



CITY OF CONCORD

REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Thomas J. Aspell, Jr., City Manager

DATE: April 15, 2020

SUBJECT: 2020 – 2021 City Council Priorities

Recommendation

Accept this report as to the current status of the City Council Priorities established on February 18, 2020.

Background

Members of the City Council met on February 18, 2020 to discuss and set priorities for the remainder of Calendar Year 2020, as well as for Calendar Year 2021.

Discussion

Listed below, in ranked order, are the accepted priorities, projects and ongoing initiatives; and their respective statuses as of March 31, 2020.

GOAL 1. BALANCED BUDGET ISSUES: FY 2021 and 2022

a) Collective Bargaining/Contract Issues

Status: The City is currently in negotiations with UAW, CPPA, and IAFF. UAW and CPPA collective bargaining agreements expired on December 31, 2019, but both groups have reached tentative agreements. The IAFF collective bargaining agreement expires on July 1, 2020. The City entered into collective bargaining agreements with both AFSCME and CPSA, which included 2.75% cost of living adjustments and an agreement to go to a high deductible health care plan as the premium driver.

b) Health Insurance Costs

Status: The City received a not to exceed rate from Harvard Pilgrim of 6% for FY 2021. We continue to negotiate that cost and will have finalized the rates in April. It is anticipated that the modification to base premium cost sharing on the high deductible plan will result in a lower cost premium for participants and for the City of Concord.

c) Capital Financing Alternatives/Storm Water Utility

Status: The Engineering Division, with consultants from Tighe & Bond, gave a presentation to the Fiscal Policy Advisory Committee on their evaluation of the City's potential creation of a storm water utility fund. The committee recommended staff return in the fall of 2020 after conducting public outreach and meetings with stakeholders in the community.

GOAL 2. COMMUNITY-WIDE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES TO EXPAND TAX BASE**a) Employment Security**

Status: In February 2020, the City received proposals from multiple developers interested in acquiring and redeveloping the former NH Employment Security property. Upon consultation with the City Council in non-public session on March 9, 2020, a list of developers to be interviewed was established. Interviews have been scheduled for late April 2020.

b) Opportunity Corridor

Status: Storrs Street North Extension (CIP #18): Discussions are ongoing with Pan Am railways and the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) concerning this project. The schedule for this project will be addressed in the forthcoming FY 2021 Capital Improvement Program.

c) Exit 17/Whitney Road

Status: The traffic study commissioned by Laurie and David Rauseo, which examined the impact of a possible roundabout at the Whitney Road/Hoit Road intersection, is under review by NHDOT.

d) Exit 13

Status: The developer has not formally submitted any plans to date. The changing dynamics of the economy due to Covid-19 have already impacted this project with retailers/restauranteurs withdrawing due to broader impacts on their businesses. The housing piece of this multi-phase development may move forward first.

e) Housing

Status: Prior to the economic impact of Covid-19, new market rate housing construction was proceeding at a steady pace. New single family homes in Concord were selling for \$350,000-\$400,000 in the active developments in the north Concord and Penacook areas.

In terms of multifamily housing, construction on the Penacook Landing project is proceeding and the CATCH Penacook development is slated to break ground this summer. Phase I features 34 units and will be completed in September 2020. It is anticipated that Phase II, which will feature 20 units, will begin construction in spring 2021.

GOAL 3. PUBLIC SAFETY WORK

a) Opioid/Substance Abuse

Status: The Police Department continues to take an aggressive stance in combatting illegal drug issues facing the City. The Department works closely in this effort with stakeholders in the community and throughout the State to include other police agencies, service providers, City Departments and the court system. The Police Department continues its involvement with the Merrimack County Drug Court Initiative. As part of this initiative, the Department has a member assigned to the Drug Court Team. The Team meets weekly to discuss the progress of individuals that have been assigned to participate in the Drug Court process. The Team regularly evaluates the status of each individual in the program and makes recommendations based upon the individual's performance. The Department conducts curfew checks on each participant that resides in the City of Concord.

