

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

10/23/2023 - Minutes

1. Call to Order

Mayor Thoms called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

2. Roll Call

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

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

Alderman Randy Hurt arrived at 5:33 p.m.

Absent: Alderman Moses Robinson.

Staff: Assistant City Manager and Parks and Recreation Director John Gripp, Attorney Leslie Day, City Clerk Samantha Gange, and other City Staff.

MOTION:

Alderman Poulos moved to allow Alderman Judith Gilbert to attend via remote connection; Alderman Swanson seconded.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 4-0-2 voice vote. Aye: Parker, Poulos, Healy, and Swanson. Nay: None. Absent: Robinson, Hurt.

3. Public Comment

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

4. Presentations

- a. Public Works - Proposal for Dumpster Registration

Public Works Superintendent Luke VanLandegen discussed the benefits of dumpster registration. He provided

background information on the dumpster blight in the downtown area, and a number of photos to illustrate the problems. He noted that most businesses address dumpster issues immediately, and the purpose of the presentation is not to single out any business, as it is a widespread problem downtown. Sometimes messes are simply overflow, but other times it is a matter of illegal dumping. He said staff spoke with public works departments in other municipalities to acquire different perspectives on what does and does not work for dumpster management. He added that the key is to not allow the dumpster areas to get in disarray from the beginning.

Mr. VanLandegen discussed the current ordinance language, which says dumpsters are to be serviced once a week, which is partly an awareness issue, but rarely happens. The Zoning divisions and the Public Works Department have the authority to require dumpsters on private property to be properly screened or fenced. Non-compliance to the ordinance would follow the nuisance violation protocols. He pointed to the nuance with the City's authority regarding private property dumpsters and those on right-of-ways. He said the current challenges include ownership identification of dumpsters, multiple service providers, haulers that may not be aware of the weekly service requirement, and the abuse of dumpster areas with illegal dumping activities.

Mr. VanLandegen discussed proposed solutions to the dumpster issues. The first proposal is to have dumpsters registered with the City to identify ownership and location. Another is to have one exclusive hauler for the entire downtown area, similar to what is done in Iowa City, IA. Consolidation of dumpsters represents an additional potential solution. Registration would include a label on the dumpster that identifies the related business and their address. Benefits for registration of dumpsters include the establishment of clear accountability, as local authorities will gain insight as to who is responsible for waste disposal at all locations. This would be invaluable in a non-compliance scenario. Additionally, registration would provide a legal framework for enforcement and streamline the process of addressing non-compliance. Drawbacks for registration would potentially include additional administrative tasks and time for businesses, as well as the need for City staff to process the information and assess registration fees.

Mr. VanLandegen discussed the benefits of having an exclusive provider for hauling in the downtown. These include the ensurance of a consistent level of service tailored to the unique needs of the downtown, more reliable service times with less clutter, and the advantage of businesses not having to shop for providers. Drawbacks to exclusivity would potentially include dealing with existing contracts held by businesses with other providers. This might require negotiation and contract buyouts. There is also the potential for service disruptions as well as missed pickups during the transition period.

Mr. VanLandegen discussed the benefits of consolidation. This would potentially include having reduced clutter and optimizing the usage of space, as well as streamlining the collection of waste while reducing noise and odors. He discussed the recommendations of Public Works, which include a phased approach to downtown waste collection improvement. This would start with registration, leaving the option open to having an exclusive provider in the area. Additionally, an ordinance would be drafted to Council to implement the registration program and mandate consolidation where appropriate. The second phase would include an assessment of the initial impact of registration, and if the feedback is positive, move towards a centralized waste management program in the downtown.

Mr. VanLandegen said community engagement in the process would be essential. The plan would be to engage stakeholders to ensure needs are met and concerns addressed, and he said most businesses would agree this is an issue that needs a resolution. Jack Cullen, Executive Director of the Rock Island Downtown Alliance addressed Council, stating there was potential for areas of consolidation, including the Arts Alley

project. Mr. VanLandegen said proposals such as this would help to create a people-friendly environment in the downtown.

Mayor Thoms asked whether or not a cost for registration would be recommended. Mr. VanLandegen replied they have not arrived at that point in the process. Mayor Thoms asked which department would be responsible for registration. Mr. VanLandegen replied it would likely need to be a combination of the Community and Economic Development (CED) and Public Works departments, as CED is currently identified by ordinance as having enforcement capabilities on nuisance violations.

