



MINUTES OF THE CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION held November 28, 2001, for the purpose of meeting with Roosevelt Center merchants.

The meeting began at 8:06 p.m. It was held in the Multipurpose Room of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Council members Rodney M. Roberts, Alan Turnbull, Edward V.J. Putens, Thomas X. White and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; Bob Manzi, City Solicitor; Jim Craze, Chief of Police; Lts. Michael Craddock and Tom Kemp; Officer George Matthews; Bill Phelan, City Horticulturist; and David E. Moran, Assistant to the City Manager

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Jim Cassels, Bob Davis, Sheldon Goldberg, Leonard Wallace, Gwen Vaccaro, Cindy Comproni, Louis Parker, Susan Jones, Anita Astryka, Lisa Daffan, Amy Boyes, The Gazette, and several other citizens.

Mr. McLaughlin outlined possible action steps that can be taken at Roosevelt Center as listed in a November 27 memorandum. He noted that staff was recommending these steps be implemented. The steps included: conduct a public information campaign, post a code of conduct, supplement Police presence with Code Enforcement personnel, add additional lighting and investigate upgrading existing lighting and move the benches near the overpass.

Lt. Kemp provided an overview of additional public safety steps taken at Roosevelt Center. Mr. Putens asked if individuals who have committed a crime can be banned from the area where the incident occurred. Lt. Kemp responded that this can be done, but it must be justified.

Mr. Manzi noted that individuals have certain rights of speech and assembly at Roosevelt Center. Mr. Roberts asked if the City could enforce the same rules it has at City facilities. Mr. Manzi responded no, because Courts have held that public areas like streets and sidewalks have a higher level of protection than facilities. Mr. Roberts believed the City should have a set of rules that the City applies at all of its facilities.

Mr. Putens believed that certain behavior should not be tolerated and suggested that the City may need to get State or Federal laws changed.

Mr. Wallace believed a code of conduct would help define expectations at the Center. Mr. Wallace asked about the "Officers as Agents" program. Mr. Manzi responded that this program was intended to deal with trespassing.

Ms. Vaccaro asked what she needed to do to report violations. Chief Craze responded that they should call the police to report it.

Mr. Turnbull asked about use of undercover officers. Chief Craze stated that the City could use these tools as resources allowed. The Chief suggested that groups of responsible adults needed to take back the Center. Mr. Turnbull asked about officer exchanges with other Police Departments. Chief Craze responded that this could be done as well.

Mr. White asked if there was a certain time when a public presence was needed at the Center. Lt. Kemp responded that the Department was beginning to try and track this.

Ms. Vaccaro suggested that the Center was the heart of the City and that the City needed to reclaim the Center. Mayor Davis stressed that other areas of the City had needs as well. Mr. Putens stated that the City needed more officers and needed to plan for future police needs, especially with the proposed development at the Greenbelt Metro Station.

Mr. Parker stated that we all need to take an aggressive stance and suggested that everyone should make an effort to report suspicious activity and reclaim the Center as well as the other parts of Greenbelt.

Ms. Comproni expressed concern about children hanging out in front of her store. Chief Craze responded that he would ask the SRO's to visit the area.

A citizen asked if restaurants had different rules about evicting patrons. Mr. Manzi responded that restaurants could enforce the same rules and prohibit individuals from being in their establishment.

Mr. Turnbull stressed that officers needed to intervene and try to engage offenders rather than ticket or arrest them. He asked if officers could conduct surveillance from the businesses. He noted that underage smoking was illegal and suggested officers approach kids and ask them to put it out. Mr. Turnbull asked about enforcement of rules at the Center (bicycling, skateboarding, etc.) Chief Craze responded that the City's laws needed to be tightened. Mr. Turnbull suggested that destruction of property (e.g., hedges) needed to be enforced. He also asked that the City investigate use of a camera that takes photos of every car passing through the Center. Mr. Manzi responded that he would have to investigate the legality of such a camera.

Mr. White stated that in the petitions to Council and discussions at the previous work session on the Center, the issue of patently illegal behavior keeps coming up. He stressed a distinction between this activity and concerns about inappropriate behavior and asked if there were police efforts directed at the drug activity reported by citizens at these forums. Chief Craze responded that none of the allegations had been confirmed. Mr. White hoped the need for the public to provide specific information to police would be included in a public information campaign.

Lt. Kemp encouraged merchants to report any suspicious incidents and record information. He noted that the Police Department can collect this information and run routine checks.

Mr. White stated the posted rules should include specific code citations. He stated that the more we talk negatively about the Center, it may become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Mr. Putens stressed that officers are highly trained and needed to address significant crimes. He suggested a non-sworn force that can deal with nuisance activities like littering, underage smoking, etc. He also stated the need for additional cameras at the Center.

Mayor Davis asked about upgrading the cameras. Chief Craze responded that upgraded cabling was needed to improve functionality (pan, tilt, etc.).

Mr. Roberts suggested using park rangers at the Center. Mr. McLaughlin indicated there were limited funds for rangers and they were not intended as enforcement personnel and that was why staff was suggesting use of code enforcement personnel.

Ms. Comproni asked if more light could be put near her business. Mr. McLaughlin indicated that the City was looking at increasing the wattage in the existing fixtures. Ms. Vaccaro stated that there were many lights that didn't work and those should be fixed. She also favored keeping about benches for those who were handicapped. Ms. Comproni asked that the benches by the underpass be removed.

Council requested that the City Manager come back on number with a plan for lighting changes and bench relocation.

Mr. Turnbull wanted to see a prototype of the information campaign. He expressed concern about signs at the Center and wanted to run that by APB and possibly the Landscape Architect that redesigned the Center. Mr. Turnbull wanted the City to require the landlord to properly maintain the lights.

Other Issues

Ms. Vaccaro expressed concern about two drains that backed up and caused damage to her business. She also referenced that there were rats. Mr. McLaughlin said he would ask Code Enforcement to investigate both situations. Ms. Vaccaro raised a concern about trash pickup.

There was discussion of problems with the present owner and options for the merchants. Mr. Manzi indicated that beyond code enforcement there was very little the City could do to pressure the owner.

Other Business

Mr. McLaughlin relayed a request from Jim Estep's campaign to meet with Council as a focus group. Council suggested that Mr. Estep approach organizations or individual Council members.

Mayor Davis announced the retirement celebration for Harry James.

The meeting ended at 11:17 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

David E. Moran

Assistant to the City Manager