

Aiken City Council Minutes

September 22, 2003

WORK SESSION

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

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Bill Huggins, Anita Lilly, Al Cothran, Leasa Segura, Sara Ridout, Josh Gelinas of the Augusta Chronicle, and about 16 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 6:20 P.M. He stated Council had two items that they would like to discuss in the work session.

PENSION PLAN

Retirement Plan

Mr. LeDuc stated that Mr. Warner Anthony, the city's actuary and attorney who has worked with the city on the city's pension plan, was present to discuss changes to the pension plan. The City of Aiken's Pension Plan was last modified in the mid 1990's. Since that time there have been several IRS and Federal law changes that require us to modify our plan. He said if Council feels comfortable with the proposed plan, the matter will be placed on a future agenda.

Mr. Warner Anthony stated the city's pension plan was last restated about five years ago, in 1997. Since that time there have been a number of minor changes and a number of amendments. He said in looking at the plan it was found that some things were not clear. He said because of the federal laws that were passed, the city was required to restate the plan, so they were taking the opportunity to incorporate the federal changes and the items that were not clear. He said the IRS changes require us to incorporate the GUST statutory changes, which refers to six different federal laws, and the EGTRRA incorporates the changes in the Federal Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act. The new plan will also incorporate all of the federal pension law changes from 1993 to 2001. These are mostly technical and minor changes that do not impact the actual benefits. The plan also incorporates previous changes to the plan, such as early retirement at 28 years from 30 years to match the State plan, the contractual agreement that you have with the City Manager, and allowing Councilmembers to opt out of the plan should they desire. A provision to limit benefits to 100% of pay was included in the plan. There is also a phase-in over five years of a new benefit formula that provides offsetting Social Security benefits received by all participants, so that upon retirement all retirees would receive, with their Social Security payments, 92% of their salary. He said most of the changes are minor modifications and compliance issues. He said the plan is about a 65 page document. He said he and the Pension Committee had reviewed the document line by line in several meetings.

Council briefly discussed the plan and proposed changes. Council discussed the retirement benefits for Council, and Mr. Warner explained the benefits to Council. In response to a question, Mr. Warner stated the cost for the changes would probably be less than \$40,000 annually.

Mr. LeDuc stated a resolution would be placed on the next agenda for Council's consideration to adopt the revised plan.

TOOLE HILL

Northside Development

Redevelopment Plan

Morgan Street

Edgefield Avenue

Mr. LeDuc stated the city's consultants had been working on the Toole Hill and Chesterfield Street areas, and John Burgess and Christian Sottile are present at tonight's

meeting to discuss the new Toole Hill Redevelopment Plan. They discussed this plan with City Council in May and had several meetings with citizens and other groups to formulate the plan to be presented tonight. This includes several exciting aspects including new streetscape designs, elimination of the entrance to the School District property, along with the addition of a new entrance off of Toole Street; the narrowing of Morgan Street, and phasing of the overall renewal for the entire Toole Hill area. One remaining question that Council will need to decide is whether or not Morgan Street should include parking as part of its final design. As Council is aware, we are moving forward with the purchase of property in that area, and Engineering has started the design of the future streetscape needed within those neighborhoods. Upon City Council's acceptance of this plan, staff will move forward with the new lot layout and site plan for the neighborhood, along with the design for five or six new bungalow style homes for this neighborhood. We hope to begin home construction sometime early next year.

Mr. LeDuc stated the staff and the consultants had met with the citizens and the neighborhood association concerning this plan, and they are very excited about it. The city's two partners, Second Baptist Church and Aiken Housing Authority, have reviewed the plans. He said it is now presented for Council's review. He pointed out as the consultants review the plan, he would like for Council to consider how they want Morgan Street from Edgefield to Hampton to look, and whether they would like for the street to be just a two lane thoroughfare or if they would like for it to be two lanes with parking allowed on one side of the street. He said some Highway permits have been requested for some of the infrastructure on Edgefield Avenue, Dillon, Toole, McCormick. He said they were waiting for Morgan Street until Council gave some direction. He said at the last meeting Council approved purchase of 15 properties, and purchase of 6 properties is on the agenda for this meeting. This will mean that the city has under contract for purchase about 80% of the property in the two block area.

Council discussed the width of Morgan Street and what the consultants recommend as a safe two lane road. Mr. Burgess stated a two lane road should be 20 to 24 feet in width. He said normally 27 or 28 feet would be wide enough to have two travel lanes and parallel parking on one side.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out the city typically has 30 foot wide streets with parking, which is face to face on the curbing. Council then discussed the width of other streets in the city with parking, such as Park Avenue. Mr. LeDuc stated if no parking is allowed on the street there would be no place for guests to park. He said if the street is narrowed there would be a wider space between the curb and the sidewalk which would give more green space. He said parking along the street slows down traffic.

Mr. John Burgess stated they were proposing to narrow the road and have parallel parking. He said this would allow sidewalks and a planting strip. He said he thought their drawings show a green strip of 6 feet, a 5 foot sidewalk and 2 travel lanes and parallel parking on one side.

Councilwoman Clyburn pointed out that Morgan Street carries a lot of traffic from Hampton to Richland. She felt there should be a sidewalk even if there is no parking along Morgan Street.