Aldersperson Swanson suggested it would be beneficial to send staff to each business for the initial process of registration at their location. She expressed concern that businesses with dumpsters close to their location would have the responsibility for the entire cluster of dumpsters. She noted the pushback regarding the potential Project NOW purchase of the Star Cres Building, expressing concern that said pushback would feel justified if violations occurred at that cluster location. Mr. VanLandegen agreed, and said mandating dumpster responsibility would be challenging. Mayor Thoms remarked that it could potentially drive costs down to consolidate with one vendor. He suggested looking at long-term solutions for enclosures as some materials are easily damaged, and can add to blight.

Aldersperson Healy discussed some of the difficulties his downtown business has encountered with their hauling vendor. He commented that registration would help with the issues that they are facing. Mr. VanLandegen said there are extremes pertaining to what haulers will allow, and Public Works should be able to help facilitate finding a consolidation vendor.

b. Inspections Presentation on Demolition Process

Community & Economic Development Director Miles Brainard and Building Official Jerad Irvine presented the first of a four-part series on inspections. This involved an overview of the Inspections Division and the demolition processes and policies. Mr. Brainard said the Inspections Division is comprised of the building official and his team, who are responsible for ensuring the safety of the built environment. There are three subdivisions including the trades, housing and property maintenance, and health. Demolition generally falls into two broad categories, including emergency and non-emergency. Emergency demolitions are considered when there is an imminent threat to public safety. Non-emergency demolitions are considered to eliminate blighted conditions, and are undertaken as a last resort. Non-emergency demolitions are both taken seriously and done sparingly. When a demolition occurs, the City loses property tax revenue, as well as the opportunity for creative reuse and the loss of cultural heritage.

Mr. Brainard discussed details of how a demolition is considered an emergency, using the Klass building as an example. It is at risk of collapse onto the right-of-way or other buildings, including the nearby parking lot. This demolition is time-sensitive, but not necessarily fast, as the legal process can be lengthy. The court process is in place and could take time before the demolition. Steps have been taken to ensure safety, including an erected fence surrounding the property. This process is uncommon and invoked rarely.

Mr. Irvine discussed the standard operating procedures for a demolition. He said they are done on a case-by-case basis, and depending on the ownership situation, the circuit court is petitioned for an order to demolish based on the 1 by 1 process. Once the order is granted, bidding documents are prepared, and City Council can approve the contract in order for the demolition to begin. State statute defines 1x1 as the application

required by the Circuit Court, including a posting on the building itself.

Mr. Brainard discussed the non-emergency demolitions process. Generally, these are houses that have deteriorated past the point of no return, or properties that are not owned by anyone. In any given year, the City has funds to address 4 to 6 of these properties, a number which can fluctuate when more funds are available. This is usually through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. Buildings on the foreclosed, vacant, or abandoned property list are monitored and structural elements evaluated. The 2x2 notice differs from 1x1 simply because there is a 2 foot by 2 foot sign on the building as opposed to 1x1, per state statute. Mr. Irvine said the department is taking more of a systematic approach, including a scoring process that is based on various factors such as proximity to a school, etc. Staff adds in data, and a list is generated based on the aforementioned scores. Mr. Irvine and the department is working on making this more documentable and objective.

Mr. Brainard discussed special circumstances and industrial demolitions. From time to time, the City may acquire a commercial or industrial building for economic development reasons. Prior to the demolition, a last call for rehab can be issued for 30 days, which is not a common practice, and does not often take place. Mr. Brainard asked Council if they had any questions or comments, or questions about how the department approaches demolitions.

Aldersperson Parker thanked the department for their work and development of these processes. He said he appreciated the last call option, but would also like to see it with residential structures, and would like to see the Land Bank utilize the last call approach with properties such as these. Mr. Brainard explained that most of the 2x2 demolition situations do not end up with the City being the owner. Staff would need to get legal permission in this type of situation, but if the Land Bank were involved, that would be different. Aldersperson Parker said ultimately, he would prefer to see other alternatives aside from demolition, such as prevention before it gets to a certain state.

Aldersperson Gilbert asked about the status of the old parks and recreation office, and whether it was demolished. Mr. Gripp and Mr. Brainard responded affirmatively. Mr. Brainard said other sessions would be forthcoming that focus on rental inspections, and vacant or abandoned property registration.

5. Adjourn

- a. Motion to Adjourn.

Motion:	Motion whether or not to adjourn.
RC	Voice vote is needed.

MOTION:

Aldersperson Poulos moved to adjourn; Aldersperson Healy seconded.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 6-0-1 voice vote. Aye: Poulos, Healy, Hurt, Gilbert, Swanson, and Parker. Nay: None.
Absent: Robinson.

The meeting adjourned at 6:18 p.m.

Josh Adams, Deputy City Clerk