During the fall of 2019, the Police Department received a grant award in the amount of \$50,000 through the Law Enforcement Opioid Abuse Reduction Initiative (Project Granite Shield). These funds continue to be utilized by the Department to cover overtime costs associated with conducting illegal drug investigations in the City and surrounding towns. The Department will continue these efforts and regularly assess personnel assignments and initiatives to most effectively address illegal drug usage in the city. During the first three months of 2020, the Department arrested 54 individuals on illegal drug related charges.

The Department also maintains a prescription drug drop box in the lobby of the police station. This drug drop box allows people to drop off their unused or unwanted prescription medications that otherwise could be available for abuse or unauthorized consumption. During the first three months of 2020, over 140 pounds of prescription drugs were turned in by members of the community. The Department also continues to participate in the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's National Drug Take Back Days.

The Police Department works closely with Riverbend's Choices program in helping individuals suffering from drug and other substance abuse issues to find treatment.

The Fire Department continues to be very active with its collaboration to address substance abuse. In addition to being part of the Capital Area Substance Abuse Disorders Leadership Team, the Department is fully participating with the Homeless Provider Network, which also hosts monthly meetings in Concord and is made up of various agencies within the capital area that are working within the homeless population including Concord Police, Concord Coalition to End Homelessness, Community Action Program, the Salvation Army, the Public Health Network, and others. The Fire Department has also secured a voting seat on both of the Governor's Opioid and Prevention Task Forces.

During the first three months of 2020, the Project FIRST Director distributed 124 naloxone kits to individuals or their family supports; and taught 11 classes on substance abuse, naloxone usage, and hands only CPR to 129 participants. There is a current case load of 17 individuals. There were four complete successes, meaning the individual was encountered, enrolled into Project FIRST, entered into treatment, successfully completed treatment and is still in recovery as of March 31, 2020. The Fire Department

was also appointed as a voting member of the Governor's Opioids and Prevention Task Force in February 2020.

COVID-19 impact has resulted in a temporary stoppage to all public classes. The Fire Department is also temporarily unable to expand the classes and Project FIRST to the Capital Area Fire Mutual Aid Compact (22 surrounding towns), which was in the grant proposal and officially re-authorized by Governor and Council in February 2020. The Department is still engaging patients and families who are seeking assistance with treatment and recovery. However, the Department is using more personal protective equipment practices and telephone and Webex options when appropriate.

b) Community Policing

Status: During the first three months of 2020, the Police Department has been involved in a number of initiatives designed to further its relationship with the community. As part of these initiatives, the Department has hosted community meetings with multiple community organizations throughout the City. The Department is also active in staying involved with the New American community.

The Police Department has participated in several other programs to help promote community interaction with both children and adults. With the assistance of several local businesses, the Department hosted two "Coffee with a Cop" events in the City. These highly successful events offer an opportunity for community members to interact with the City's police officers in a relaxed atmosphere. Officers are available to answer any questions that residents may have and are able to foster a positive collaborative relationship between the Department and the community.

During the first three months of 2020, the Department scheduled a Rape Aggression Defense (RAD) class, but it was canceled due to not having enough participants. RAD is a comprehensive self-defense course for women and includes situational awareness, prevention, risk reduction and avoidance, and progresses to the basics of hands-on defense training. The RAD system is dedicated to teaching women defensive concepts and techniques against various types of assault by utilizing easy, effective, and proven self-defense tactics. The system of realistic defense provides women with the knowledge to make an educated decision about resistance.

Due to the unfortunate trend of mass shootings occurring in businesses and schools throughout the country, the Police Department has been offering active shooter training seminars. Since the start of 2020, the Department participated in one active shooter training with over 20 attendees. The Department also conducted six safety presentations for local businesses and the New Hampshire Technical Institute, as well as two fraud educational presentations for seniors.

