

CITY COUNCIL E-MAILS
Received: October 20, 2022 (after 9:00 a.m.) – October 24, 2022 (before 5:00 p.m.)
October 24, 2022 Council Meeting
ADDENDUM

New Content:

Submitted on Thu, 10/20/2022 - 15:14

Full Name

Matthew Glenn

Email

matthglenn@gmail.com

Subject

Support for Stormwater Utility

Address

34 Harrison Ave

Message

Dear Mayor and Councilors,

I watched your meeting to consider implementing a Stormwater Utility, and wanted to express support. It makes a lot of sense for the costs of stormwater management to be proportional to the impervious cover on each property. Besides being much more equitable, it incentivizes better building practices and management for both residential and commercial properties.

A few stats from the most recent Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership report (www.stateofoureestuaries.org):

"Between 1990 and 2015, the combined population of the 52 towns in the Piscataqua Region watershed (10 in Maine and 42 in New Hampshire) grew by 38%."

"Between 1990 and 2010, impervious surfaces in our watershed increased by 120% and have continued to increase over the last five years. Combined with changes in precipitation, these impervious surfaces are sending more contaminants into our estuaries. During extreme storm events, they are delivered in large, disruptive pulses. Such rapid inflows of runoff not only add more nitrogen and toxics to the system, they also stir up estuarine sediments."

"Watersheds reach a tipping point around 10% impervious cover, beyond which water quality impacts become increasingly severe."

"Communities with the highest reported impervious surface percentages were found in Portsmouth (26.7%), New Castle (20%), and Seabrook (20%)"

To restate that, we've had a 38% population growth in the region but a 120% increase in impervious surfaces-- and Portsmouth has by far the most in the region. Anything that can be done to incentivize better development patterns, and charge those with the most impact, has my support. And I think residents will understand that a proportional "stormwater fee" is far preferable to ever higher water/sewer rates. Thank you for your effort on this.

Matt Glenn

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Fri, 10/21/2022 - 13:42

Full Name

CHRISTOPHER WHITE

Email

comm2114@gmail.com

Subject

Proposed Policy on Auditor Rotation

Address

28 Porter Street

Message

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Deaglan McEachern

FR: Christopher White, Chair, Audit Committee

DT: October 21, 2022

RE: Comments on Proposed Auditor Rotation Policy, City Council Policy No. 2022 –

You requested that the Audit Committee give you an opinion of the proposed Auditor Rotation Policy generated by the Governance Committee. No one from the Governance Committee informed us of your request. I only learned of this request earlier this week. From the 10/3/22 City Council meeting materials on this topic, the Governance Committee states: "... the City Council shall require an RFP process for selection of an auditor every five years or earlier, if needed. The City Council shall also require the Principal Auditor and engagement team,

and the audit partner responsible for reviewing the audit, be changed every five years, at a minimum, to maintain audit independence.” The governing body (the City Council) should be wary of mandating requirements that may tie the hands of this and future Councils. While this proposed policy is admirable in what it is attempting to do, some caution and refinement are advisable. The State of Rhode Island, for example, mandates that a municipality find a new auditor every three years. The City of Warwick contemplates requesting a State-issued waiver of the three-year requirement since there are simply not enough municipal auditing firms available to fulfill this requirement in part due to consolidation within the auditing industry. Even increasing the tenure to five years may not be long enough to answer the need of the municipality. In our case, the New Hampshire municipal marketplace for audit firms is not deep or broad enough to accommodate such a requirement and still maintain a competitive bidding process.

Mandating auditor turnover needs a more nuanced approach. What is clear is that a municipality should not be provincial in searching for candidate auditing firms. Portsmouth needs to look both within and outside of New Hampshire to create a considered set of potential auditing firms. Further, the candidate firms must be of sufficient size to provide an adequate number of engagement teams, principals and audit supervisors.

1. A full and fair examination of this issue would show the following:

- a. The Audit Committee, as it reviews candidate firms for replacing an existing auditor, must examine carefully the ability of the new firm to put into place at least three fully-staffed engagement teams, principals and audit supervisors. This gives greater flexibility, if it is needed, to extend the assignment of the auditor to perhaps six years. This assumes that an engagement team, two principals and a supervisor should serve three years before being rotated out of the assignment and that there should always be a team in reserve if something should go wrong with the team currently on the job.
- b. The responsibility of the Audit Committee must include an annual review of the auditor’s work. Question 19 (Page 39) of the Government Finance Officers’ Association (GFOA) lists the several key tasks of an Audit Committee. Many of these have been taken over by City management, severely compromising the municipal audit’s true independence. This is an underlying problem. One of the key bullet points on Page 39 is that the Audit Committee must assess the performance of the independent auditors. This is part of Securities and Exchange Regulation (SEC) 330-8220. It must take place and be done annually.
- c. Part of this review must be based on the last bullet point of the list on Page 39: “Providing an independent forum for internal auditors to report findings of management fraud, abuse, or control override.” Such a forum will give the Audit Committee its necessary material for conducting its assessment of the auditors’ performance.
- d. Thus, the Audit Committee’s ongoing involvement of the annual audit requires its direct and significant involvement in the audit process from initiation to completion, as Question 19 (Page 39) stipulates. It is simply not enough for the Audit Committee to conduct an RFP every five years. Rather, it must be actively involved in the oversight of the audit on an annual basis.

