CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
November 09, 2026
7:00 p.m.

Mayor Sarah V.C. Pierce Presiding

Present: **Council Member Shane A. Garrabrant**
Council Member Robert O. Kimball
Council Member Douglas E. Osborne, Jr.
Council Member Benjamin P. Shoen
Mayor Sarah V.C. Pierce

Also Present: **Eric F. Wagenaar, City Manager**

City staff present: Aaron Harvill, Michael Lumbis, Erica Anderson, James Mills

D I S C U S S I O N

Hydroelectric Project Status Report: Compliance and Engineering Support
Environmental Scientist Jason George, and Water Resource Engineer Michele Stottler, introduced themselves as Project Managers with Gomez and Sullivan.

Mr. George talked about the background of the project and which topics would be discussed during the presentation. He talked about the City's Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) License compliance status, requirements, and stakeholders involved. He stated that the City has received complaints, which prompted the FERC investigation.

Mr. George stated that the goal is to address these complaints and build a good compliance record for future FERC relicensing. He spoke further regarding the issues that were identified including Whitewater releases, recreation facilities, fish passage facilities, and cultural resources, noting what has been fixed thus far. He added that every hydro plant along the Black River was also responsible for responding to these complaints.

Mr. George talked about the issues which still needed to be corrected to meet compliance including the water release plan, Black River water shed, annual reports, and updated signage. He explained the Black River Fund and how it was formed. He discussed the need for regular meetings to increase engagement with other parties.

Ms. Stottler informed Council that the purpose of establishing operating procedures and a checklist for maintenance, indicating it would be beneficial, so knowledge is not lost due to retirements over the years. She stated that they are working to put this together and will be finalizing it by the end of the year.

Ms. Stottler advised that they are working on gathering information to support the project and assist the City in negotiations with the expiring National Grid agreement. She discussed the energy model which could be used as a tool to evaluate potential upgrades and expansions. The discussion also covered the license expiration in 2035, a comparison with Brookfield, and the steps and deadlines leading up to relicensing.

Mr. George outlined the FERC requirements, described what the city could expect during the relicensing process, and presented the proposed schedule.

Ms. Stottler explained that most of the work and expenses would occur in the first three years of the five-year process. She noted that initial engagement was underway and that years four and five would primarily be spent awaiting FERC action.

Council Member Garrabrant stated that the expiration of the National Grid agreement was his primary concern. He expressed appreciation for the standard operating plan and urged the City to begin work promptly, citing the potential budget impact if negotiations resulted in unfavorable terms for the City.

Ms. Stottler informed Council that the first few months would focus on compliance and evaluating available opportunities for credits, including options beyond sales to National Grid.

In response to Council Member Garrabrant's recommendation of reviewing applicable energy requirements, Ms. Stottler acknowledged the financial value of the existing National Grid agreement and the importance of that revenue to the City.

Mayor Pierce welcomed those remarks.

Council Member Osborne expressed concern about how the City would absorb the cost of facility upgrades and the potential for a budget shortfall. He requested that alternatives be presented for consideration.

Ms. Stottler acknowledged his request.

Mayor Pierce thanked the presenters and said she looked forward to working with them.

Leasing of Thompson Park Golf Course

Andrea Doane, former owner of Rustic Golf Course, introduced those in attendance and requested guidance from Council on how to proceed with the proposed lease. She discussed feedback regarding the closure of the golf course and expressed interest in continuing operations in a way that would support the City and protect taxpayers from financial losses.

Ms. Doane reviewed potential operating arrangements and summarized her analysis of revenues, expenses, and opportunities to reduce costs. She discussed competition with Ives Hills and indicated that she would be willing to pay more in rent if course revenues increased.

Ms. Doane raised concerns about the cost of the irrigation system and whether the clubhouse would pass a health inspection. She also addressed concerns about pre-paid items, discussed leasing gas-powered golf carts in place of electric carts, and recapped the site visit, including discussion of purchasing the fertilizer already on site.

Ms. Doane noted that the course had been well maintained and asked about the winterization status, maintenance schedule, and what would be included in the lease. She spoke about her prior experience owning a golf course and the business risks involved. She expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity and asked whether the process could move forward to accommodate food and liquor licensing timelines.

Council Member Kimball disclosed that Ms. Doane's accounting firm has prepared his taxes for the last few years but felt it would not interfere with his opinions in the proposal and asked City Manager Wagenaar what the next steps would look like.

Mr. Wagenaar stated that the proposal would be reviewed and that meetings would be held to answer questions and gather information to present to Council.

Council Member Shoen emphasized the importance of keeping the course viable over the long term and limiting taxpayers' financial exposure. He acknowledged the improvements City staff have made to the golf course and emphasized the importance of preserving them. He expressed concern that a one-year lease would provide limited stability and give a lessee too little incentive to maintain those improvements.

Ms. Doane stated that she would prefer a five-year lease but wanted to better understand the course's clientele and expected business before taking on that financial risk. She also mentioned keeping rates for City residents at their current levels.

Council Member Shoen discussed the need for enough carts to support tournaments and how cart shortages had affected previous events.

In response to Mayor Pierce's question regarding plans for the restaurant, Ms. Doane talked about the interest she and her daughter share in hosting events.

