

Heart of the City

February 12, 2007 – Café Carpe

Present: Beth Gehred, Bill Camplin, Kitty Welch, Jude Hartwik, Leslie LaMuro, Ann Englemann, Anders Yocom, John Ottow, Jill Ottow, Mary Linton, Kathy Kaufmann, Lue Ehnger, Joan Callan, Paul Bubutzis, Josie Gobel, Paul Habel, Andy Jorgensen, Mary Gates, John Kleinschmidt, Stella Kleinschmidt, Steve Klein, Elaine Johnson, Dave Frohmader, Ann Penfield

Meeting called to order at 7:00 pm by President Beth Gehred.

Speaker

City Manager John Wilmet. Started his presentation with some background on his history in the City. When he initially became city manager 8 years ago his priorities were:

1. Improve transportation system within the city.
2. Need for a place for businesses to relocate in Fort.
3. Improve city fleet.
4. Renovate downtown – dilapidated buildings, riverfront was in poor condition.
5. Beautify the city – public art, make the community more attractive.

Accomplishments:

1. Beautifying the city: new signage for community destinations, upgrades to parks/playgrounds, paved paths to recreation attractions, new Christmas decorations, city entry features, riverwalk development, public art installations, bike trail.
2. South Side business park, businesses expressed concern that there was no place to expand. Approximately 1/3 is developed or under development.
3. Downtown renovation: Proposed spending \$1M on downtown development. Downtown TIFF district is now self-supporting. Chamber of Commerce participated in a "First Impressions" program, get impressions of the city from outside observers. Moved Bicentennial park, developed condominiums on old park site. Moved police & Fire station to downtown, showed commitment to downtown development.
4. Fleet upgrades: city was incurring large maintenance fees to maintain old vehicles. Implemented program to rotate fleet & have newer vehicles in use.

On the horizon:

1. General capital projects: Additional upgrades in all parks, finish river walk (link to Super 8). Sherman avenue reconstruction, repainting North water tower, Museum addition.
2. Master plan update: Got a state grant to help with regional planning process. Will be starting early March, focus groups, public information meetings etc. Committee will be formed to make recommendations to council, expect process to take 1 year.

3. Storm Water Management plan: DNR is mandating this for the city, will start around May 1. Will include public information/education components. Areas of study: snow removal, runoff from business, construction site erosion control, monitoring, enforcement, staffing requirements.
4. Climate protection ad hoc committee. Resolution will be presented at February 20th City Council meeting, this will probably be an ongoing area of study for the City. Process started by asking the city staff for documentation about what has already been done, this will formalize many of the efforts already being done voluntarily. City is a leader in recycling in the state, with good cooperation from community.
5. Will be looking at management of waste. Looking at new system that will limit volume of waste that will be picked up at residences. Will be discussing options with our contractor. Looking at recycling pickup every other week, contractor would provide containers.
6. All buildings have been upgraded for energy efficiency, studies are being done on ways to conserve energy at wastewater water utility.

How to become involved:

1. Attend committee & council meetings, volunteer & serve on committees. Most of policy work is done at the committee level. May 1 committee openings will be filled, will be advertising soon. Committees are term limited (typically 3 terms or 10 years).

A lot of effort has gone into applying for grants & donations to fund projects without taking from property taxes, about \$9M to date. City tax rate has been flat for last 8 years. Committed to stay at or below average tax rate in state.

Questions:

What is percentage breakdown of commuters, what is future trend?

Anticipating growth pressure from Madison & Milwaukee. Projections show slow growth, city is land-locked, except for west of 26 bypass, plan is to infill before jumping bypass. City has been very selective in selling property in business park, several potential businesses have been rejected.

Bill C: Highway 26 bypass EIS has a lot of this information.

Beth: Wonders when John feels Global Warming is pressing enough issue to merit financial investment (hire consultants, train staff, alternate energy)?

Levy limits are currently taken up by wage/benefit increases – not in a position to add staff. Currently running one-person departments. In the future, Federal & State governments may be providing funds to local communities for environmental initiatives. Easiest time to get grants is generally first year or two, before strings are attached (often due to abuses).