2. It should be noted that the City’s current auditor, Melanson, LLC, has a very thinly-staffed engagement team for a city of Portsmouth’s size and complexity. The principal, Alina Korsak, CPA, has as her co-principal, Scott McIntire, CPA. During interviews with Melanson last spring, we learned from Mr. McIntire that he is part of the then-proposed team for the Portsmouth municipal audit really as a way to “support” Ms. Korsak. This arrangement has a whiff of a charade if he is on the proposal in name only. It also suggests that after 27 years Melanson has rotated through all of their other engagement and principal teams and this is all that remains as candidates to fulfill the staffing needs. This means that Melanson has reached the end of their assignment “rope.”

3. In conclusion, I, as Chair of the Audit Committee, caution the City Council to not pass a policy that is overly restrictive or iron-clad. In its policy, the Council must rely on an active, educated and sophisticated Audit Committee to help it manage this important and essential responsibility of conducting a truly independent audit of Portsmouth’s financial statements.

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Sat, 10/22/2022 - 16:45

Full Name

charlie griffin

Email

charlesgriffinesq@gmail.com

Subject

Employment contracts and Union contracts

Address

210 Hilside Drive

Message

On Monday night you will be asked to approve 2 employment contracts and 3 union contracts ,3 of which (Deputy Police Chief ,paragraph 3; Portsmouth Supervisory Alliance Subsection IV and Portsmouth School Administrators Article XVII contain language tying COLA increases to the 10 year average for the Boston -Cambridge -Newton all items index as computed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. A copy of the Portsmouth Association of Clerical Employees contract was not included in the on line packet.

While no one can deny that it is expensive to live in Portsmouth, likewise no one can deny that the cost of living in Portsmouth pales by comparison with those of Boston, Cambridge and Newton.Out of 2202 American cities, Cambridge ranks 25th, Boston 26th and Newton 138th nationally in terms of costs of living.

Portsmouth on the other hand ranks 216th.

That being the case , I ask you why are COLAs in Portsmouth Collective Bargaining Agreements and Employee contracts determined by the cost of living in Greater Boston ?Such language makes no sense and is a disservice to the taxpayers.

A random sampling of area municipal and town contracts reveals that the Exeter Fire Fighters will get a 2%COLA in years 2 and 3; the Hampton Firefighters just under a 2% COLA in year 2 and just above 2% in year 3: and the Rye Police a 2.75% COLA in years 2 and 3. None of these contracts ties their COLAS to the cost of living in Greater Boston.

These agreements are contracts presumably the result of collective bargaining. A bargain is defined as an agreement between two or more parties as to what each will do for the other and involves meaningful give and take What each party gives does not have to be of equal value ,but this does not mean that the City does all the giving and the Union/Employee does all the taking. However, with the exception of the Portsmouth School Administrators who have agreed to contribute an additional one percent to their health insurance costs I do not see that any of the other Unions or Employees have agreed to give the City anything in return for what they are receiving That being the case these so -called agreements are in fact nothing but gifts to be paid for by the taxpayers.

As a result I urge you to table these agreements /contracts and direct the parties to return to the bargaining table to find a method of calculating COLAs that extricates Portsmouth from Greater Boston and that also requires the remaining Unions /Employees to give something TO the City in exchange for what they are receiving FROM. the City.

As always I thank you for your consideration

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Sun, 10/23/2022 - 09:18

Full Name

Robin Husslage

Email

rhuslage@hotmail.com

Subject

Islington Creek Neighborhood Parking Program

Address

27 Rock Street, Apt B

Message

Dear Mayor, Assistant Mayor and City Councilors,

I am writing to you while you consider next steps regarding a residential parking program for my Islington Creek Neighborhood. I spoke with a family who had bought a house on Hanover Street 6 months before the NPP pilot and the parking problem was so bad, they were planning on moving. They weren't the only residents who were this frustrated with the situation. The pilot program was a clear success – returning our streets to being a neighborhood rather than being a free parking lot for downtown workers and out of town visitors, forcing neighborhood residents to park far away from their homes.

Results from monitoring showed a clear need at either end of our neighborhood, while the middle section saw empty streets during portions of the day. No parking program will be perfect for everyone but I think with all the smart, creative, and forward-thinking minds on the City Council, you can come up with a program that meets a majority of the needs of most residents in our neighborhood and the City of Portsmouth. It is a problem that has a solution and I have confidence you will be able to come up with a good one.

Thank you for all you do for our City.

