

# **LEWISTON CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP AGENDA**

**Wednesday, August 8, 2012**

**City Council Chambers**

**6:00 p.m. Workshop**

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Moment of Silence.

## **WORK SESSION**

Review of 2012-2013 City Council Priorities

LEWISTON CITY COUNCIL  
WORKSHOP AGENDA  
AUGUST 8, 2012  
6:00 P.M.

1. Review of Council Priorities

In a March retreat, the City Council established priorities that it wished to pursue over its term in office and expressed an interest in periodically reviewing progress. Attached please find a listing of those priorities along with an update (in bold for each major area) of progress status. A variety of staff will be present at the workshop to review each area and respond to questions. The workshop will allow the Council the opportunity to adjust priorities and/or provide direction to staff on areas where greater attention may be required.

NOTES FROM LEWISTON CITY COUNCIL PLANNING RETREAT  
MARCH 10, 2012

2012-13 PRIORITIES FOR THE COUNCIL (AND SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES):

The following are generally presented in priority order.

**BUDGET**

Adopt a budget that keeps property taxes stable, meets debt policy guidelines, and maintains current service levels, all on a long-term sustainable basis.

**The FY 2013 operating budget maintained the existing tax rate. A revised debt limitation ordinance was adopted that limits borrowing authorizations to 80% of the previous three year principal payment average, although this can be overridden by a Council super majority as was the case with the middle school renovation and expansion project. At the same time, City debt service, excluding schools, has declined over the last three years from more than \$9.5 million to \$8.6 million, dropping from 21.8% of the municipal operating budget to 19.7% in spite of the fact that the budget is currently slightly below that of FY 10, the peak debt service year. In addition, the bonds authorized for the coming year for the municipal general fund are approximately \$1.8 million, significantly below the level of recent years and far below the principal amount that will be paid off this year. Finally, the municipal operating budget has eliminated the use of fund balance and transfers back from the school department, two unreliable revenue sources. Overall, therefore, the city's budget has significantly stabilized after the dramatic revenue losses experienced due to the recession.**

**Challenges remain. Although reduced, debt service remains significant. We should continue to work to further reduce its impact on the operating budget, especially given the forecast capital needs of the school department. The state administration remains focused on income tax relief, a goal that may be achieved at least in part through further reductions to municipal support programs such as revenue sharing and school aid. The state administration is also emphasizing welfare reform, including changes to the state-municipal general assistance program, that could easily transfer greater costs to municipal government. Finally, the economy remains sluggish with limited private sector development activity.**

**IMPROVE HOUSING CITY-WIDE**

- Assess the effectiveness of the additional code enforcement officer position and decide whether or not to continue that position in the future.
- Evaluate whether or not record keeping in code has improved and what additional changes to record keeping should be made in the future.
- Support mixed-income residential development.
- Eliminate at least as many new units as are added to the housing stock inventory to improve the stock and help balance supply and demand.

- Work closely with landlords and property managers who manage and maintain their properties well and explore ways to support their efforts.
- Create more incentives to support owner-occupied residential properties.
- Review and revise city loan programs to increase utilization and user-friendliness.
- Maintain an appropriate urban population density.
- Review zoning requirements for parking and winter parking rules.
- Investigate establishing a "disorderly house" ordinance.

**Our primary focus to date has been on the removal of distressed properties. About \$650,000 in CDBG and bond funds have been allocated toward demolition and acquisition. To date, 9 properties have been demolished (8 by the City; one by a bank) representing 30 residential units. An additional 6 properties (26 units) are in process. To date, approximately \$215,000 of the available allocation has been expended. Once these structures are removed, over 50 units of housing will have been eliminated. Given the number of distressed properties that have been identified, this level of effort will need to continue for some time. At this level, we should be able to meet or exceed the goal of removing at least as many units as are added to the downtown area's inventory.**

**Additional Code Position. Much of our progress in property demolition has resulted from additional staff in the Code office allowing it to continue to meet its normal demands while taking on the additional work required to prepare condemnation hearings. The position has also provided the Office with the ability to work more closely with landlords on a variety of issues. Gil Arsenault and Jeff Baril will be present to discuss how this position has benefited the department.**