Erica Doane, Ms. Doane's daughter, stated she thrives on events and holidays, but was concerned with the building's structural condition.

Council Member Garrabrant echoed Council Member Shoen's comment about the stability a longer lease could provide.

Water Treatment Plant- Disinfection By-Product Project Update

Project Director Kevin Castro introduced himself and outlined the goals of the proposed improvements. He reviewed project costs and changes in treatment by-product levels compared with prior years. Using a map, he explained the work planned for each phase. He indicated that the Phase 1 plans were expected to be submitted in March 2027, Phase 1 construction anticipated to begin in the summer, and Phase 2 projected to begin in 2030.

Mr. Castro compared the funding secured to date with estimated project costs and indicated that the remaining balance could qualify for a low-interest loan. He provided a preliminary estimate of the financial impact of Phase 1, discussed Amendment No. 8, and outlined the next steps.

Council Member Osborne asked whether the City could complete Phase 1 on its own and under what circumstances Phase 2 would be needed.

Mr. Castro explained that Phase 2 was planned as a contingency and that funding was not contingent on completing it.

In response to Mayor Pierce's question regarding associated funding, Mr. Castro explained that the additional grant would not be received if Phase 2 was not completed.

In response to Council Member Shoen's question about the filtration system, Mr. Castro explained that Phase 2 could improve treatment outcomes.

Council Member Shoen discussed the benefits of completing the project and spreading cost increases for users over time.

Mr. Castro indicated that potential future regulation changes could affect the allowable treatment by-product levels.

Council Member Shoen expressed concern about how this would affect operations and what options would be available to meet those requirements.

Settled Water Line, Lead Service Line, and Reservoir Project Updates

Water Superintendent Aaron Harvill provided an update on the 2027 Water Infrastructure Improvement Project. He outlined the steps needed to prepare for the project, including completing SEQR forms and meeting the requirements for additional funding.

Mr. Harvill described the next phase of the reservoir project, including preparations to address the leak. He explained that EFC funding is proportional to the projected project cost and discussed bid service related to the upcoming resolution.

In response to Council Member Kimball's question about the earlier cost estimate, Mr. Harvill explained that the estimate was prepared for a preliminary report to support an application for SRF funding. He also reviewed the available funding options and their requirements.

In response to Council Member Kimball asking what was required for the lead service line replacement project, Mr. Harvill said his research indicated that an engineering report was required to qualify for funding.

Council Member Shoen asked about replacing service lines on private streets. Mr. Harvill explained that those lines could be replaced if funding were available but would retain their existing classification.

Mr. Wagenaar expressed hope that funding would be available to help cover the costs.

Vacant City Properties

Planning and Community Director Michael Lumbis presented findings of the latest review of vacant City-owned properties. He explained that the review was intended to identify parcels the City could return to the tax roll and noted that the previous reviews were conducted in 2018 and 2022. He described how staff used GIS mapping and reviewed individual parcels to determine whether they should be retained for future development, storm drainage, or other municipal purposes, or considered for sale. Mr. Lumbis discussed selling eligible properties by auction, through a proposal, or by offering them to adjoining property owners. He outlined factors affecting the sale of individual properties, including access, utility lines, rights-of-way, and environmental restrictions. He reviewed the next steps and

identified mid-to late January as the earliest potential auction timeframe. He also recommended resuming regular reviews to avoid having to evaluate so many parcels at once.

Mayor Pierce thanked staff for their work.

Council Member Shoen also expressed appreciation for staff providing an update as requested. He stated that he had visited several properties and believed some could be sold at auction. He raised concerns about holding vacant properties for extended periods and supported selling parcels the City no longer needs. He also discussed offering parcels to the adjoining property owners and considering opportunities for housing where lot size allows.

Mr. Lumbis used the GIS map to illustrate different properties. In response to Council Member Shoen's question about why a particular parcel was being held, Mr. Lumbis acknowledged that it may have been misclassified and explained how staff assigned the classifications. He also discussed the benefits of selling certain properties through a proposal process and cited examples of successful rehabilitation projects.

Council Member Kimball asked about the process for returning vacant homes to use and how the current inventory of 224 properties compared with prior years.

Mr. Lumbis stated that the number was comparable to prior years and that most of the properties were considered essential to retain.

City Comptroller James Mills added that the current count was within the usual range and could change when figures are updated in the spring.

Council Member Garrabrant stated that he would like to see these properties showcased so they are turned over quickly. He also suggested putting time limits on how long they are listed under sale by proposal, before moving them to auction.

Mayor Pierce agreed with establishing timelines and would like to see eligible properties promoted on social media.

City Manager's Update

City Manager Wagenaar publicly apologized for the recent system error affecting City school taxes. He said that the City will be working with the school district to work through the issue.

Mr. Wagenaar provided a staff report outlining proposed tax exemptions and stated resolutions would be presented at the next Council Meeting.

Mayor Pierce announced that community hours were scheduled for three dates and that Police Chief Cristin Lyon would attend two of the sessions. She added that she would issue a press statement with additional details.

Work session ended at 9:06 p.m.

Jessica L. Leroux - Deputy City Clerk