The Police Department continues to work on new initiatives to assist in community engagement. One of the most positive initiatives that the Department recently deployed was the introduction of a police comfort dog. Liberty, an almost two year old female Labrador retriever, has been instrumental in interacting with community members and members of the Police Department. She has been deployed to numerous scenes and locations where violent or traumatic events have occurred to help lend relief to those suffering or affected by the incident. Liberty has also engaged those suffering from mental health issues, and has also made appearances at schools, hospitals and other

venues. She has participated in many social and community events throughout the City and has a large following of supporters.

In December 2019, the Police Department was very fortunate to receive a donation of \$50,000 from an anonymous community member. The donor requested that members of the Police Department identify persons and families in need and make monetary disbursements or use the funds to obtain goods and services for the recipients as appropriate. This mission has been known as *Operation Blue Elf*. Police officers and civilian support staff made great strides in completing this mission by the close of 2019. *Operation Blue Elf* was a community policing success and has continued into early 2020.

The Department's Adverse Childhood Experience Response Team (ACERT) launched in October of 2019. This team is made up of a member of the Concord Police Department, a member from Riverbend Community Mental Health, and a member from Merrimack County Human Services. The team deploys to residences where children have been exposed to violence. At the residences, the team meets with the families and assesses the situation to determine next steps that can be taken for the child, such as support groups, mental health counseling, early childhood education, or child-parent psychotherapy. ACERT made 94 home visits during the first three months of 2020. Recently, however, home visits have been put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The team has still been able to follow up with families by phone. For the second half of March, the team contacted over 20 families by phone.

The Police Department is committed to participating in these types of initiatives and continuing to foster the relationship between the Department and the community. All officers are encouraged to participate in community engagement activities. The success of the Police Department in providing the safest community possible is dependent upon a cooperative effort between the Department and the community as a whole.

c) **Working with School Districts**

Status: Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Police Department had three officers assigned as School Resource Officers (SRO). Officers were assigned to Concord High School, Merrimack Valley High School, and Merrimack Valley Middle School. Each of these officers is responsible for the safety and security of the schools' campuses, to act as mentors and educators, to be community policing liaisons, and to be problem solvers. The SRO's are also expected to help guide students through personal, educational, and social pressures that are part of being an adolescent.

During the first three months of 2020, the Department was extremely active in all of the schools throughout the City. The Department currently has six officers trained in D.A.R.E. The D.A.R.E. Program is designed to teach students at an early age the dangers of drug and alcohol use. This program has been widely successful and appreciated throughout the schools.

Officers also participated in "Police Readers" throughout the schools in the Concord and Merrimack Valley School Districts. Officers go into first and second grade classes where they read the class a book and answer any questions the children might have.

During the first three months of 2020, members of the Police Department presented two internet safety talks in the Concord and Merrimack Valley School Districts to help educate students about the dangers of the internet and social media and how to avoid being victimized. Officers provide suggestions to students on how to protect themselves from becoming victims.

The Police Department will also be assisting the Concord School Board by participating as a member of a task force focused on developing a strategic plan for improving student safety and wellbeing. This task force will also involve a variety of stakeholders from within the Concord community, and will be facilitated by Gerri King, Ph.D., a nationally recognized organizational facilitator.

d) **Recruitment**

Status: During the first quarter of calendar year 2020, the Police Department has aggressively worked to recruit staff. Staffing and training continues to be one of the Department's main priorities and will remain so until our agency stabilizes our work force. During this time period, the Department had 15 vacant full-time sworn police officer positions and three vacant full-time civilian positions.

The Department worked to attract qualified police applicants as well as civilian workers. Of the 15 vacant sworn positions, four positions were in the supervisory ranks and 11 positions were for entry level police officer positions. The Department was very successful at running several promotional processes and has established lists in order to backfill both lieutenant and sergeant positions as needed. This will ultimately allow the backfill hiring of four entry level police officer positions, as the supervisory positions are filled by current staff members.

