

The meeting of the Pocomoke City Mayor and Council was held in the Council Chambers at City Hall on Monday, March 18, 2019. The meeting was called to order at 6:32 PM.

Present: Mayor Bruce Morrison
First Vice President: Esther Troast
Council Members: Diane Downing,
Dale Trotter, Todd Nock, George Tasker
City Manager: Robert L. Cowger, Jr
City Attorney: Roscoe Leslie
City Clerk: Michelle Beckett-El Soloh

Call to Order, Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance @ 6:32 PM.

Review and Approval of Minutes from Meeting of March 04, 2019:

Motion to approve Minutes from Council meeting March 04, 2019 (Tasker, Trotter passed) @ 6:33 PM.

Acclamation: Trotter-aye, Nock-aye, Troast-aye, Downing-aye, Tasker-aye; none opposed

Review and Approval of Bills:

Motion to Approve and pay bills on current bill list (Nock, Tasker passed) @ 6:34 PM.

Acclamation: Trotter-aye, Nock-aye, Troast-aye, Downing-aye, Tasker-aye; none opposed

Approve Bids for Purchase of City-Owned Surplus Properties:

Planning Director Dan Brandewie stated the City put 6 surplus properties up for bids. The City received bids on all properties. The Council received a summary sheet of the bids. Bids that came in were good bids and will cover the City costs. There was one exception. That is property #5. Purchase price was \$3,958.44. The bid that came in was \$500.00. He recommends not to accept that bid, but that is Council decision. He would recommend that Council accepts the other bids and proceeds to enter into purchase contracts with the interested parties. Councilmember Tasker asked if the City can still list the properties with a realtor instead of just giving these properties away? Councilwoman Downing asked if pictures of the properties were still available? (That file was not available on the computer) Planning Director Brandewie said that was discussed with Council prior to putting a request for bids out. City Manager Cowger stated that Council can accept or refuse any bid. There will be a lot more properties that will be offered to bid on. A property can be held and put back into the next properties that come up for bid. Councilmember Nock confirmed that property #5 bid does not have to be accepted tonight? City Manager Cowger confirmed that is correct. There are other properties for disposal that will be offered in the future. Some of these properties are small and have been acquired by tearing down old buildings, These properties are of no use to the City. They need to be sold and put back on the tax roll. Planning Director Brandewie said he did not know that unless a property is declared for City use, the City still has to pay property tax to the County. Council commented on the price offered on property #1 and that price should definitely be accepted. Councilmember Nock said that the issue with property #5 is that the person placed a bid on every property offered. The reason why the City acquired these properties was because the people that owned the properties didn't do what they were supposed to do. Because this person bid on all the properties the City doesn't want the properties to sit vacant and not have any building or development on it. Councilmember Tasker asked if there was any purchase/development history with that bidder? Planning Director Brandewie said he wasn't familiar with the City history with that particular person.

Councilmember Troast asked if all properties were vacant or had buildings? City Manager Cowger answered, all properties are vacant. The City also has to cut grass every two weeks and maintain properties. That is a City expense. Councilmember Troast asked if the Council does not accept the bid for property #5, can it be relisted. Planning Director Brandewie answered, yes, the process would be the same. Certain properties are brought before Council to approve to open bid process. It can also go to real estate office.

Motion to accept all bids, except on property #5, all properties having bids that are accepted are no longer needed for public purpose by the City and for that reason are being opened to public bid (Troast, Nock passed) @ 6:40 PM

Acclamation: Trotter-aye, Nock-aye, Troast-aye, Downing-aye, Tasker-aye; none opposed

Discuss Elected Official Computer/Tablet Policy:

City Manager Cowger said this was drafted by HR Dept. This subject came about after meeting with the insurance company. Insurance company recommended that a policy be put in place to protect the City. It is an FYI unless the Council wants to vote to enact it. Councilmember Downing said she doesn't agree with the policy. The City doesn't need to know how the individuals on the Council responds to a citizen's email. Emails should be private. City Manager Cowger said this is mostly due to the ongoing lawsuit and what the City has had to do to access and gather those records. Councilmember Downing said if the City Attorney or opposing attorney has a case, then yes, the City should have access for info pertaining to a specific case. The City Manager or the City Clerk should not have access on a daily basis to the City's email accounts. Councilmember Nock said the part he is hung up on is where it says "City reserves the right to monitor its email system" that part is good, but "including an elected official's email at its discretion in the ordinary course of City business". Basically, that says the email can be looked at any time you feel like it. City Manager Cowger said this policy is what is in effect with City employees now, this is just adding in elected officials. Councilmember Downing said she still doesn't agree. Councilmember Troast said it needs to be reworded. City Manager Cowger said that is why it is being brought before Council today. City Manager asked City Attorney to weigh in. City Attorney Leslie said that as public officials or government officials, email is subject to be produced under the rules of Public Information Act. Documents might have to be turned over in a public manner if requested. If you send a to a letter to a citizen it is considered a public document. Email is subject to the same treatment. Councilmember Downing said she is still not in agreement with the way it is written. She doesn't have anything to hide. Councilmember Nock said the last bullet needs to be taken out. "At its discretion in its ordinary course of business" needs to be taken out. That is like saying if you think that there is something in my email that would help someone. What if someone emailed me about a water bill and you wanted to know what I said, this document says you could just go into our email and see what we said. And that's not acceptable. Councilmember Trotter said put a period after mailbox and delete the rest. Councilmember Nock said the Council needs to be notified if any access is to be done. Parameters need to be set. There are people who have City phones. You can't just take away phones. Councilmember Troast asked who the IT Coordinator is? City Clerk Beckett-El Soloh answered myself and Rusty Merritt, under direction of City Manager.