**Code Records. The Energov Code system has been implemented and has resulted in improved record keeping in Code. The system was recently reviewed by representatives of the Visible Community and Neighborhood Housing League who I believe were impressed by the system's ability to track and record complaints and Code's response.**

**Loan/Grant Programs. The city has a variety of commercial and residential programs that have been in place since 1999. Staff is evaluating them and developing recommendations for updates and new programs to better reflect current redevelopment needs and to maintain their effectiveness within the realities of reduced federal capitalization. A spreadsheet showing the various programs, current funding levels, and recommendations for how to allocate the \$377,000 that has been returned from LAEGC will be available on Wednesday. Highlights of recommended program updates include moving decision making over façade grants from staff to the loan committee, clarifying the qualifying criteria and number of façade grants that can be made on a project, reducing the number of "silos" available for funding the programs, introducing a blend of 0% interest loans and grants to support projects, and the creation of a Life Safety Grant/Loan program that can be used to assist with the redevelopment of upper floors of smaller downtown mixed use buildings. Given reduced federal resources, the Council may wish in the future to consider providing local resources to support grant and loan programs aimed at commercial/mixed use/residential rehabilitation projects.**

**Owner Occupancy.** On a related issue, Linc is currently working with several non-profit housing agencies and the Downtown Neighborhood Advisory Committee on a project that would potentially redevelop a site with affordable owner-occupied housing. This is in line with the objective of increasing such housing in the downtown neighborhood. The City has also redeveloped three properties through the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program. These properties will eventually result in 4 owner occupied properties in this residential area.

**Winter Parking Rules.** Working with the Downtown Neighborhood Advisory Committee, City staff has developed a proposal that would eliminate the overnight winter parking ban. Formal changes will be presented to the Council in August. Eliminating this ban is intended to address one of the perceived disadvantages to living in the downtown neighborhood.

**Gauging Effectiveness.** The Council has expressed some interest in assessing the effectiveness of the additional code position. I would suggest that this be expanded to develop measures aimed at assessing the overall health of the downtown neighborhood. Some potential indicators to track could include:

- Number and value of building permits issued
- Number of condemned properties
- Overall property values
- Crime statistics/calls for service
- Number of code complaints received
- Visual appearance

As to the last of these, last year CCI undertook a visual assessment of the properties in the downtown neighborhood. We are currently in the process of integrating this information into our GIS system to provide a pictorial overview of exterior conditions. While the data only covers property exteriors, it does provide a basis for evaluating how the neighborhood is perceived. CCI plans to do a five year update of this information which may prove valuable in assessing overall neighborhood trends.

**"Disorderly Houses."** The Police Department is researching a "disorderly house" ordinance and will be prepared to discuss this with the Council at some point in the future.

## **DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT**

- Review our parking policies and make the parking system more visible and user-friendly
- Reach out to larger employers in the city to promote the benefits of downtown residences for their staff/employees, especially high income staff.
- Evaluate and upgrade our loan and assistance programs targeted at downtown.
- Make developers aware of all potential assistance programs available by providing a comprehensive list of city, regional, state, and federal programs.
- Consider establishing design standards for the downtown in order to encourage and protect development; If non-mandatory, look at linking city assistance programs to compliance with recommended standards.
- Promote local ownership of downtown businesses and properties.

- Complete the implementation of the Kennedy Park master plan.
- Coordinate Downtown Development with Riverfront Island plans/development.

**Parking.** A number of recommendations came forward from the Riverfront Island Master Plan regarding parking policies and the visibility of our parking garages. These need to be reviewed and integrated into the overall implementation plan for the study. We anticipate presenting a draft implementation plan in September.

**Work and Live Downtown.** The Lofts at Bates Mill has completed two model units. The developer has begun to aggressively market them as a new downtown living option and is holding open houses from 4 -5 p.m. several days a week. With these units coming on line in November, staff will work with the developer to make the hospitals, Bates College, and other large downtown employers aware of this new downtown living option. Only a limited number of quality residential spaces have been developed in the downtown area in recent years. The Lofts is the first major recent project of its type, and it will provide us with a product that we can market. Marketing efforts will extend to both market rate and affordable units, for which we believe a number of downtown employees will qualify. As we undertake this effort, we will include other potential sites such as the renovated Park Street condominiums near the Public Theatre. To attract residents to downtown, we need a quality product to market. The Lofts provides us with this opportunity. As it succeeds, it is likely that additional quality residential properties will be developed.

