

Meeting Minutes
State College Borough Council
February 15, 2008

The State College Borough Council met in a regular meeting on Friday, February 15, 2008, in the State College Municipal Building Council Chambers, 243 South Allen Street, State College, PA. Ms. Goreham called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

Present: Bill Welch, Mayor
Elizabeth A. Goreham, President of Council
Ronald Filippelli
Donald M. Hahn
Theresa D. Lafer
Silvi Lawrence
Peter Morris
James L. Rosenberger

Also present: Thomas J. Fountaine, II, Borough Manager; Thomas S. Kurtz, Assistant Borough Manager; Roger A. Dunlap, Assistant Borough Manager; Carl R. Hess, Director of Planning; Thomas R. King, Chief of Police; Mark A. Whitfield, Director of Public Works; Norma J. Crater, Accounting Supervisor; Sheila Carl, Recording Secretary; members of the media; and other interested observers.

Public Hour. There was no one from the public wishing to speak.

Report from the Centre Region Schlow Memorial Library Board. David Miller and Nancy Kranich, the Borough's representatives on the Centre Region Schlow Library Board, and Betsy Allen, Library Director, attended the meeting to report on the activities on the Library Board over the past year.

Mr. Miller reported in the spring an area between the Library and the Addison Court building will be transformed into a garden by a local citizen.

Mr. Miller stated the Library continues to improve the streetscape along Beaver Avenue as well as improve the lighting near the CATA office entrance.

Mr. Miller also reported a strategic plan is being developed for the coming years and hopes to have a plan completed by May.

Mr. Miller stated the Library continues to be pleased with the custodial services the Borough provides to the Library.

Ms. Goreham asked about the current library usage in comparison to previous years. Ms. Allen stated there has been a slight decline in circulation but not enough to cause concern.

Council asked what was the amount for the acquisitions budget. Ms. Allen stated in 2007 fourteen percent of all expenses were spent on books. She added the library is becoming a site for public forum issues and the attendees have been a nice mix of students and citizens.

Ms. Lafer said she has been very pleased with the utilization of the new children's section.

Fraser Centre Update. Theresa Sparacino, Director of Downtown State College Improvement District, attended the meeting and presented an update on the Fraser Centre project.

Borough staff also updated Council on the status of the Beaver/Fraser safety improvement project. Council was provided with the executive summary for the Beaver Avenue Parking Garage Traffic Impact Study.

Ms. Sparacino reported the old municipal building has been demolished and the Medical Arts building will be torn down in April. After the demolition of the Medical Arts building the design phase will begin and is scheduled to be completed in August 2008. The construction document phase will be from August until December 2008 with construction beginning in January 2009 and a projected completion date of July 2010.

Council asked if there was any interest in the condos that will be included in the project. Ms. Sparacino stated there are about ninety people on the waiting list and estimated about 60% will become buyers.

Mr. Whitfield spoke to Council regarding the executive summary for the Beaver Avenue Parking Garage Traffic Impact Study that was provided with the agenda. Mr. Whitfield explained the study showed a plus intersection would be safer for pedestrian crossings. Mr. Whitfield stated there are two proposed design scenarios. One scenario would include more streetscaping, a turning lane for the parking garage, and an increase to the width of sidewalks in some sections. Mr. Whitfield stated the design portion of the project should be done by September 2008 and the project should be out to bid in March or April of 2009.

Mr. Fountaine added that Centre County on behalf of the Borough will submit this project for federal funding. An amount of \$1.5 million is being requested and the application will be discussed with Representative John Peterson next month, he added. Council asked what would happen if the project was not funded. Mr. Fountaine stated just a basic realignment would be done with minimal streetscaping.

Mr. Whitfield stated input is needed on two of the design elements. He explained the one design has a substantial amount of green space and a decision will need to be made on how the community wants to use it. In 2009 PENNDOT will repave Beaver Avenue, Mr. Whitfield explained, and a decision regarding the width of sidewalks between Fraser and Allen Streets must be decided.

Council discussed the pros and cons of widening the sidewalks and how the foot traffic would be changing with the addition of the theatre in the area.

Ms. Lawrence suggested adding a bike lane to Beaver Avenue. Mr. Whitfield added the Transportation Commission has discussed narrowing the streets to accommodate bicycles and the Commission felt there are enough bike routes being planned for other areas. Ms. Lafer stated cyclists and cars share the roadways all the time and did not feel a bike lane was needed in this area. Ms. Lafer liked the idea of wider sidewalks and having safety for pedestrians so they are not spilling out onto the streets. Mr. Filippelli agreed pedestrian safety should be a consideration.

West End: Consultant Progress Report. Karen Dickinson, Project Manager, attended the meeting to report on the status of the implementation phase of the West End Revitalization Plan. Ms. Dickinson provided Council with a status report which highlighted the status of each of the five tasks.

Ms. Dickinson reported task 1 is 95% complete and a review draft of the zoning/design guidelines was provided to staff. The main objective was to make sure the zoning and design guidelines will become a tool that will easily be used by staff.

Ms. Dickinson stated task 2 involving the Capital Improvement Plan and task 3 involving the West End Urban Redevelopment Law Implementation have both been completed.