The Department has hired three new police officers; however, they have not started their employment yet. These three new police officers will officially start on April 12, 2020. Additionally, the Department recruited six other police officer candidates who are currently in various stages of the hiring process. All six candidates appear to be very promising for hire. One of the six officer candidates is an experienced full-time sworn police officer from Maryland. The other five candidates have no experience and will need to attend the New Hampshire Police Academy. Recruiting experienced police officers from our area continues to be a challenge.

All nine of the above-mentioned police officer candidates were the result of targeted recruitments. Department staff put in countless hours to identify, meet, and recruit these candidates one on one. We work to educate them on our hiring process and the transition to become a police officer. We expect to move forward with the remaining six candidates by mid-year. Being that the vast majority of applicants will need to attend the New Hampshire Police Academy, we are reliant on space availability at the Police Academy for these hires.

The three vacant civilian positions at the Police Department are for police dispatchers. During the first quarter of 2020, the Department held a dispatcher recruitment process. We have streamlined our hiring process and have identified six promising dispatcher candidates, of which we will hire three.

It is critically important to understand that in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our fellow police agencies have postponed their hiring and recruitments. The Concord Police Department has not stopped efforts with regards to recruitment or hiring. We have found creative ways to connect with applicants and conduct interviews in a responsible and safe manner. We have continued to push forward despite these challenging times.

GOAL 4. PUBLIC INFORMATION, MARKETING, AND COMMUNICATIONS

a) Overall Economic Development

Status: In addition to standard business attraction/retention efforts, the Economic Development Director worked with three clients that are making direct investments in businesses in Concord to assist in the development process (Teatotaller, Doggy Day Care Kennel, and a corporate acquisition). Social media communication continues. The Economic Development Director began outreach to businesses with resource assistance during the COVID-19 state of emergency; co-created a business survey with the Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce to gauge needs during the shut-down; and followed up with impacted business owners.

b) Concord TV

Status: The City of Concord works closely with Concord TV on a variety of initiatives including informational videos, public service announcements, event promotion and coverage, and monthly podcasts.

c) Concord / Merrimack Valley School District

Status: The City is working with the Concord and Merrimack Valley School Districts to enhance their presence on the City website. The City and school districts are also exploring other ways to collaborate.

GOAL 5. WORKING WITH STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

a) Transportation with NHDOT

Status: Mayor Bouley announced that he was going to empanel a committee of citizens to review the I-93 widening project.

b) Department of Justice / Garages

Status: The General Court of New Hampshire, in coordination with the NH Department of Administrative Services, sought proposals for the preliminary study of constructing a new office building to house the New Hampshire Department of Justice, certain Legislative space, and a new parking garage. The work was scheduled to be undertaken in the fall of 2019 and deliverables completed by calendar year end. However, to date an award has not been made.

c) **Stickney Avenue**

Status: Staff has met with NHDOT representatives on the future of the State's Stickney Avenue properties. Those conversations were ongoing but have been temporarily paused pending the resolution of the COVID-19 state of emergency.

GOAL 6. ENHANCED COMMUNITY EVENTS/ARTS

a) **Promote Community Events with Community Partners**

Status: Unfortunately, the COVID-19 state of emergency has led to the cancelation or postponement of many special events in our community that typically would take place in spring and early summer.

GOAL 7. SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

a) **Form Based Code**

Status: After a successful series of stakeholder and public meetings in February, the draft of the first phase is now undergoing the City's legal review.

b) **Street Light Re-lamping**

Status: While significant progress has been made in this effort, the City continues to work with Unutil and the City's energy consultant, Beacon Integrated Solutions, to formalize a program to replace current street lights with LED lights.

c) **Renewable Energy & Conservation**

Status: At its April 13, 2020 meeting, the City Council approved a recommendation from City Administration to award a bid for a small scale, "behind the meter" facility located at the Hall Street Wastewater Treatment Facility, in the front of the parcel. The City is projected to save up to \$100,000 over the life of the project (slightly less if the system has to export some of the generation due to added costs).

d) **Recycling**

Status: The General Services Department has been diligently working with property management firms and condominium associations to address contamination in the multi-family recycling stream. Recycling contamination has been recognized as a significant detriment to maintaining a successful recycling program through industry changes.