**Loan/Grant Programs.** As noted above, we are in the process of revising our CDBG loan and grant programs, including those targeted to the downtown, and will be reviewing these with the Council. In addition, our summer intern has developed a comprehensive list of the assistance programs available through other agencies such as LAEGC and AVCOG that City staff can use to work with interested parties in identifying potential financing and assistance programs.

**Design Guidelines.** In 2007, the City developed "*Design Guidelines for the Downtown.*" At that time, the Planning Board and City Council chose not to adopt them; however, that work will serve as a solid foundation for moving forward with design guidelines and zoning recommendations for the Riverfront Island and downtown area as recommended in the Riverfront Island plan. Planning will review and resurrect these proposals and bring them forward through the Planning Board this fall.

**Local Downtown Ownership.** Over the last several years, the city has been fortunate to have significant levels of downtown development interest from local developers and business owners. Projects include: Eric Agren's Fuel, Marche, making space available for the Lyceum Gallery, and developing market rate apartments above Fuel and Marche. Work is underway on another market rate apartment on the top floor of the Fuel building and three in 43 Lisbon Street. A third Agren restaurant is planned, in time, at street level in 43 Lisbon. Niky's Greek restaurant opened at 29 Lisbon Street earlier this year. Jules Patry redeveloped 84 Lisbon Street, bringing five market rate apartments to downtown, including one that is his home. The Vault wine shop opened in the street level space. Work is underway for Rainbow Bike

which expects to open in the former Drapeaus' at 97 Lisbon Street this fall. A coffee shop/café will be part of the redevelopment. Jim Wellehan has begun exterior rehabilitation work on the former Grant's department store located at 113 Lisbon Street. Jamie Pittman purchased and has begun a full renovation of the McGillicuddy Building located at 133 Lisbon Street with plans for market rate apartments on the upper floors. Paul and Kate Landry have purchased 112 Lisbon Street (Mother of India restaurant building) and have begun renovations with plans to develop upper floor market rate apartments, one of which will become their home. Kimball Street Studio, an archival frame shop and gallery, opened earlier this year at 191 Lisbon Street. Allen Smith purchased 178 – 180 Lisbon Street several years ago and has been rehabilitating the building since. Forage Market opened in this location this spring. Yoga studios and health care consultants occupy the second floor. Gabby Russell and Kevin Morissette purchased 223 Lisbon Street in 2011 and renovated the second floor for their home. The street level is leased to locally owned LA Magazine and Captive Element Arts House. Tenant interest is picking up at the Bates Mill, with Bates Mill Dermatology expanding, one lease signed for the top floor of Bates #2 Wing/Storehouse, and negotiations underway for another floor with another tenant.

**Kennedy Park.** Our ability to implementing the Kennedy Park master plan is constrained by resource availability. There is currently \$139,500 available for this purpose. Of this, \$75,000 has been pledged toward Gazebo renovation. The remaining \$64,500 has been designated for improving park amenities such as benches and trash cans. Staff will review and prioritize other potential uses for this \$64,500 and return with a formal recommendation to Council in the near future. Additional improvements would then require additional funds.

## **RIVERFRONT ISLAND DEVELOPMENT**

- Adopt the Riverfront Island master plan.
- Allocate federal earmark grant funds remaining after the master plan for a Riverfront Island project.
- Move to acquire the canals.
- Determine a final disposition for Mill #5

**The Riverfront Island master plan has been adopted. The next step is to develop a firm implementation plan, including a recommendation on how to best use the remaining earmark funds. This is somewhat complicated by the negotiations over the canal system, something which also impacts making a final decision on the disposition of Mill 5.**

## **STRATEGIC AND MASTER PLANNING**

- Evaluate the current Comprehensive and Strategic Plans to look for gaps and redundancies; work to make the plans complete, consistent, and up-to-date.
- Review city-wide zoning and land use policies/ordinances for consistency, with special attention to high traffic corridors, transitional areas, rural areas, and open space.

