

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

2/12/2024 - Minutes

1. Call to Order

Mayor Thoms called the Study Session 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: Alderperson Randy Hurt, Jenni Swanson, Dylan Parker, Mark Poulos and Mayor Mike Thoms.

Alderperson Jenni Swanson arrived at 5:35 p.m.

Alderperson Moses Robinson arrived at 5:38 p.m.

Absent: Alderperson Bill Healy.

Staff: City Manager Todd Thompson, Attorney Leslie Day, City Clerk Samantha Gange, and other City Staff.

3. Public Comment

No one from the public was signed up to speak.

4. Presentations

a. Campground Feasibility Study Presentation - Campground Consulting Group

Parks & Recreation Director John Gripp introduced Founder and President Jayne Cohen of Campground Consulting Group. They were approached this past spring to conduct a feasibility study for the development of an RV park at Sunset Park. Ms. Cohen shared a little bit about herself and her qualifications and introduced her associate, Sharon Weber. Campground Consulting Group specializes in feasibility and market studies, development and expansion, land planning and operations.

Ms. Weber shared some key findings in the camping industry and said this is a great opportunity to create a recreation destination for Rock Island residents as well as tourists. Turning Sunset Park into Sunset RV Park and Marina would include adding RV and tent sites for each access, unique rentals, fee-based amenities, boat slips and boat ramps. She shared a bubble diagram that showed the relationship between the different elements they envisioned for the development. Ms. Weber noted that Sunset Park is in a great location with easy access to Interstate 280 and Route 92 as well as access to the Mississippi River.

They discussed the proposed development. Full hookup (FHU) sites, which means the sites have water,

electricity and sewer, are the industry's most demanded sites. There are few that exist in the market right now, which would give the City a competitive advantage. In looking at the rentals, they recommended tree house rentals, which are cabins built on stilts to help avoid flooding during flooding season, and river boat rentals. These would sit in the marina and provide a unique experience. Both the river boats and tree houses offer a unique element that would substantially increase occupancy and related revenue. Ms. Weber pointed out that there are amenities already on the property that can be used as is, while some would need to be refurbished.

They believe there is a unique opportunity for the RV park and marina to share buildings, amenities and employees, and highly recommended coordinating the renovation of the marina and the new campground development. The plan would be to phase in tree houses and river boats over a five-year period. The Campground Consulting Group expects profitability between years two through five for a new RV park development. Even with conservative modeling, using a minimum site density, the proposed development has a net operating income from year one and a positive cash flow in year three. The total campground development cost as presented would be \$18.1 million. Ms. Cohen said the only negative from the key development criteria is flooding, which is addressable. Hospitality and funding are neutral concerns, but they are also addressable.

The next steps would be to develop a master land plan for the marina, campground, and daily use attraction. The financial model would be revised to coincide with a phasing plan.

Alderperson Swanson said she cannot picture a water park play area while also allowing the public to have access to Lake Potter. Alderperson Poulos noted that the diagram showed that there could be a barrier between the two areas. Ms. Cohen said she was involved with a development in Ohio where they had different areas buoyed off for different things. This is something that they can look into when they get to the master planning stage.

Alderperson Parker believes it would be worthwhile to have a conversation with Visit Quad Cities to solicit their thoughts on whether an attraction like this would be positive for the community. Based on the presentation, Alderperson Parker said it is his understanding that this would be a publicly owned, financed, managed, and operated project. He asked if there had been any consideration or arrangement to have the private sector finance, construct and operate the entire operation. Mr. Gripp said that financing is a huge question for him and his department. One of the challenges of the marina has been covering the expenses for maintenance. Mr. Gripp said if the consensus is to move in this direction, then it must be looked at as one facility. He noted that the Parks Department is not in the position to raise funds to offset any of this operation.

Alderperson Hurt said there are a lot of options on the table and asked about the cost of a phased approach. Ms. Cohen said she encourages the phased model because of the capital costs, and it also allows them to see how the property is growing.

City Manager Todd Thompson said the staff will review the information and provide some thoughts on what the next step might be.

b. Rock Island Public Library 2023 Annual Report Presentation

Library Director Angela Campbell provided an overview of the Rock Island Public Library 2023 Annual Report. She explained the actual revenue in 2023 was \$2,836,148, of which 81 percent comes from the City tax. She noted the percentage from the Foundation is not as high this year due to money being tied up in capital campaign payments for the Watts-Midtown Branch. CY 2023 expenditures were reviewed, with the two largest being personnel and services. Capital went toward the purchase of the parking lot adjacent to the south entrance at the Downtown Library. They plan to develop it in the future. The Library Board earmarked \$350,000 for furniture and equipment for the Watts-Midtown Branch and some of those bills came due in 2023 instead of 2022. They also had a \$50,000 elevator upgrade in 2023.

Ms. Campbell provided a statistical overview of what took place at the library in 2023. The total number of library materials used in 2023 was 154,000. The number of electronic materials circulated continues to increase and was up thirty-three percent last year. Library statistics continue to increase, post-COVID. Patron visits were up 32% from last year. Program attendance was recorded at approximately 59,000 patrons, which is up 12%. She also discussed the various partners the City Library works with, including neighboring communities.

Ms. Campbell reported that the Library Board is asking for taxes to be levied in the amount of \$2,652,859 to cover all estimated inflationary costs for CY 2025. The dollar amount represents a 7% increase, which should provide enough funds for a balanced budget. She discussed accumulations and liabilities. Accumulations include a 90-day reserve fund. There is also an assigned reserve fund, specifically for library capital projects. Liabilities include HVAC and lighting upgrades. The annual payment is roughly \$90,000 with a little over \$1 million still owed. The library also owes an estimated \$379,155 towards the remaining balance of the Watts-Midtown Library construction. Fundraising is underway, with the expectation that within the next two years, the amount will be substantially lower.

Ms. Campbell reviewed the Year of the Library. They celebrated their 150th Birthday, held a Grand Opening at the new Watts-Midtown Branch in March and celebrated 120 years at the Downtown Library in December. She shared some of the library's programs that are offered to the public, which includes the Summer Reading Program. Ms. Campbell talked about strategic planning sessions in 2024 and capitalizing on the library as an economic development tool.

Mayor Thoms thanked Ms. Campbell, the Library Board, Foundation and volunteers for making this a great amenity for the City of Rock Island.

Alderperson Swanson noted the 90-day reserve fund is required by the City. She pointed out that the assigned capital funding has already been assigned to future projects.

5. Adjourn

a.

Motion: Motion whether or not to adjourn.

VV Voice vote is needed.

MOTION:

Aldersperson Poulos moved to adjourn the meeting; Aldersperson Parker seconded.

The Study Session adjourned at 6:39 p.m.

VOTE:

Motion PASSED on a 6-0-0 roll call vote. Aye: Swanson, Parker, Poulos, Robinson, Gilbert, and Hurt. Nay: None. Absent: None.