GOAL 8. RECREATION AND PARKS

a) **Athletic Fields**

Status: The Parks and Recreation Department coordinates the reservations and maintenance of the City's parks and athletic fields. During the course of the year the following fields are maintained and reserved for numerous user groups: four baseball fields, five lacrosse fields, seven softball fields, two flag football fields, three football fields, one field hockey field, and 19 soccer fields.

During the spring and fall months (April to early June and late August to end of October), the main users of our fields are the three high schools, youth spring leagues, and our in-house department youth leagues. During the summer months, the main users of the fields are adult softball leagues, Sunset Baseball, adult baseball leagues, Babe Ruth baseball, the NH Wild Baseball Team and various summer camps.

Working with the Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee and members of the Keach Park Community, the Department continues to have a soccer field at Keach Park from early April to the end of October. This field is reserved for community use two evenings a week and all day on Sundays.

b) Terrill Park

Status: The new Master Plan for Terrill Park has been approved and is fully permitted. Phase 1 of the project was approved in the fall of 2019, which includes a new upper parking lot, a new dog park, the paved Merrimack River Greenway Trail, and related site improvements. The work is scheduled to begin in May with Phase 1 being completed by the end of August. Phase 1 is funded in partnership with the Friends of the Merrimack River Greenway Trail, a grant from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the City of Concord.

c) Merrimack River Greenway Trail (MRGT)

Status: The City is engaged in ongoing discussions with property owners, stakeholders, and potential partners concerning the possible acquisition of private property to support future development of the MRGT.

d) City Trail System

Status: As the Governor's State of Emergency was implemented, there was a significant uptick in trail usage leading to some concerns from the general public about parking and lack of social distancing. The Conservation Commission put out messaging to advise the community of the availability of other less popular trails as alternatives.

ONGOING INITIATIVE 1. FORMER TANNERY SITE/PARK

Status: In 2004, the City held a design charrette for the purposes of soliciting public input concerning redevelopment of the former Allied Leather Tannery complex at 23-25 Canal Street. As part of that exercise, the community expressed a strong desire to develop a new public riverfront park at the Tannery property to support future redevelopment of the site, as well as revitalization of Penacook Village.

In 2012, the City acquired additional property at 5-11 Canal Street to support future development of the park. As part of marketing efforts conducted for the Tannery site in 2008 and in 2015, the City commissioned various conceptual site plans for the former Tannery complex, which included a new riverfront park.

In conjunction with the sale of the portion of the Tannery site located at 35 Canal Street to the Caleb Development Corporation for the Penacook Landing housing project in September 2020, the City retained a 1.53 acre parcel with approximately 500 feet of frontage on the Contoocook River for the future riverfront park.

The current park concept plan was commissioned by the City in 2015 and had an estimated total cost of \$950,000. The concept included full reconstruction of the Canal Street Public Parking Lot. Adjusting for inflation, the estimated total cost of the project is \$1.35 million. It is anticipated that the total cost of the park will be supported by the Penacook Village Tax Increment Finance District, as well as with recreational impact fees. The schedule for the design and construction of the park will be addressed in the FY 2021 Capital Improvement Program.

ON-GOING INITIATIVE 2. ENHANCED NEIGHBORHOOD STREET PROGRAMS

Status: The FY 2020 Paving Project will be completed by Continental Paving this summer. At the March City Council meeting, Council approved the addition of Bog Road to be paved this summer, as well as the use of \$750,000 received last fall from the State Highway Block Grant fund. Continental Paving will start work on April 13, 2020, with a completion date of late October.