- Include bike and pedestrian planning in multi-modal transportation plans.

**The Council has authorized \$100,000 toward revising the City's comprehensive plan. Planning is in the process of developing an RFP for consulting services which we anticipate will be issued later this month. A Comprehensive Planning Committee should be organized this fall. As a part of the revision, elements of the Strategic Plan will be updated and integrated into the comprehensive plan.**

**A joint Lewiston/Auburn Bike Ped Committee has been formed and has begun to meet. We are currently inventorying bike lanes and road shoulders of adequate width to support bike use. I would anticipate that this Committee will be considering policies that can be incorporated into the comprehensive plan. In addition, AVCOG is updating and revising its bike and pedestrian plan. The Cities' efforts should feed into that process as well.**

### **NEW SCHOOL**

- The council will, at a time to be determined, take and communicate a position on the location of the new school.

**This is not yet timely.**

### **MARKETING THE CITY TO CHANGE PERCEPTIONS**

- Develop a new brand and logo for the city.
- Develop a city marketing plan that dovetails with regional marketing plans.
- Develop and distribute stories and story ideas for local and regional press and broadcast outlets that support a positive image of the city.
- Explore moving Great Falls Television into the downtown.

**In March of 2012, Community Relations Coordinator Dottie Perham-Whittier, Library Director Rick Speer, and Finance Director Heather Hunter began working to develop a process for a new marketing brand/logo for the City. Under consideration was a public contest seeking graphic artists and marketing firms to submit potential logos along with incentives to encourage participation.**

**In late April, City Administrator Ed Barrett pointed out that the Chamber of Commerce's Regional Image Committee was in the process of developing a regional branding initiative and suggested that staff meet with its representative, Hillary Dow, to see if there could be some collaboration. That meeting took place in May where Hillary encouraged collaboration between the Twin Cities and the regional effort: *"A strong branding initiative is such an extremely crucial component necessary to bring a vision to life. With so much progress being made, and more and more solidification around a vision for Lewiston-Auburn, rolling out a full scale branding initiative WILL create a significant wave of energy and buzz that will help drive more progress for years to come. It is how our community communicates and represents Lewiston-Auburn to our own citizens, to Maine, New England and the entire world. A strong brand is a powerful driver of economic development.***

***Elements of the brand for both Lewiston and Auburn (separately) should come after the full brand has been developed. This sequence and cohesion is critical to having a strong brand."***

**As a result, our planned effort was put on "hold" so that we could work closely with the regional effort to develop a cohesive regional branding strategy, but one that would separately individuate Lewiston and Auburn perhaps through color or graphic variations. We have also promoted the Regional Image Committee's "Lewiston - Auburn Branding Initiative 2012" survey on our web site.**

**Dottie has been coordinating regularly with Hillary. According to Hillary: "The next phase we've started working on, which we will certainly be reaching out to both cities is twofold: 1) composing and finalizing an RFP for design and strategy services and 2) Lining up our local stakeholders to come to the table with both funding and input into the selection process of a community marketing agency." We also learned that the survey data collection process is complete and a summary of the results should be available soon.**

**We plan to continue to cooperate with this process.**

#### **JOINT PUBLIC/PRIVATE RFPs IN SUPPORT OF CITY-WIDE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

- Identify properties which could benefit from being included in such a program.
- Test and evaluate the concept with a limited pilot program, perhaps in the downtown.

**This remains a valid idea. However, resource constraints and the number of pending projects make it difficult to prepackage an incentive plan. We continue to work closely with individuals who have expressed an interest in development.**

#### **OTHER POSSIBLE AREAS FOR COUNCIL FOCUS**

- REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT; WORK WITH AUBURN, AVCOG, AND LAEGC TO COORDINATE ACTIVITIES; ENCOURAGE A REGIONAL MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN.
- IMPROVE COLLABORATION WITH OTHER GROUPS AND ENTITIES INCLUDING: THE CITY OF AUBURN, THE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT, HOSPITALS, BATES COLLEGE, THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY, YPLAA, AND THE VISIBLE COMMUNITY.
- THE FRANKLIN COMPANY
- EXPAND UTILIZATION OF THE RECYCLING PROGRAM; PROMOTE WASTE REDUCTION.