackson and Mr. Wood to clarify the final cost.

Council Member Compo told Council that even though she has arrived on Council late, she has concerns over the cost and does not like the idea of spending taxpayer's money on a project that is not what Council originally wanted it to be.

Council Member Horbacz pointed out that Delhi, NY built a pool house and pool for \$900,000.

Mr. Finn suggested completing the design and hold off on starting the project until next November because going into it during winter could save money.

Mr. Wood said he has concerns that if the project is started in March there would not be a pool season next year.

Council then summarized the cost breakdown which included \$1 million for the pool, \$1.3 million for the bathhouse and \$500,000 for the designs, demo and inspection.

Mayor Butler suggested letting things rest for a few days and the topic can be discussed again at Monday's Council Meeting.

Vacant Property/Zombie Program Update

Mayor Butler introduced Shawn McWayne, Code Enforcement Supervisor, and Christine Shipley, Building Safety Inspector, from the Code Enforcement Office to discuss the new software that has been developed.

Ms. Shipley started the discussion by telling Council that along with herself, Petranella La Touche, IT Project Manager, and David Wurzburg, IT Manager, have put together a new module for the Zombie properties within the City. She explained that it is Accela software and the benefits that will be implemented to help organize and keep track of properties. She said the software is designed to read information and that she no longer will have to manually input the information which will save a lot of time. Some of the things Accela will read is water shut-offs, and she explained this information will allow her to go out and inspect properties and look for things like squatters, structural damage, or fire safety issues, and depending on the season, make sure that the property has mowed lawns and snow removal. The information that is collected can then be viewed by others in the Codes Office and it is a permanent record. She told Council that she really likes the program and is excited to start using it. She offered Council the opportunity to ride along with her if they would like a better idea of how it works.

Mayor Butler asked if everyone in Codes is licensed to use Accela.

Ms. Shipley confirmed that they were and said that eventually other departments will be licensed to use it also.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson asked if it would be more cost effective to have the Fire or Police Departments handle these inspections.

Mr. McWayne said the system in place works and the Police and Fire Departments are always in contact with Codes with concerns they may find.

Mr. McWayne discussed at length the importance of vacant building registration. He explained to Council a building is not considered vacant if it is listed for sale with a licensed real estate person and the property remains in compliance with the Stated Property Maintenance Code. He said the owner of any vacant building located in the City had to register that building with Code Enforcement no later than 30 days after it becomes vacant. He told Council that the owner of a vacant building will pay a \$50 fee at registration and if the building remains vacant for more than 90 days, the owner will pay an annual vacant inspection fee of \$750.

Ms. Shipley and Mr. McWayne then summarized the steps an owner must take if the building is to be rehabilitated or returned to a permitted use allowed within its zoning district. It was noted that if the owner of the vacant building fails to register and pay the fees in a timely manner, the registration fee, inspection fee, plus an administrative fee of \$150 will become a lien on the property.

Mr. McWayne informed Council that once a year, on or before April 15th, the Codes Office will send the City Manager a list of all buildings in the City declared vacant and the list will also be forwarded to City Council.

The discussion turned to the new software and Mayor Butler welcomed IT Manager David Wurzburg and IT Project Manager Petranella LaTouche to the table for the demonstration of the Accela software. This software is designed to assist with the work involved with the Vacant Property/Zombie Program and the presentation provided an update and status on the implementation and its use.

Ms. LaTouche presented a slideshow (on file in the City Clerk's Office) that defined the software objectives and tools and gave a detailed look at the software and processes. She began by showing Council the Zombie Property Finder App which looks at three established triggers and returns a list of all the properties that meet these criteria. Discussing the Accela Web Application, she presented several screenshots from the software that showed the functions associated with accessing vacant properties cases, reviewing lists of the cases and the individual property summary, and then followed that with the screens for scheduling inspections. Lastly, she illustrated the component of the software that staff will be using in the field on a tablet. The screenshots of the application showed how an inspection and review of the conditions are documented, as well as how violation codes are added to the file and overall inspection findings are reported.

Mayor Butler asked if this information will continue to be accessed years from now.

Ms. Shipley said they would.

Council Member Henry Wilkinson asked if it generates a new case number every time it's used.

Mr. Shipley explained that it keeps the same case number till it closes out or another issue arises with the house.

Richard Finn, City Manager presented Council with a handout showing the effect of abandoned property on adjacent property values. He stressed the importance of keeping a close watch on abandoned properties and noted that an abandoned property, even at 150 feet away can decrease a neighboring property value up to \$7,627. He summarized the different dollar amounts that can affect a property depending on how far away the abandoned house is. He explained to Council that Zombie houses are a part of this, but also houses that are in foreclosure and the issue is much bigger than foreclosure. He stated that abandoned properties can start a process where homeowners no longer want to keep up their homes and end up moving out. He referred to the Vacant Building Registry and reiterated the importance of the program. He wants the homeowners to be responsible for the cost, not the taxpayers. Council then discussed at length with Mr. Finn the concern with staffing to help identify these homes.

Mr. McWayne addressed Council and said that there is staffing available but more would be helpful and suggested maybe part-time help in the summer.

Mr. Finn noted that although he has suggested no more hiring of staff, this would be considered part-time temporary employment which could be done at a lower cost.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson suggested it would be a great opportunity for college students looking to get into public affairs or civil engineering careers.

Mr. Finn feels that this program will provide the most "bang for the buck," noting it will tackle the heart of the problem and will take 1 year to 18 months to see a turnaround.

Mayor Butler suggested discussing the topic more at the next Council meeting and possibly voting on it at the May 2nd meeting.

Work session ended at 9:15 p.m.

Margaret M. Puccia
Deputy City Clerk