

CITY COUNCIL JOINT WORK SESSION WITH PORTSMOUTH HOUSING AUTHORITY

POTENTIAL PARKING GARAGE LOCATIONS

January 19, 2010 – 6:00 p.m.

Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers

City Council Present: Mayor Ferrini, Assistant Mayor Novelline Clayburgh, Councilors Lister, Hejtmanek, Spear, Dwyer, Coviello, Kennedy and Smith.

Officials Present: John P. Bohenko, City Manager; Robert Sullivan, City Attorney, Chris LeClaire, Fire Chief, Steve Parkinson, Public Works Director, Jon Frederick, Parking Manager, Ruth Griffin, Chair of Portsmouth Housing Authority, Portsmouth Housing Authority Members, Thomas Heany and Charles Bradley, and Valerie French, Deputy City Clerk I

I. Call to Order

At 6:00 p.m., Mayor Ferrini called the work session to order.

City Manager Bohenko asked Parking Manager Jon Frederick to review the options being considered for a parking garage. Mr. Frederick gave a brief overview of the current parking situation.

Portsmouth Housing Authority Chair, Ruth Griffin, referred to a letter dated 11/20/2009 to the Council from the Portsmouth Housing Authority which expressed their opposition to the construction of a multi-level parking garage on the land owned by the PHA adjacent to the Feaster Apartment building. She further stated the reasons for the opposition as follows:

1. A multi-level parking garage in that area would block the sun and obstruct the view of the residents residing on that side of the Feaster building;
2. A multi-level parking garage would restrict the flow of clean air and would increase gasoline exhaust fumes that would prohibit residents from opening windows in their units;
3. A multi-level parking garage would create an excess of traffic on Court Street which would restrict further the travel of the elderly residents in this area both with their vehicles and walking to and from the downtown area; and
4. A multi-level parking garage would also create the potential of increased crime in the neighborhood within the parking garage itself.

Ms. Griffin then asked Former PHA Director Ted Connors to give the background as to how the PHA acquired that property. Mr. Connors explained the history of how the PHA acquired the 15-20 parking spaces from the City Council back in the 1960's and how there is a need for more senior spaces now. Ms. Griffin stated that spaces are given out by lottery and that people actually watch the obituaries to see when they become available.

PHA member Heaney stated that they have to keep in mind that there is limited developable space and they are concerned with giving it up as they are finding they need it themselves.

City Manager Bohenko introduced Chief LeClaire to the conversation stating he was invited because of the close proximity to the Fire Station. Chief LeClaire explained that they need the spaces they have due to overlap of shift changes, visitor parking and equipment which is stored there from other stations. He stated that if a garage was built, it would cut off their access to their parking. He continued that there would also be a problem for access of emergency vehicles on Court Street as well as a problem maintaining clearance around the courthouse which is a homeland security issue to be able to watch who is parking in the area.

Mayor Ferrini asked if there were any further comments on the PHA land adjacent to the Feaster Apartment building. Seeing none, Parking Manager Frederick continued his presentation of alternative parking garage locations. City Manager Bohenko explained that they have looked at several areas, but more specifically, the Worth Lot has received extensive review.

Public Works Director Parkinson referred to a summary report by HTA Consulting Engineers conducted in 2003 which outlined various scenarios for a parking garage on the Worth Lot and the recommended phases for implementation. City Manager Bohenko further reviewed the background of the study report stating that in 2000 the Worth Lot was reviewed as a part of the CIP and in 2003 they hired HTA Consulting Engineers who presented the previously mentioned report. He stated they also started working with the Sheraton and Best Western hotels for a public/private partnership, but they didn't work out. He stated the Council back then decided to put their efforts into a public/private partnership and the preliminary work was done on the Worth Lot, but nothing was done on the Parrott Avenue Lot which are 2 of the lots the City controls. He continued that they have extinguished the authority for the hotels, so they are no longer being contemplated and are off the books. He stated they will also probably remove the underground garage as a part of the Portwalk project to get that off the books as well. He stated that there would then be no authorization for a parking garage on the books, but that is good for rating agencies and would be a fresh slate to go forward for bonding. He stated that it could be totally funded from the parking revenues as the debt from the High Hanover garage will be done this year.