Ms. Dickinson reported meetings to share the final plan with property owners have been occurring and have been positive. Ms. Dickinson stated there would be additional meetings scheduled to meet with property owners.

The final task, Ms. Dickinson reported, was to develop three options for wayfinding and logo design which were presented to Borough staff and the public. The designs were generally well received and a presentation can be made to Council next month. Ms. Dickinson added the public seems to prefer either West End or West Village but there have been no decisions on graphics.

Council asked about the probability of having an anchor project completed in the near future. Ms. Dickinson stated a two year timeframe would be feasible to have a project underway.

Council requested another word be used to describe "blight" properties. Ms. Dickinson explained the term must be used for legal purposes but a different word could be used in the public forum.

Mr. Fountaine reminded Council of the joint meeting with the Planning Commission being planned for March 5, 2008.

Report on Town/Gown Neighborhood Meeting. This item was postponed to a later meeting.

PENNDOT Street Turnback Proposal. Mr. Fountaine said staff will provide a report and ask for Council's feedback on a proposal for the Borough to take over PENNDOT streets located within the Borough. Mr. Fountaine explained Staff did not currently have enough information to make a recommendation but concurrence from Council was needed if they wished for a letter of interest to be submitted to PENNDOT.

Mr. Whitfield stated there are some issues to be considered with one being the financial implications. Mr. Whitfield explained PENNDOT would have no jurisdiction over streets in the Borough with the exception of the traffic signals. He continued to explain an initial cash settlement would be made and the Borough would then be given money annually after that. However, the amount of additional income does not always cover the costs of maintaining the roadways especially when the roadways need to be repaved.

Council requested a memo be prepared indicating the sacrifices and possible gains that could be expected by making the change and where those changes would affect the budget.

Council expressed concern with submitting a letter of intent with such little information to review. Mr. Fountaine stated a control vs. costs report could be prepared and would take some time but a letter of intent would need to be submitted to keep the process continuing. The process could take several years and the letter would not be a binding commitment, just a step to keep the possibility open and available to the Borough, he said.

Mr. Fontaine stated PENNDOT would be contacted and informed of Council's intent to continue with the process.

Atherton/Allen Intersection Safety Improvements. Mr. Fontaine stated discussion concerning the Atherton/Allen intersection would continue from the February 11, 2008 meeting. Council was provided a copy of the executive summary from the Allen Street/South Atherton Street Improvements engineering study.

Mr. Whitfield explained to Council the history of this project and the findings of the engineering study stating there is a safety concern with this intersection. He stated the findings of the study could make the Borough liable for accidents and injuries that occur at the intersection if the concerns are not resolved.

Mr. Hahn said there are two problems with the intersection; one being the lack of a left turn signal from Atherton Street to Allen Street and the traffic leaving Nittany Office Equipment onto Allen Street because of traffic turning on red from Atherton Street to Allen Street. Mr. Whitfield stated a left turn signal would require a turning lane to be added to Atherton Street and he was not certain this could be done. Mr. Whitfield stated he would make a recommendation to PENNDOT to have a no turn on red sign posted for traffic turning right from Atherton Street to Allen Street.

Ms. Lawrence requested different drawings that would more easily depict the existing intersection and the proposed changes. She also expressed concern questioning if the benefits of taking the Easter Seals property would be justified by being able to stack an additional three cars. Mr. Whitfield stated the change would allow for the stacking of an additional six cars.

Mr. Rosenberger questioned if the zoning issues in the area would get entangled with the taking of land for the realignment. Mr. Fontaine stated particular attention is being made to help ensure the issues remain separate and the taking of the land can be done with or without the zoning changes. Mr. Rosenberger also expressed concern that taking the land from Easter Seals would cause too great of a change to the lot and the lot would no longer be large enough for a daycare. He questioned if this could cause a liability issue for the owner by causing additional burdens with trying to rent the property. Mr. Fontaine stated the property owners have been having problems renting the property and that is part of the reason the owners are asking to have the property rezoned.

Mr. Fontaine stated the project was brought to Council to provide them with an update. He explained the project needs to be submitted to PENNDOT for approval now or the project will have to wait until the 2009 construction season.

Ms. Goreham said she is concerned because she has seen the cost of projects increase dramatically. Mr. Fontaine stated the cost of the project will not be known until the project goes to bid and if the bids are too high the bids can be rejected.

Mr. Filippelli stated the intersection needs attention and suggested moving forward with the project so the 2008 construction season is not missed.

Ms. Goreham questioned if the project could move forward with changing the lights only. Mr. Fontaine stated the bids were not done to allow for alternatives but only doing part of the project does not address the safety issues set forth in the study.

Mr. Hahn stated he is concerned about the liability issue and requested Council be able to discuss the ramifications with the Borough Solicitor at the next Council meeting.

Mr. Morris stated this afternoon's discussion helped him to understand better the liability and safety issues and agrees the project should continue. Ms. Lafer agreed it would be in the Borough's best interest to proceed with the project.

Ms. Lawrence stated this is not an easy issue to resolve and requested an additional meeting to discuss the liability concerns and project plans.

Based on discussion, Mr. Fontaine stated he would have the plan submitted to PENNDOT and continue to move forward with the project.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia S. Hanscom
Assistant Borough Secretary