

OWOSSO CITY COUNCIL

FEBRUARY 21, 2009

9:17 A.M.

PRESIDING OFFICER: MAYOR MICHAEL E. BRUFF

PRESENT: Mayor Michael E. Bruff, Mayor Michael E. Bruff, Mayor Pro-Tem Mark D. Owen, Councilpersons Michael N. Cline, Joni M. Forster, Benjamin R. Frederick, Gary W. Martenis, and Jason D. Simmons.

ABSENT: None.

City Manager Fivas explained the rules governing Council work sessions, indicating items could be discussed but no decisions would be considered.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Mayor Bruff indicated he would like to discuss the effects of foreclosures on the City and how they could be dealt with.

There was discussion regarding what other communities have done to enforce maintenance codes on foreclosed properties.

Mayor Pro-Tem Owen arrives at 9:23 a.m.

Motion by Councilperson Frederick to approve the agenda with the addition of a discussion regarding home foreclosures following the Quality of Life discussion.

Motion supported by Councilperson Forster. Voice vote, 5 yes, 1 no.

CITIZEN COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Cindy Popovitch, 704 North Chipman Street, said she felt her comments on Holman Pool may have been misconstrued, she indicated she had no intention of offending and apologized to anyone that felt that way. She went on to say she feels very strongly about the pool and providing swimming opportunities for children in the City.

Mayor Bruff thanked Ms. Popovitch for her comments and indicated donations for the operation of the pool would be accepted.

There was a brief discussion regarding whether the City could contract with another entity to operate the pool. It was noted the City could contract out the operation of the pool, and the scope of the responsibilities of the contracting entity could be determined through negotiation. Councilperson Martenis noted that privately owned/operated pools tend to be a different type of facility from Holman Pool, he wondered whether the pool could be profitable as it stands.

There was also discussion regarding the hidden costs of operating such a facility and the commitment that would be needed in order to open the pool.

DISCUSSION – BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE REPORT

City Manager Fivas started the discussion saying the Blue Ribbon Committee report focused on what the City could sustain over the next 20 years, he wanted to know what the City needs to do to be successful in the next 20 years. There was discussion regarding the history of the population and projections for the future. It was noted that despite projections of 20,000 or more, the City has maintained a population of approximately 15,000 since the 1920's. There was discussion regarding why Oakland County and Livingston County have exploded in the previous 10-20 years. Council noted Shiawassee County's dependence on GM, not only jobs working directly for the company but also jobs created by the many GM suppliers. It was also noted that counties like Livingston and Oakland have many more recreational opportunities for their residents and have ready access to expressways. In its deliberations the Blue Ribbon Committee concluded there was no "silver bullet" for the City. They hoped the City would concentrate on efforts to anchor the community and grow it from that point.

There was a lengthy discussion regarding supporting economic development and entrepreneurialism, marketing Shiawassee County as a whole, and developing an attitude that focuses on the region rather than individual municipalities.

Councilperson Simmons arrives at 10:00 a.m.

There was further discussion regarding how to attract people to our area, branding the City in an

effort to better market ourselves, bridging the transportation gap in our region, and the idea of keeping people here or bringing them in from other communities.

Mayor Bruff called for a brief recess at 10:25 a.m.

Council reached a consensus the City is at a cross roads, decisions must be made to stop the decline of the City and start forward progress. Blue Ribbon Committee Chairperson Cindy Popovitch said the Committee felt the City needed to capitalize on what is here, noting the strong agricultural background of the area. She also mentioned her skepticism the area would be able to compete for high tech jobs, but instead should concentrate on attracting green jobs and environmentalists because of our agricultural background. There was hope that not only could the City attract these types of jobs but also take advantage of our manufacturing labor force and support the manufacture of green products in the area. The complexity of starting up a business and the "hostile" work force of Michigan were noted as hurdles to overcome.

There was then discussion regarding the things that would attract existing businesses and their employees. Good housing stock, good schools, and amenities were noted as being very important. Council then discussed how to change misperceptions about the community.

The Council bounced around ideas regarding establishing incentives to redevelop run down neighborhoods, using the Main Street Program to improve the appearance of the downtown, increasing business hours for stores downtown,

Council recessed at 12:21 p.m. for lunch. The meeting resumed at 12:56 p.m.

Council formed a list of priority items to help the community maintain the assets it has and develop others. The list included:

- Establishing arts/culture businesses
- Encouraging building maintenance
- Developing a theme/continuity for the downtown
- Supporting the Main Street Program/Encouraging investment in the downtown
- Developing recreation options
- Developing/encouraging downtown living
- Supporting entrepreneurial incubation
- Regional service sharing/cooperation
- Brush pick-up/recycling
- Instituting green infrastructure
- Riverfront development
- Encouraging neighborhood associations
- Development of a housing program
- Conducting a branding exercise
- Entertaining marketing efforts
- Developing a master plan

The Council decided on 5 priority items to pursue in the next year.

- Exploring regional service sharing
- Developing a brush pick-up/recycling program budget item
- Budgeting branding and marketing services
- Research what the city can do to foster entrepreneurial incubation
- Researching options for a Bentley Park playscape

Motion by Councilperson Martenis to adjourn at 3:08 p.m.

Motion supported by Councilperson Cline. Voice vote 2 yes, 3 no.

Motion by Mayor Pro-Tem Owen to extend the meeting to 3:20 p.m.

Motion supported by Councilperson Forster. Voice vote 3 yes, 2 no.

OVERVIEW OF UPCOMING BUDGET PROCESS

City Manager Fivas described the effects of falling taxable values, indicating it is anticipated taxable values will increase this year while state equalized values will fall. He encouraged Council to be cognizant of this situation and how it will affect the future of the City as they consider the budget.

CITIZEN COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mayor Pro-Tem Owen for adjournment at 3:11 p.m.

Motion supported by Councilperson Forster and concurred in by unanimous vote.

Michael E. Bruff, Mayor

Amy K. Kohagen, City Clerk