

CITY OF ROCK ISLAND
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION
City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3rd Floor,
1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL

6/26/2023 - Minutes

1. Call to Order

Mayor Thoms called the meeting to order at 5:15 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

2. Roll Call

Mayor Thoms asked City Clerk Samantha Gange to call the roll.

Present: Mayor Mike Thoms and Alderpersons Randy Hurt, Judith Gilbert, Jenni Swanson, Dylan Parker, Mark Poulos, and Bill Healy.

Aldersperson Robinson arrived at 5:27 p.m.

Absent: None.

Staff: City Manager Todd Thompson, Attorney Dave Morrison, City Clerk Samantha Gange, and other City Staff.

3. Public Comment

Mayor Thoms asked if anyone in the public wished to speak. No residents were signed up to speak.

4. Presentations

a. Rock Island Downtown Alliance (RIDA) Workplan Presentation

Rock Island Downtown Alliance (RIDA) Director Jack Cullen provided a presentation on the downtown, including the CY 2024 budget that was recently approved by the RIDA Board. He reviewed the recent history of the partnership between the City and the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce in bringing a place management organization to the downtown area. He referred Council to the RIDA workplan and proposed budget, and discussed the organization's vision and mission. He noted the workplan is centered around three areas, including business and economic growth, infrastructure and livability, and advocacy and promotion. Roughly 50 percent of the budget involves clean and safe initiatives.

Mr. Cullen discussed the areas, or pillars of the RIDA workplan. Beginning with economic growth, he noted there are 13 major initiatives in the workplan. The goal of the first pillar is to enhance the economic landscape

of the downtown area. He said RIDA is looking to serve in a connector role for small businesses for grants that would spur expansion or development projects in the downtown. They will look to launch a capital improvement program separate from the City to help leverage funds for maximum benefit and private investment in the downtown. The board will look to identify such programs in the future.

Mr. Cullen discussed the infrastructure and livability pillar of the RIDA workplan. The primary goal is to utilize multiple entities in order to enhance safety in the downtown area, and nearly 50 percent of the established budget is dedicated to achieving this. They are looking to work with the Rock Island Police Department in hiring officers for overtime hours to provide additional security. He noted a \$7.5 million investment in downtown infrastructure, which would contain some tactical urban design measures to counter undesirable behaviors in the area. RIDA will partner with the Public Works Department to break ground on the Rebuild Downtown Rock Island Project, and will also launch a downtown ambassador program, which includes sweeping debris, removing graffiti, enhanced snow removal, and other landscaping duties. Enhanced services for the downtown will be brought back to the Council at a later time with more specific details of the services provided by RIDA. A Downtown Operations Manager will also be hired, and Mr. Cullen described the duties expected of that position.

Mr. Cullen discussed the advocacy and promotions pillar of the workplan. He said RIDA will create a marketing strategy and brand style guide for the board, and will take over the downtown social media and website. He noted the public meeting being held on Tuesday, June 27, 2023 to obtain public input on the draft renderings of the downtown and details of the project. He said securing office space and storage for RIDA would be important, and they will work with the City to potentially occupy the Centennial Bridge Commission building for office and garage needs. RIDA will also produce downtown business promotions and communications to keep stakeholders informed and involved. They plan to promote and program events as well as work with partners to plan and support their events, as is done with the Alternating Currents Festival. RIDA will also advocate for improved downtown property stewardship, as well as address public policy initiatives.

Mr. Cullen presented an overview of the FY 2024 RIDA budget, including contributions from the City, partners such as Modern Woodman, as well as the Special Services Area (SSA) tax. He discussed the details of certain expected expenses, including overtime hours for police officers for enhanced patrol in the downtown. He discussed the Community Navigator position as well as the supplies and equipment line item, which includes cleaning and personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies and a utility vehicle to enhance beautification in the downtown.

Aldersperson Swanson commended Mr. Cullen on the budget and said it was easy to understand. Mr. Cullen said the \$80,000 from the City has been discussed, and further details and review are needed. Aldersperson Healy asked how fluid the budget is. Mr. Cullen said it has to be fluid, and assured Council members that appointments to the board, including City Manager Todd Thompson, are reflective of the trust needed of the board. He added this is the first year, and if flexibility is needed, adjustments can be made year-to-year. Aldersperson Healy said he wanted to make sure of flexibility as there are not many people downtown at the moment, and thus there is not a large need for police at this time. Mr. Cullen said that is another example of flexibility and noted the visible presence of police would make a difference. Aldersperson Healy said another challenge for the board is the reference to the outdated 2015 downtown plan, adding that he hoped this would adapt to the changes and challenges. Aldersperson Poulos asked if a full staff would be necessary right away with the anticipated construction. Mr. Cullen said he sees the organization getting off the ground in full within two to three years, and staffing is key to accomplishing that.

Alderson Gilbert said when the budget was first presented last year, there was opposition to the amount of the overhead and staff and asked if consideration had been made for starting with smaller staff numbers. Mr. Cullen said it is important to have all components in place, including an operations manager, based on the models used to develop Rock Island's plan. Alderson Gilbert asked if they see themselves creating a signature Rock Island event in the downtown. Mr. Cullen said the existing budget does not currently reflect that, but he would be interested in discussing with the City what that might look like. He said the focus is getting the initiative started and setting the City up for success, then having strategic conversations about such events. He added that the board is currently looking at smaller-scale, more frequently-occurring events. He discussed the Alternating Currents series, and noted the August 17 through August 21, 2023 week and would look to additional City support and funding. They are also working with the Parks and Recreation Department to kickoff Thursday Night Live.