Action: Reword "Elected Officials-Computer Use" policy. Bring back to Council at next scheduled meeting.

Discuss Downtown Revitalization:

City Manager Cowger said as we know, the City has been tearing down buildings and working with DBA, the City is getting comments about all the vacant lots and what is the plan for Downtown? The

City has a vision to fill in the empty spaces. Becker Morgan has done a concept drawing. The City wanted a building that would blend in with the existing buildings so this is what they came up with that has brick. This drawing shows the whole block because that's how they had to do it for the computer model. There are still buildings standing there now. What we gave them direction to do is put retail space on the bottom and condo/apartment type living space on the 2nd floor. This is a popular design going on in in cities and towns now. There have been a couple developers that would be interested in the project. There are 3 different views; front, side and corner. The thought was to put balconies on front and sides of the living quarters. Events that the City has would be able to be viewed from the balconies. The living areas are roughly 1,400 sq ft. The section where the Lusby buildings are now, if the Council is in agreement; if you like the concept drawings, a developer can start from the corner of Lusby building and build to front street. Also, the 2 empty lots where the buildings were just torn down can be built on. This is probably a year or two out before they would be finished but what this does is gives anyone who would want to come into Pocomoke and setup commercial retail, they have a nice, new, fresh building. Condos on the top would have to be owner-occupied. They can't be AirB&B or rentals. If you buy it, you have to live in it. As far as the commercial space, they are open design, just petition walls, and can be designed according to square footage needed from 1,500 sq ft to 4,000 sq ft. This is just a starting idea. At least when the community asks what will be done with vacant lots after tearing old buildings down, we do have a vision. One of the developers said if they got a 50% commitment on retail and condo, they would start building and take the risk on getting the 2nd half occupied. Councilwoman Downing asked how can you require someone to not be able to rent their property and have to live in it? You can't tell someone they can by something then not rent it out or sublease it? The City Attorney Leslie stated that sounds difficult to do and would need to investigate that. Councilmember George Tasker said that is the way the Planning & Zoning Code is now. If you own the building downstairs, only the owner can live upstairs. City Manager Cowger said the building on the end, Mike Dunn owns it and Billy Hickman is occupying right now has an area that ties in that could be made into a downtown restroom and can be opened during downtown events. Councilmember Trotter said he thinks that design looks fabulous and that it still leaves room for parking and Discovery Museum overflow and the one-room schoolhouse. If the Council moves forward with the plan, you can still make changes to the plan. The developers would come take measurements. The concept-drawing depicts 4-1,500 sq ft condos and 6-1,400 sq ft condos and the way they have been designed are to be in the \$200,000 range to be affordable. Public opinion has been that Pocomoke City doesn't have anything to offer the millennial people who don't want yardwork and same with the senior population who don't want yardwork either. People looking for this kind of set up are going to Salisbury because it's not available here locally. City Manager Cowger said Council can think about this but at least consider the go-ahead to get this out to the public. Councilmember Nock said he feels a Public Hearing should be held. City Manager Cowger said yes, that will be scheduled. Councilmember Nock said we need to create a "Downtown Revitalization Committee" to work with the City Manager because after Downtown there are other areas that need a lot of work; uptown, the middle, southside because the downtown can look beautiful but there are still houses on 6th St that need a lot of work to look decent. City Manager Cowger said this a start. The City needs to do. We can't just leave things stagnate like it is. This City was let go for years and has continued to go down. It is not thriving as well as it was 20 years ago. The City let things deteriorate and now the City needs to step up and do what we need to do to improve and turn things around. City Manager Cowger said he likes Councilmember Nock's idea to to a Public Hearing, that's first. Councilmember Nock said each Councilmember needs to pick a person to serve on a Revitalization Committee. Council's opinion was that the people to choose would have an interest and a vision for Pocomoke and maybe have background in construction and retail. Councilmember Troast said it needs to be given consideration and thought. Councilmembers were in agreement that they like the idea of the retail/condo concept drawings and think downtown area would benefit. Councilmember Nock did not like the green awnings.