Mr. Burgess and Mr. Christian Sottile presented a slide presentation of the Toole Hill Redevelopment Plan. He reviewed the mission as providing safe and affordable housing for the community, identifying areas of new development and new development potential, balancing new development with historic patterns, selecting housing infield types that are compatible with the neighborhood, and improving streetscape, sidewalks and lighting in the area. He presented a slide of the master plan showing the area to be focused as Morgan Street and Edgefield, which also includes the other side of the street facing these blocks. He said they included half of each of the adjacent blocks in their study. He said they started their study with city staff and residents walking the neighborhood. The overall plan shows future phasing in the area. He said they agreed on the corner of Edgefield and Morgan as a first point of contact. He said the thought on the second phase was to continue along Morgan up to Hampton Avenue to continue the streetscape improvements on Hampton and also create a more unified streetscape. The

third phase would be to fill in the larger sites. He said the thought was to concentrate on the most visible parts of the neighborhood first to really improve the neighborhood's public image, which would help spur the market.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out the point was discussed earlier in the year concerning going ahead and doing the two block area. Once that was finished, as far as acquiring the property and getting the right of way and other improvements completed, the city would then go to Edgewood as the next phase. He said they would then go back to the Toole Hill area and expand. He said they are looking at the next expansion beyond the two block area, which is going up Morgan Street to Hampton Avenue.

Mr. Sottile pointed out that the proposed area is within a ten minute walking radius of Eustis Park. He said they looked at the green space at Eustis Park and the area. He said they are recommending additional sidewalks in the area, decorative lights and streetscape. He said the entrance to the School District at the corner of Edgefield and Morgan was an opportunity to close the corner, move the parking and entrance to the property and create a landscaped area and a sign for the neighborhood.

Mr. LeDuc stated the School District will probably vacate their property in two to five years. He said it is hoped that the entrance to this property could be made at Edgefield and Toole Street.

Mr. Sottile then reviewed Morgan Street and the width of the street. He said presently there are two travel lanes wider than interstate lanes. He said there is a sidewalk on each side of the street. He said an alternative is to come in from the sidewalk and have a planting strip with street trees and then have two travel lanes about 12 feet wide and have a planting strip and sidewalk on the other side of the street. He said the effect of this is that the travel lanes are appropriate for the movement of traffic. He said the street trees provide not only shade, but protection to pedestrians since there is an area between the sidewalk and the street. Another alternative is to have two travel lanes and one row of on-street parking, a planting strip and with the sidewalks closer to the property line.

Councilwoman Vaughters asked if there could be parking on both sides of the street. She said she was concerned that the lots will be small and there will only be space for one car to park in a driveway. She was concerned that cars would park on the front yard. She said parking across the street in front of a neighbor's house would not be convenient. She said she would rather have a wider road and room for parking cars on the street so the residents would not park in the front yard.

Mr. Sottile stated they recommend parking in the side and rear of the yard, and there should be room for a minimum of two parking spaces for each lot. It was pointed out that their street plan recommends two travel lanes, parking on one side of the street and sidewalks and a planting strip on each side. He said the planting strip is an important part of how the sidewalk works and how the street looks.

Mr. LeDuc stated that there could actually be parking on both sides of the street and still maintain the six foot planting strip, but the existing sidewalk on Morgan Street would have to be moved closer to the property line. He said the question is whether the city should use some of the existing infrastructure and fit everything around it or if the city should take everything out and make it like they would want the area to be. He said with the new water line and sewer line improvements and new driveways, some of the current sidewalk would have to be removed. He said if Council feels parking is needed on both sides, then they should consider removing the present sidewalk and redoing the area.

Councilman Cuning pointed out that in most residential areas there is not on-street parking on both sides of the street. He said there did need to be at least two off-street parking spaces for each lot. He said if there is on-street parking, it means the owner of the house cannot control who parks in front of his house because it is a city street. He said he did not feel that parking on both sides would be residential design.

Council continued to discuss the condition of the present sidewalk, the width of the road, off-street parking and whether there should be on-street parking on one side of the street or both.

Councilwoman Price and Clyburn expressed being in favor of on-street parking on both sides of the street.

Mr. LeDuc stated from the discussion of Council it seemed that Council would like to have on-street parking on Morgan Street at least on one side. Councilwoman Price stated this area is in her district and she would like to request that parking be on both sides of Morgan Street.

Mr. Sottile then continued his presentation showing proposed buildings, infield lots, streetscaping, architectural details such as front porches, etc. He said they recommend between one and one-half story buildings for the area. He said they would be recommending removal of all the chain link fencing in the area.

Mr. LeDuc stated at first it seemed that only about 20 homes could be built because of finances. However, because there has been interest from three developers who would like to put up their money to build homes, that all of the homes might be able to be built in the first phase.

Mayor Cavanaugh thanked Mr. Burgess and Mr. Sottile for the presentation. He said he felt Council had expressed the feeling that they would like to have parking on both sides of the street.

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Hall, Miles

Giobbe, Ed

Planning Commission

Councilman Smith stated Miles Hall had informed him that he is resigning from the Planning Commission. He said he was recommending that Edward Giobbe be appointed to replace Mr. Hall. He asked that this appointment be on the next agenda for action.

Aiken City Council Minutes

REGULAR MEETING

September 22, 2003

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

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Ed Evans, Larry Morris, Anita Lilly, Pete Frommer, Sara Ridout, Philip Lord of the Aiken Standard, Josh Gelinis of the Augusta Chronicle and about 30 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 7:35 P.M. Mayor Cavanaugh led in prayer, which was followed by the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Cavanaugh stated Council needed to approve the agenda. Councilwoman Price moved, seconded by Councilman Smith and unanimously approved, that the agenda be approved as presented.

MINUTES

The minutes of the work session and regular meeting of September 8, 2003 were considered for approval. Councilman Sprawls moved that the minutes be approved. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Clyburn and unanimously approved.