Bill C: Need to have more candidates running for office to raise issues that are not currently talked about.

Jude H: Any move to televise city council meetings, this may generate interest in the community in becoming involved. John: Doesn't believe it can be done successfully on a volunteer basis, should be staffed etc. He has not heard from the public the desire for televised council meetings, but it will probalby happen eventually.

Jill O: Industrial Develoment Corporation: how is it staffed, how can citizens have input?
John: has been in existence for 50 years, composed of business leaders. It acts as an advisory group only, provides means for companies to investigate possibility of moving to Fort without going public. Screen businesses, evaluate fit with Fort, make recommendations to City Council. 501C3 elected, separate entity from the City.

Jill K: Recently several downtown properties were demolished and left vacant before being redeveloped. Is there a way to address this in the future.

John: Property owners have rights regarding disposition of their property. May be able to place some requirements on property condition while awaiting development. City does not have a lot of power over status of vacant private property. Will have to look at what other cities have done that have survived court.

Approval of last month's minutes. (Ann/Jill O)

Truth to Power Moment: Paul Habel: Local Dentists are offering free dental care for people without access. Fort Hospital has contributed space, with funding for remodeling from Delta Dental. Will be opening this spring.

Big Heart Award:

Election facilitated by Leslie & Jill O. People were given an opportunity to talk about why they had nominated people for the award.

Winner: School District of Fort Atkinson

Second Place: Dick Wanie

Third Place: Fort Garden Club

Nominations for next year's Big Heart Award can be made all year, Beth has nomination forms.

Treasurers Report: Current balance \$838.17 Have a positive cash flow for the year as of tonight.

Committee reports:

Projects:

Peggy Sundquist met with committee on community garden. Looking into grants for equipment, setting up a meeting with Joe Nehmer and John Molinaro.

Public Policy/Govt Relations:

Currently working on High school voter registration. County board representatives will be at the Library 4:00, February 13.

Education & Outreach:

Beth & Leslie attended talk by Charles Fishman author of "The Wal-Mart Effect".
Josie Gobel is having a preview of 3 films this Thursday, 6:30 pm (February 14) at her home, for future events to lead discussion groups.

Website:

John Ottow would like to address website at next steering committee meeting

Old Business

Beth brought a stack of Sustainable Times for distribution.

Ad Hoc committee update: A draft resolution will be submitted to the City Council. Next Ad Hoc meeting will be March 5, 6:00 pm.

Membership drive: Paul Habel has pulled together list of people who have expressed interest in HOC (approximately 100 names). A mailing will be going out to coincide with Earth Day.

Study Circles report: Continuing to form groups around the county. Greg David, Paul Moderacki, Beth have been giving presentations to interested groups. Beth is planning a study circle for middle school group. New study circle is starting in Jefferson tonight, there are still openings.

Andy Jorgensen reported that he attended a presentation on Study groups in Waterloo.

New Business

The Atkinson Diet: Kitty reported on a project to invite people go on a low carbon diet. Website is currently under development, week by week tips will be presented for ways to reduce carbon footprint. Community leaders will be contacted to ask them to join the diet.

Sustainability benchmarking: We should be leading by example, carpooling etc, setting thermostats back.

The Odyssey of Nature: HOC has been invited to set up a table at Mush-Ko-Se-Day park July 7. Need people to man the HOC table!

Beth was contacted by the Catholic Church about the possibility of opening a St Vincent DePaul in Fort. Looking for feedback from the community. Jill Ottow believes there is a need for a "Free Shop". People donate cloths, household goods, etc. items can be taken at no charge. Would this hurt Goodwill & downtown thrift shop?

Next Steering Committee meeting: February 26th, Ann & Andy's.

Next General Membership meeting is March 12, 7:00 pm at the Police Department

Announcements

Jill Ottow: Passed around information on Co-op America.

Jill Ottow: Try organic bananas! Ask local grocery stores to stock them.

Kathy Kaufmann: Jefferson has an organic grocery store.

Adjournment: 9:20 pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Steve Tesmer