Action: Councilmembers to each choose a person with a vision for revitalization in Pocomoke City. City Clerk to put on Agenda for next mayor & Council meeting meeting.

Council Comments:

Councilmember Tasker said he is seeing lots of potholes on streets. City Manager Cowger said that clearing the trenches can cause the road edges to become loose especially with rain. One guy from Public Works is inspecting roads for weak spots. In the spring, the plan is to get the trenches paved. We should be caught up sometime in April.

Councilmember Nock asked if there was a service hotline for after hours in the City that citizens can use to report issues? City Manager Cowger said for emergencies people are supposed to call the emergency police number. Councilmember Nock wanted to know if a hotline and a 24-hour link to maybe the City Clerks email address on the website to can be setup. Someone was having a water issue that was not the City's fault. It was underneath the house. City Manager Cowger said the police have a weekend and night person on call and someone at the police department can take care of cutting the water off. Councilmember Nock stated that most people would Google the contact info instead of calling the police department.

Action: City Clerk to add link for 24-hour emergency hotline link on website.

Councilmember Trotter said he thinks the timer for the traffic lights is not coming on at 8:00 AM since the time change. City Manager Cowger said that when the light poles were taken out so demolition could be done the timer line was broken. Now the light poles can be put back in and timers reset. That will be completed soon. Harry Whit's company is finishing the clean-up of the area.

Councilmember Troast was approached by Pocomoke Little League Association would like for the City to sponsor another little league team this year for \$500.00 and uniforms and to put the City of Pocomoke banner on the fence.

Motion to approve City sponsorship of Pocomoke Little League team, \$500.00 and uniforms and placing the City of Pocomoke banner on the little fence (Trotter, Nock passed) @ 6:55 PM

Acclamation: Trotter-aye, Nock-aye, Troast-aye, Downing-aye, Tasker-aye; none opposed

Action: City Manager Cowger to review budget for those funds.

Councilmember Troast said the downtown flowers are personal to her. She has taken it upon herself to take care of the flower pots. She tries to do perennials so that they come back every year and just need 1 or 2 plants in each pot at the start of the season to make them full again. Last year she tried to take care of watering pots and hanging baskets but it was just too much during the hot summer and some plants died. Lowes has given the City a good deal on buying plants and supplies. This year, she has picked the "Downtown Beautification Project" to donate some of the money to go towards the supplies. She would like Council permission to request bids for a company to take care of the plants. Last year the City spent \$2,000.00 in garden supplies. \$700.00 from an auction has been raised to put towards that amount. The permission would be to go ask for quotes from different companies. Councilmember Tasker said he was at a DPA meeting recently and this topic was discussed. Amber Thompson, owner of Simply Sublime, 147 Market St, she stated that she has a vested interest in the downtown appearance. She likes the idea of decorating the downtown and contracting out the care of the plants. She worked in a nursery for 5 years and knows that the hanging baskets dry out quickly.

Her idea is that Lowes uses a machine called a “water buffalo”. It’s a pressurized water tank and comes with equipment high enough to reach hanging plants. She has volunteered to water everyday since she will be living in the downtown area. The DPA has been raising funds to be more involved with downtown beautification. Even if the job is contracted out, they might not come out enough to keep them watered. She has found water buffalos ranging from \$300.00 to \$1,000.00. Lowes has had to do very little maintenance on theirs so they seem to be cost effective. It was Mark Scher’s idea to split the cost of a water buffalo with the City. Councilmember Troast said she will bring estimates for planting and basic care of downtown hanging baskets and pots.

Action: Councilmember Troast to get estimates for downtown plants and care.

Audience Comments:

Curtis Milbourne, 709 Clarke Ave, a few years ago he ran for a Councilmember position. He is interested in filling in for District 3 if the current seat holder leaves. He is also the leader of the Election Board and needs the Board of Election Supervisors to meet. City Clerk advised that she has met with Mr. Milbourne once and was given contact information for all but 1 of the Supervisors. There are 2 meeting set up in the next 10 days before the election. Councilmember Nock said make sure meeting are scheduled so that all the Board members will know the procedure and what is expected of them on election day.

Action: City Clerk Beckett-El Soloh to continue with pre-election process and meet with Board of Elections Supervisors.

Councilmember Nock said he received some concerns from neighborhood residents that have seen the buildings in downtown area come down. There were also some houses that were scheduled for demolition. That was supposed to happen in October 2018, now it is March. Are they scheduled yet? Planning Director Brandewie said those projects are a budget issue and will be moving forward one budget issues are solved.

Councilmember Tasker said everyone has complained that the lighting in the Council Chambers is very dim. A company has met with Finance Director Wilson and there will be corrections made. Brighter bulbs installed.

Motion to adjourn meeting (Nock, Trotter passed) @ 7:20 PM

Acclamation: Trotter-aye, Nock-aye, Troast-aye, Downing-aye, Tasker-aye; none opposed

Approved: K.M. Beckett- El Soloh
City Clerk