

Aiken City Council Minutes

WORK SESSION

March 19, 2007

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Clyburn, Price, Smith, Sprawls, Vaughters and Wells.

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Bill Huggins, Larry Morris, Richard Pearce, Glenn Parker, Susan Mimmie, Wendell Hall, Carla Cloud of the ADDA, Susan Mimmie, Tony Baughman of the Aiken Standard, Jeff Wallace of the Aiken Standard, Betsy Gilliland of the Augusta Chronicle, and about 28 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 5:05 P.M. He stated Council had four items to discuss in the worksession – a review of the Parking Management recommendations by John Edwards, an update of the Wayfinding Project, publication boxes and their locations in the downtown area, and sidewalk sales.

PARKING MANAGEMENT

Aiken Downtown Parking Management Study
Edwards & Neff, Engineering, Inc.
Edwards, John

Mr. LeDuc stated that an executive summary of the Aiken Downtown Parking Management Study, which was recently completed, was provided to City Council for their review. He stated there are three pages of recommendations which the ADDA would like to discuss with City Council and receive their direction before their Parking Committee moves forward. He stated the major steps recommended including a two-hour parking time limit zone, obtaining additional on-street and off-street parking, developing mapping and signage to identify parking areas, and a public campaign to discuss these new parking regulations.

Mr. LeDuc reviewed the recommendations made by John Edwards.

City Council and concerned citizens discussed the parking management issue at length.

Carla Cloud, Aiken Downtown Development Association Director, stated that a letter had been sent to City Council telling them that a Parking Advisory Committee had been formed, as John Edwards had suggested. She stated that the committee felt that the ultimate goal would be two-hour parking. She stated they are not looking for specifics right now, but are looking for enforcement. She stated the Parking Committee wants support telling them this is the direction to go, and they will have someone to enforce the new parking limits.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated he would like to see the Parking Committee look for alternative parking by going to private places.

Ms. Cloud stated she agreed with looking for alternatives and also with looking at the possibility of changing parallel parking to angled parking if necessary. She stated there is no reason to start identifying places unless they are going to have enforcement of some sort.

Sam Erb, owner of the Westside Bowery and a member of the Parking Advisory Committee, stated the first issue will be education. He stated most people will want to know how the 2-hour parking came about. He stated that on the norm, 1 hour and 46 minutes is the average time spent parked in the same place. He stated that enforcement is very important. He stated if this is going to be an ordinance, then it has to be enforced. He stated that a uniformed person would need to be present so people will realize it is a serious ordinance. He stated that if there is 2-hour parking, then employees of businesses will wonder where to park, because they do not want to have to walk to their place of

employment. He stated the employees and merchant owners need to realize they cannot park in front of their businesses.

Mayor Cavanaugh asked Mr. Erb if we were to build a new parking area, how many spaces would we need to rectify this parking problem.

Mr. Erb stated we do not need that now. He stated we need to manage what we have, and in the future we may need a new parking lot with the ability to be expanded, if needed.

Councilmember Wells stated that his concern is imposing the 2-hour limit on parking in front of businesses that require a long stay. He stated an example of this is Barbara Sue Brodie's store, where a customer has to stay awhile to make a decision and for Ms. Brodie to make the sale. He stated he would hate for Council to place limitations that could hurt businesses. Mr. Erb stated that the hours of enforcement are very important.

Chris Lydle, owner of Chris' Camera, stated one of the problems is that if the hours are made too short, someone can arrive at just the right time and be in compliance and actually be there for four or five hours. He stated he was of the opinion that legislating and enforcing the 2-hour parking is the first thing to do because the people will find a place to park if they have to. They will never take advantage of additional parking if they can park for free wherever they feel like it.

Barbara Sue Brodie, owner of Barbara Sue Brodie Needleworks, stated she has a knitting shop downtown and has been downtown for seven years. She stated she was on Laurens Street for five years and has been on Hayne Avenue for the last two years. She stated people come to Aiken to shop because it is easy to do. She said a person can park their car and shop all of downtown without moving the car. She stated that for most of the customers, shopping is an experience. She stated if customers have to watch their time to make sure they do not park in a place too long, the businesses will lose customers. She stated she has talked with other merchants, and they feel it is not customer parking that is the problem, but employee parking. She stated the problem needs to be addressed. She has advised her employees not to park in front of any retail stores, but to park and walk. She stated she feels that two hour parking will not fix the problem, but will hurt the businesses in the Downtown District.

Carla Cloud stated that the majority of the people shopping downtown are here less than two hours. She stated that Aiken is not the only city dealing with parking problems.

Wade Brodie, Aiken Downtown Development Association Committee, stated that nothing that has been done in the past has worked. He stated that nothing will work without the mechanism of enforcement. He stated that the Parking Advisory Committee is before Council to see if they will back them up with enforcement of the parking ordinance. He stated that if there is not enforcement, then the parking ordinance will not work. He asked Gary Smith if it was discrimination to differentiate between customers and employees. He also asked Council if they would like for the Parking Advisory Committee to go out and locate all the available lots and negotiate with property owners and come up with leases before they actually bring the whole package before Council. He stated that if employees would not park in front of the businesses, Council would not be meeting on this subject.

Gary Smith, City Attorney, stated that from an equal protection of the law standpoint, it would be difficult to say if it is okay for this class of individuals to do this particular thing, or if it is not okay for this class of individuals to do this particular thing. He stated if you go to enforce an ordinance against one class of citizens, Council would incur a problem from the fairness standpoint. He stated that, from an enforcement standpoint, if parking is free for all customers, and Council says they are going to put all employees in a lot and they have to put a sticker on their window and that is where they park, then they will choose not to put the sticker on so they can park everywhere. He stated it would be very difficult to enforce.

Ms. Cloud stated that before any parking ordinance is implemented, there will be a time of community education. She stated they will hand out literature and maps and educate everyone on how to park and the consequences of parking incorrectly.

Ron Brenneman, owner of Birds and Butterflies, stated he has been in business for about 10 years and has seen the problem increase. He stated his problem is seeing the real estate companies and banks moving downtown and those are folks that will take up more and more space on a regular basis. He stated he can point out 10 or 15 cars on his block that belong to employees parked close to their businesses and those take up parking spaces for customers.

City Council continued to discuss the parking issue at length.

It was the consensus of City Council for the Parking Advisory Committee to move forward with the intention of implementing the consultant's study and eventually passing an ordinance that limits parking in the areas they recommended with an estimated time table.

WAYFINDING PROJECT

Signage

Signs

Mr. LeDuc stated the Wayfinding Project is being overseen by Glenn Parker and the ADDA. He stated that ADDA had asked Council to come up with some signage. Council accepted that and felt there was good merit in it but felt at that time it needed some polishing. He stated they went back to USC-A with that information and they felt it was a good idea. He stated that Glenn Parker, working with ADDA, went to several different firms that do this for a living. They are utilizing the Design Group firm to complete this study and to develop a plan of action.

Glenn Parker stated Design Group was chosen because they are a local firm, and they appreciate what we have in Aiken. He stated the other reason they were chosen is because they are working on our branding campaign, which somewhat ties into this. He stated it is a separate project, but it could tie into the look and the feel of the signs. He stated they are still in the concept stage, but Barry Doss will give an update on the project.

Barry Doss, The Design Group, stated the primary goal of this assignment is to bring the visitor into town efficiently, help them get around once they are downtown, as well as directing them to points of interest beyond the downtown area. He gave an overview of the project. He stated there are three types of signs: welcoming, directional, and informational. He stated the typical process for this type of signage project falls into five phases. He stated the first phase is research, site surveys, determinations, and recommendations. He stated phase two would get into the actual physical solutions. That would include verbal and visual materials, determinations and recommendations, as well as the other support materials. Phase three is production specifications, negotiations, and determinations to determine and draft all production specifications, identify all potential suppliers, get the specs out to those potential suppliers, negotiate final production details and costs, and then award the project. Phase four is manufacturing – providing all the necessary production files to the chosen supplier and supervising that process. Phase five is installation – confirming all the installation details with the city, developing the final installation schedule, and supervising that installation. He stated that the group's recommendation is that phase one and two be combined. He stated in this case they think it is important to bring Phase one and Phase two to Council at the same time we talk about our recommendations and determinations with regard to the overall survey. He stated they will bring to Council the solutions as well. He stated that they feel it will be easier to present to Council the research determinations as well as the solutions at the same time as one report. He stated they expect to have that report ready the first of June.