With regards,

Robin Husslage

27 Rock Street, Apt B

Portsmouth, NH

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Sun, 10/23/2022 - 17:32

Full Name

Ken Goldman

Email

kgoldman@comcast.net

Subject

Islington Creek NPP

Address

271 Islington Street

Message

Dear City Councilors,

Due to system glitches with the City's email system, you may have received an earlier email from me. If so, please disregard that one and read this one....

Thank you for an opportunity to write to you once again about the Islington Creek Neighborhood Parking Program (NPP). Since I have written and spoken on this subject so many times before, you may have already heard what I am about to say below, so I will give you my bottom line upfront, followed by some questions and background.

- This was initially a 6-month Pilot Program which has now lasted more than a year.
- Pilot programs are tests or feasibility studies and are not intended to be permanent.
- One Pilot Program option is always to discontinue the program based on the results.
- The Parking Department's data on the NPP has consistently shown that the program was neither necessary nor effective.
- Since the data indicates that the NPP is neither necessary nor effective, it should be ended.
- If the NPP is ended, there is no cost to the city, and therefore no need to charge for parking in Islington Creek
- Please permanently end the Islington Creek NPP, not impose metered parking, and end our long nightmare

Here are some questions I had asked in my last email, which I would like to repeat:

- Does Islington Creek have the most severe parking problem of all the neighborhoods in the City of Portsmouth?
- If not, why would you considering imposing the cost and continued inconvenience of this program on the residents of this neighborhood?
- Is there any compelling reason to have an NPP, or metered parking, in Islington Creek?
- Why would you continuing to single out Islington Creek for an NPP, and now metered parking, despite the data presented by the Parking Department consistently showing that the NPP is not necessary?
- I do not understand the reason why there is potentially a proposal to replace the NPP with metered parking. I understand that the program is expensive to implement, but if there is no program, there is no cost to the city. The city does not want to bear the cost of the Islington Creek NPP, and neither do I! Why should we pay for a program that the Parking Department's data has consistently shown to be neither necessary nor effective?

Now some background...

...One reason I bought my home was the supply of plentiful and free parking on the adjacent streets. I hope that the NPP will be ended, and we go back to way things were before it was implemented, with free and open street parking in Islington Creek.

In their notes to Parking and Traffic Safety Committee, the Parking Department states that "...The Islington Creek neighborhood has an inherent parking supply vs. demand issue..." I do not believe that this is true, and, more importantly, the parking department's own data has consistently demonstrated that this is not true.

The parking supply vs. demand issue comes from the perception of some vocal residents and is based on anecdotal information, most of which predated the Foundry Place Parking Garage and the very successful Employee Parking Program. Anecdotes are not data and are simple snapshots in time.

For instance, the other day, for at least 3 hours, there were no cars parked on Cornwall Street. What does this tell us? It tells us that for a small snapshot of time no one was parked on Cornwall Street, nothing more, nothing less. This anecdotal information does not say anything about general parking trends in Islington Creek any more than the anecdotes that were used to justify this program. The NPP has always seemed to be a solution in search of a problem!

It is not clear if the parking department proposes metered parking for the entire neighborhood or just the part of the neighborhood identified as problematic, i.e., the area between Rock Street and Bridge Street. If it is the entire neighborhood, I protest strenuously. If it is just for the residents in the problematic area, I think they should decide what they would like to do.

Metered parking using the Park Mobile app would be inconvenient and expensive for residents, people working at the houses and visitors, especially overnight visitors. I ask you to end the NPP and NOT impose the unnecessary burden of metered parking on the neighborhood.

Thank you,

Ken Goldman

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Mon, 10/24/2022 - 14:23

Full Name

Pamela Barrett

Email

pambarrettnh@gmail.com

Subject

Stump dump

Address

100 Lafayette road

Message

I support the new skatepark 100%. It has recently come to my attention that the land has been a stump dump for many years. As I understand, the stumps will rot overtime and the ground will sink. I question whether the skate park will outlive the sinking of the ground. A lot of money and labor is being invested in this project. I feel sure that the council has studied this and there is no problem in the future.

Thank you for your time.

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Mon, 10/24/2022 - 14:59

Full Name

Brent Schmitt

Email

brentjayschmitt@gmail.com

Subject

Connie Bean Limited Open Hours

Address

300 Cass Street

Message

I am writing in reference to the extremely limited Connie Bean "open to the public hours" since Covid. Prior to Covid, it was open from 3pm-8pm on weekdays and from 10am-7pm on Saturdays and 10am-4pm on Sundays. This fall it did not open until October 1st and now it is only open one day a week (i.e., Sundays from 11am-4pm). I have been told that it is "because they can't find staff" but, if this is the case, they need to do a better job of finding someone to staff it. My sons and many other children used to go to the Connie Bean every day after school but cannot now because it is closed. When will the Connie Bean resume normal open hours again? Can the City apply some of its surplus Covid money to staff the Connie Bean? The taxpayers spent a lot of money to fund the Connie Bean and to have it open 5 hours/week to the public is absurd.

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes
