

MINUTES

WORKING SESSION CITY COUNCIL 401 WEST WASHINGTON STREET EAST PEORIA, ILLINOIS

January 7, 2020

The Honorable John P. Kahl Mayor of the City of East Peoria called the Working Session of the City Council of the City of East Peoria, Illinois to order at 5:02 P.M. with the meeting having been properly noticed.

Upon the roll being called the following answered present: Mayor John P. Kahl, Commissioners Daniel S. Decker, Mark E. Hill, Seth D. Mingus, and Michael L. Sutherland.

Absent: None.

Mayor Kahl explained that the City Council is meeting for a Working Session and that no formal business will be conducted by the City Council at the meeting. He explained that the purpose of the meeting is to have a Working Session regarding a Tourism and Special Events -2019 Recap and 2020 Plan. He turned the discussion over to Director of Tourism and Special Events, Doug McCarty.

Director McCarty noted events that are planned for 2020 in the city. He explained that the City Council has in front of them those events. The list of events is given to local hotels and businesses to ensure that those businesses are ready for the larger crowds and can plan accordingly. Director McCarty recapped the 2019 events that included over 2000 tournaments and many special events. He explained that there is a decline in the amount of people in recreational sports with a vast majority going into travel sports.

Director McCarty summarized the 2019 Festival of Lights. There were around 25,000 vehicles that drove through the Winter Wonderland display, and he estimates that well over 100,000 people went through Winter Wonderland in those vehicles. Director McCarty commented on other smaller events surrounding the Festival of Lights that were also well attended. There are 25 events scheduled in the Levee District in 2020 that impact the area. Director McCarty commented on the change in revenues from 2017 to 2018 was significant due in part to events in East Peoria. Director McCarty commented on the six-year average of revenues to the Festival of Lights, sponsorships for the Festival of Lights, New Year's Eve Get Lit Run, and other Festival of Light's events. Many changes were made in 2010 that made it so the Festival of Lights at least broke even.

For 2020, the city will be featured on the Great Christmas Light Fight. Director McCarty is expecting some larger traffic numbers for the next few years as a result. He is considering improving the website and working with businesses to help make visitors want to stay when they come and see the Festival of Lights. Director McCarty commented on improvements he feels are needed, including improvements to Par 3 Lane to add a lane to lessen traffic on Springfield Road and redoing a portion of the parking.

Director McCarty commented on other special events that occurred last year. Those events included ones that did not exist before or moved to the Levee District location. Cars and Coffee were new events that were busy and a good fit for the Levee District. East Peoria Chamber of Commerce Director Rick Swan commented on the sales tax impact of the events in the Levee District.

Director McCarty commented on youth sports tourism and its impact and prevalence. He explained that EastSide Centre was built before its time as a multi-sports event center. Communities such as Homer Glen are doing a sports complex impact study to improve tourism. Director McCarty explained that East Peoria has grown in business and hotels due in part to EastSide Centre, the riverboat and others that rely on others coming into the City. Youth sport tourism is a \$19 billion industry and has grown 50% since 2010. Director McCarty explained that there is not a lot of room for expansion at EastSide Centre, but he expressed the need to be really good at what we do at EastSide Centre so that EastSide can be competitive with the other complexes. Director McCarty expressed the need for improvement at EastSide Centre to get the facility up-to-date. There is some additional land that is available for development or expansion where Splashdown was located. The soccer fields are another area that could be redesigned and redeveloped for another use. He explained the difference between Park Districts and municipalities running sporting facilities, as it only makes sense for a park district to do the youth travel tourism when they are part of the municipality because they can get associated taxes. He explained

needed replacements and routine maintenance and suggested upgrades to equipment and the building, including the need for a dedicated person for maintenance. Some of the maintenance and improvements that are needed include putting gutters on the concessions buildings, making improvements to the dugouts, and improvements to old workout equipment, among others.

Mayor Kahl explained that the facility operation is paid for through hotel/motel tax funds and the property was built with gaming dollars.

Director McCarty explained that the Tourism and Special Events department is more than EastSide Centre. The department plows city parking lots, mows city property and vacant city owned lots that need to be maintained. There is a need to have a replacement plan on equipment and to educate the public on why Tourism and Special Events, including EastSide Centre, are important to the city. If tourism is missing, then sales tax will decrease. Director McCarty understands the importance of ensuring that funds are available for other departments; however, Tourism and Special Events have saved funds to begin making improvements. To make all the improvements, it is estimated to be around \$1 million. The improvements could either be made over several years or the improvements could be made all at once with the money being paid back over several years. Director McCarty explained that staffing is concerning as there have been minimum wage increases. There is a need to increase the costs of concessions, improve community branding, and form a replacement plan for the Festival of Lights employees.

Mayor Kahl thanked Director McCarty for the presentation. He explained that he understands that retail stores, hotels and restaurants are generating revenue from EastSide Centre. He is supportive of reinvesting in EastSide.

Commissioner Mingus commented on the state of EastSide Centre and the need for upgrades. He is in favor of reinvesting to reap the benefits of the facility and be competitive.

Commissioner Decker commented on Director McCarty's commitment and him being adamant about needing the upgrades. He is in favor of investing in EastSide Centre as he sees the benefits in doing so. Commissioner Decker inquired about the biggest improvement need for EastSide. He discussed the decline of gaming funds. He inquired about having a plan for those things that are the most profitable.

Commissioner Hill commented on issues with the maintenance of the facility and ensuring that the facility is competitive with other facilities. He is in favor of improvements and the maintenance.

Commissioner Sutherland commented on the lagoon that is good in times of drought. He is happy to hear that 20 years later the City is figuring out ways to maintain the facility.

Mayor Kahl asked for any comments from the audience.

Don Norbits came up to the podium to inquire about whether EastSide Centre was an enterprise fund. He wonders whether EastSide Centre is self-sustaining now. Commissioner Decker believes that it is self-sustaining; however, it is hard to show because the monies go into the sales tax and hotel/motel tax as a whole. Commissioner Decker explained that there are many people that come to the city and spend money at stores, restaurants, and hotels as a result of EastSide Centre. Mr. Norbits feels that with the revenue it is producing, it is good to reinvest in EastSide Centre. He asked whether the city is building capital funds to pay for the improvements. Director of Finance, Jeff Becker, explained that there is an estimated \$1.8 million.

Commissioner Mingus asked if there is anything that can be done to EastSide to get the most funds. Director McCarty explained that he feels more indoor space would be the best with the weather climate in East Peoria.

Motion by Commissioner Decker seconded by Commissioner Mingus; Mr. Mayor, I move you that we adjourn the meeting.

Yeas: Commissioners Decker, Hill, Mingus, and Sutherland and Mayor Kahl.

Nays: None.

Mayor Kahl declared the motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 5:59 P.M.

/s/ Morgan R. Cadwalader

Morgan R. Cadwalader, City Clerk