Councilor Spear asked if the schematics can be switched from decks to lots to affect the costs. Discussion ensued regarding the various costs and the codes associated with each type of parking structure. Councilor Spear stated that conceptually, he feels that the Worth Lot is a good fit for the parking garage but is concerned with larger gatherings and the proximity for people to be able to go to all the different places they want to go downtown.

Fire Chief LeClaire asked if needs have been prioritized as he feels that there is a tremendous need at the Parrott Avenue Lot and it would make sense to do the deck there. City Manager Bohenko stated the city staff has been discussing that there is the need to do both.

Councilor Lister asked if businesses have been involved with the discussions. City Manager Bohenko stated yes, the stakeholders around the Worth Lot worked actively in the discussions when the public/private partnership was being pursued. He stated that if this gets reactivated in either location, they would be included again. Councilor Lister asked how we move forward with this. City Manager Bohenko stated that Walker Consultants could update the costs in a short amount of time and recognize the changes that need to be made for the Worth Lot, but the Parrott Avenue lot would take more time as no previous work had been done. Councilor

Lister stated he would want people to know that if we go forward with the Worth Lot, it doesn't mean that the Parrott Lot option will go away.

Councilor Dwyer stated she agrees with the need for multiple areas, and asked if the lower lot at City Hall should also be added for consideration for a deck. City Manager Bohenko stated that the lower lot was contemplated for a garage back in 1997 when the library was going to be here, but it was only conceptual. Councilor Dwyer stated she feels that a deck would help.

Assistant Mayor Novelline Clayburgh asked if the Parrott Avenue lot were to be used for Middle School staff, could we be reimbursed 40% by the State. City Manager Bohenko stated that hypothetically, yes, and he could talk with the School Business Administrator. Councilor Dwyer, member of the Middle School JBC, stated they can't do anything until they have a schematic design.

Councilor Coviello thanked the PHA and stated he doesn't want to build anything at that sight without their approval. Next, he discussed the Parrott Avenue lot stating it is not a wise use of tax money even with a 40% reimbursement and feels that the focus should be on the Worth Lot.

City Manager Bohenko then stated the Portwalk project has indicated it is interested in leasing to the City Lot 3 of the Portwalk project for municipal parking which under zoning regulations, the City has the right to operate a surface parking lot in a downtown area if it is owned or leased by the City. He stated the Portwalk will install the infrastructure and will lease it to the City which will operate the lot for a management fee. Parking Manager Frederick stated that it will be a gated parking lot that would not be manned, but would be operated via credit card. The City Manager stated it would be an additional 200 spaces, which could be under the City's control by the end of May.

Councilor Coviello then asked about the status of the McIntire Building. City Manager Bohenko stated that until the ground is broken at Pease, they shouldn't think about it, although they continue to work with the delegation.

Councilor Kennedy asked how many spaces we need. City Manager Bohenko stated that we do need more spaces, but feels the location is important too because of all of the south-end stuff. Parking Manager Frederick stated our short fall of spaces right now is 500-800 spaces. Councilor Kennedy stated she does not want a City full of parking garages and that people come for the beauty of the City. She stated when she drives around the City she sees lots of available spaces, but because people don't want to have to walk, they don't use them. She stated that the discussion hasn't been held regarding transporting people from areas where there is parking to areas that they want to visit. She stated we need to look at being creative with dealing with parking and public transportation.

Discussion ensued regarding alternative transportation and costs i.e. COAST bus and the trolley.

Councilor Coviello again discussed the Parrott Avenue lot stating that he feels that there are some spaces that are used for vehicle storage and that needs to be changed and intends to have the staff look at that. Mayor Ferrini stated if there is a Council consensus, then the City Manager can direct the staff to do that.

City Manager Bohenko stated he will continue to work with Port Walk to bring that proposal forward for the February meeting.

Councilor Smith stated that from the Parking Committee standpoint, he wants to take it back to the Committee for a comprehensive plan. He stated that cars aren't going away and although public transportation helps, people want to park closer to where they want to be. He stated he wants the opportunity for the Parking Committee to put it together and keep the process going.

Mayor Ferrini believes it is in the economic best interest to provide parking with parking funds. He related the City of Boston having government buildings on waterfront land which isn't taxable stating that Parrott Avenue is also waterfront property and that we should keep this in mind.

V. Adjournment

At 6:58 p.m., Mayor Ferrini closed the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by:

Valerie A. French,
Deputy City Clerk I