Alderson Gilbert asked who would pay for the parklets. Mr. Cullen said that is being modeled after other national trends following the COVID-19 pandemic structure. They will look into exploring a lease system for the structures. The purchase of the structures would be part of the RIDA budget. Alderson Parker remarked there are finally some numbers dedicated to doing the items that have been talked about since 2015, and said he appreciated all that Mr. Cullen and RIDA have done.

b. Martin Luther King, Jr. Center Presentation

Jerry Jones, Executive Director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) Center approached the podium to further discuss budget adjustment requests from the June 12, 2023 City Council meeting that were put on hold. He reviewed and reiterated the intent of the West End Revitalization Project, which includes the Collective Impact Structure (CIS) and the proposed West End Coordinator position. He said he would discuss what the position would entail, as it would be the backbone of the project along with the MLK Center. He discussed the five key aspects of the (CIS), including a common vision, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and shared measures.

Mr. Jones noted that the MLK Center is the backbone of the West End project, and is necessary to build community engagement. He said the steering committee recognized, however, that with the aggressive timeframe of the project, they are not convinced that the MLK Center alone can get the job done. He explained that the reason for the budget adjustment request was to obtain a second West End Coordinator to help advance the project. He opened up the presentation with questions from the Council.

Alderson Hurt said he appreciates the work that is being done on this and noted he values the project. He asked for more transparency as it pertains to budget changes and the addition of positions. He noted that the original transfer was going to youth programs for salary and benefits, and asked how this was related to the West End Coordinator. Mr. Jones clarified that ARPA dollars previously approved by the Council will come directly from fund 248, and the \$100,000 allocated under fund 248 was not for youth services. Salary for any position will come from fund 248, or the ARPA fund. Alderson Hurt said the allocated dollar amounts were difficult to follow and asked for clarification. Mr. Jones said the item questioned by Alderson Hurt may be a clerical error, and he will have it corrected. City Clerk and ARPA Program Manager Gange provided more clarification on the appropriate fund origins and cost centers. Finance Director Linda Barnes confirmed that Ms. Gange explained the process of restricting ARPA funds correctly, which is different due to federal reporting standards.

Alderson Hurt said there has been confusion as to whether the coordinator position is contractual or a City

employee. Mr. Jones said he met with Human Resources Director Rob Baugous following a February 2023 City Council Study Session where the coordinator position was discussed, and he was told that a contractual position for the length of time necessary may encounter legal issues with regards to benefits related to grant dollars. He added there was less risk in making the position a City employee. Alderperson Swanson said when the information was first provided to Council, the position was listed at \$50,000 with no benefits, which changed to a \$100,000 grant-funded position. She expressed frustration that the position would be a City staff position with benefits and, specifically, representation funds that exceeded the Council's own. Mr. Jones said the contract for the proposed employee would actually come under what the original proposal would be, and noted that the messages were mixed between February's Study Session and the June 12 Council meeting. He said the budget adjustment in question would approve the use of grant dollars to hire a second individual.

Alderperson Parker asked if all of the MLK Center employees were City employees. Mr. Jones confirmed that was correct. Mr. Baugous clarified that the original proposal was for a 1- to 2-year contracted employee, but it was recommended that the position transition to a City employee. Mayor Thoms noted that Council was not consulted about the change from a contracted to a City employee. Mr. Baugous said it was communicated to the Council, but some did not receive it. Alderperson Gilbert noted similar confusion regarding the position, and asked why coordinators would be hired prior to the completion of the consultant's work. Mr. Jones responded in part by noting that grant funds from United Way allow for organizational discretion regarding use of the funds. Alderperson Gilbert asked why Council could not receive a clear trail of all revenues, grants, and ARPA funds as well as expenditures regarding the West End Revitalization Project. Mr. Jones replied there are deliverables that have not yet been achieved with the consultant according to the contract, and therefore additional grant fund amounts have not been spent.

Alderperson Robinson noted that the reason for no clear picture of the flow of funds is that there had been no project line item specific to the West End Revitalization Project, and therefore funds come from different sources, which is typical of how the MLK Center needs to operate. He said there now is a collective project number, and the Council should become more familiar with how the MLK Center is supported. Alderperson Poulos asked if all funding sources that come in are placed into a general account. Mr. Jones replied the MLK Center has five funds, but the 200 funds are focused on building and some administration items, and the 900 funds are focused on programs and activities. Some of the 900 funds are separated in order to deal with federal and state regulations. Responding to a question from Alderperson Gilbert, Mr. Jones said he has requested a project number for the John Deere Foundation funds so there is an easier way to pull out expenses and revenues as necessary. ARPA funds will come from a different project code, as they are in a fund that is already assigned.

Mayor Thoms asked if the annual audit included all of the MLK Center's funds. Finance Director Linda Barnes said the MLK Center is a part of the audit as a portion of the City-wide governmental accounting process. Alderperson Swanson asked if the MLK Center was considered a non-profit or a City department. Mr. Jones replied it is considered both as a registered non-profit by the state and federal government, as well as a City entity, and the duties for each body have been laid out. Alderperson Swanson asked if the non-profit accounting is separate from the City accounting, and how the proposed employee would be funded. Mr. Jones said a decision would be made at the end of the contract's first year depending on available funds, and how long the position can continue. The position would be under City payroll in order to abide by regulations.

5. Adjourn

a. Motion to Adjourn.

Motion:	Motion to adjourn.
RC	Roll Call vote is needed.

MOTION:

Aldersperson Healy moved to adjourn; Aldersperson Swanson seconded.

VOTE:

Motion PASSED on a 7-0-0 roll call vote. Aye: Robinson, Hurt, Gilbert, Swanson, Parker, Poulos, Healy. Nay: None. Absent: None.

The meeting ended at 6:39 p.m.

Josh Adams, Deputy City Clerk