Glenn Parker stated the city received a grant from the Heritage Corridor to help with the initial research phase, which is good in that it opens up the fact that when they get to the

installation point they can reapply for this same grant. He stated it may help the city with the purchase and installation of the signs.

Councilman Vaughters asked if there was any way signs could be installed downtown to direct people to specific stores as soon as possible.

Mr. Doss stated the group would look at that as a top priority with the potential of bringing observations and solutions to that in advance of the entire system, because it is a separate element. He stated there is a possibility that the group can present that to Council in advance of the entire system solution.

NEWSPAPER RACKS

Publication Boxes

Newspaper Boxes

Downtown

Mr. LeDuc stated City Council has had an opportunity to thoroughly discuss the location and number of publication boxes, and have been presented ways for this to become self regulated. He stated that he included a copy of this program for Council's review. He stated Bill Huggins will try to answer any questions that Council may have at tonight's meeting.

Bill Huggins gave a brief history on the newspaper racks. He stated the last action Council took was approving a Memorandum of Understanding and discussing a tentative idea of the number of boxes or installations that might be recommended for downtown.

Mr. Huggins briefly reviewed the Memorandum of Understanding.

Beth Nicholson, publisher of Bella Magazine and a member of the Rack Committee that was established by the City, stated the committee had not met in a while and she was at this meeting to see if any new developments had occurred since they last met. She stated she was interested in knowing if there have been any complaints about the racks causing some sort of problem for pedestrians. She stated she had heard there were no problems.

City Council discussed newspaper racks at length.

Henry Krippner, 144 Crane Court, stated he was at the Post Office and noticed that five of the boxes were completely empty. He stated that shows him that either they do not take care of their machines or they are very successful and sell out very fast.

Ed Giobbe, 541 Grace Avenue, SE, stated he finds the number, the size, and the variety of the current newspaper racks to be unacceptable. He stated Council has three things to consider: the size of the boxes, the location, and the number of boxes. He stated if the problem is not addressed, it will accelerate.

It was the consensus of City Council that the City purchase a newspaper module and mount it at one of the designation spots on Laurens Street for Council and others to see how it looks and what citizens' remarks are about it.

SIDEWALK SALES

Downtown

Mr. LeDuc stated the last item on the worksession agenda to discuss was sidewalk sales. He stated that Council developed an ordinance on this and talked about it. He stated that Council has discussed on several occasions amendments for the sidewalk sales in Downtown Aiken, and we are seeking Council's direction concerning this item.

City Council discussed sidewalk sales at length.

Ron Brenneman, owner of Birds and Butterflies, stated he would like to see consistency. He stated there have been times when he put something on the sidewalk and Public

Safety came by and made him put it up, yet there are some stores that have about forty items on the sidewalk.

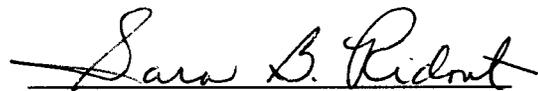
Ed Giobbe, 541 Grace Avenue, SE, stated Council needs to make a distinction between sidewalk sales and the everyday constant display of merchandise on the sidewalk. He stated he did not want the character of downtown to be degraded.

Wade Brodie, Aiken Downtown Development Association Committee, stated he feels there is an ordinance that prohibits placing items on the sidewalks except during a few times a year when ADDA is planning it, but the ordinance is not being enforced. He stated that either Council needs to enforce the ordinance or tell all the store owners they can do anything they want to and have it look like a flea market.

Mr. LeDuc stated the sidewalk sale ordinance will be placed on the April 9, 2007 City Council agenda for second reading and public hearing. He stated that will give Carla Cloud time to let the various members and nonmembers of ADDA know about it and the city will notify some individual people also.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:41 P.M.


Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk