



THE CITY OF AUGUSTA

WILLIAM R. BRIDGEO
CITY MANAGER

TO: Mayor and City Council
FROM: City Manager Bill Bridgeo
RE: Administrative Report
DATE: February 9, 2015

Meetings:

The Planning Board will meet on Tuesday, February 10th beginning at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers. An agenda is included in council packets.

There will be a City Council Informational Meeting on Thursday, February 12th beginning at 6:30 p.m. An agenda is included in council packets.

Other Items:

Enclosed you will find a draft of the 2015 Council Goals and Actions as prepared by Frank O'Hara with input from Mayor Rollins and me. Please review the document. We will schedule a follow-up discussion with Council for the second February informational meeting (likely beginning earlier than usual with something to eat to tide us over).

Also enclosed with this package is the executive summary and detailed program description for the proposed single stream recycling pilot program Council has endorsed (there is also a detailed 26 page formal proposal that was submitted to us and I am e-mailing that to you so that those interested in reviewing all the details may do so). Lissa Bitterman, Ecomaine's Business Development Manager, will be at the meeting to make a presentation and answer questions about the program.

You will notice an agenda item for Thursday related to the Edwards' Dam Scholarship. Back in the late 1990's, the City Council decided (as part of the dam removal process) to create a Cony High School scholarship and funded it with a one-time contribution of \$26,000. The intent was to use interest earnings on the principle to provide one or more annual scholarships to graduating Cony seniors. The order stipulated that the principle should not be used. A couple of years ago, we erroneously awarded a scholarship that caused the principle to drop to below that amount by about \$500.00. The balance in the fund is currently \$25,535. The question arises as to whether Council wishes to amend the original order to reduce the principle to \$25,000 and allow for a scholarship this year or wait until the principle grows back and there are interest earnings available (which in the current rate environment could be a while). Councilor Paradis has served on the three member selection committee (along with the Cony Principal and a School Board member) and can add his perspective Thursday night.

Each year, the Maine Service Center Coalition by-laws require the legislative body of each of its member communities to designate a representative to the organization and an alternate. Since its creation ten years or so ago, I have served as the City's representative (and for most of that time as an officer on the board) and Ralph St. Pierre has been the alternate. I would recommend that we be reappointed (and an agenda item to that effect is on Thursday's agenda).
(Please turn page over→)

As you know from the various e-mails I have been forwarding to you, we continue to struggle to cope with the extraordinary winter weather. I guess the good news is that we are not Boston. None the less, our challenges persist. According to Lesley Jones we have devoted over 190 operator hours (in two vehicles) to sidewalk snow removal and will need another 60 or so to get caught up (if the snow abates). We are still employing outside contractors to assist in snow removal. Salt and sand purchases are well over the budgeted amount as are our overtime costs. I will likely be presenting a recommendation for a formal budget adjustment once I have a better handle on our status and what we will likely need to finish the year.

C: Department and Bureau Directors
Augusta Legislative Delegation

2015 AUGUSTA CITY COUNCIL GOALS AND ACTIONS
(draft of February 6, 2015)

GOAL A: PROMOTE BUSINESS INVESTMENT

"Augusta welcomes all shapes and sizes of economic development. We pride ourselves on an open and fair process for promoting growth and leadership. We also work hard to ensure that new developments reflect the unique characteristics of Augusta's neighborhoods..."

Augusta Comprehensive Plan, 2007, page 24.

At long last, Central Maine is emerging from the long recession. Unemployment is down. Businesses are hiring. Retail sales are up. This is the point in the business cycle when the greatest opportunity exists for Augusta to achieve economic, job, and income growth.

Augusta has an excellent inventory of quality office space for rent, both in town and near the interstate. The city has a major riverfront parcel next to downtown at Kennebec Locke which is ready to go. The city has commercially zoned land near the I-95 exit at Riggs Brook Village. Augusta City Government has been designated by the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development as "business-friendly," and City staff have a good reputation among area businesses for being responsive and helpful. This is a year for a breakthrough project.

2015 objective: Achieve one development breakthrough project, one that creates jobs, new property tax revenues, and otherwise enhances the quality of life for residents.

This objective will be supported by three key activities in 2015.

1. On the model of the Eastside Planning Committee, the Mayor shall appoint a new Augusta Economic and Workforce Development Committee. The Committee shall be chaired by Councilor Darek Grant, and will include members with business acumen and with appreciation for quality of life issues. The Committee shall be staffed by and provide support to the City Department of Development Services. The Committee will work to:
 - a) Insure the availability of a skilled workforce, in partnership with the Augusta City Schools, the University of Maine at Augusta, the Capital Area Technical Center, Kaplan University, and the State of Maine Career Center;
 - b) Promote sites that are ready to go and serviced by utilities, such as Kennebec Locke; and
 - c) Make progress on achieving long term development projects in the City, such as Riggs Brook Village and the Arsenal.
2. Hold a marketing forum to generate ideas about how to coordinate and enhance the City's marketing and branding efforts; and
3. Hold a workshop for the purpose of updating the implementation program on the 2007 Comprehensive Plan (eliminating actions that have been accomplished or are no longer

relevant, adding actions that address new opportunities, rescheduling remaining actions);

GOAL B: ENHANCE THE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF THE CITY

"Augusta's image is communicated directly to visitors and residents by the look and feel of the City's physical development. If the City of Augusta's brand is Capitol, river, and history (as is currently contained in the City's logo), then the physical features of the City from its gateways to its roadways, must reinforce the qualities of dignity, natural beauty, and historic architecture."

Augusta Comprehensive Plan, 2007, page 29.



Up to 40,000 people travel in and through Augusta every day, residents, workers, and tourists. The appearance that Augusta presents is a major influence on whether these people will give Augusta a second look as a possible home or business location.

2015 Objective: To reduce empty commercial storefronts downtown by 20%.

During the recent recession, some buildings were abandoned; some property owners cut back on maintenance; and even some public infrastructure suffered from neglect.

2015 is a good year to improve the appearance of the City. This involves:

1. In upcoming Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) projects located in city gateways, when financially feasible, enhance landscaping and lighting above MDOT basic standards, using City resources;
2. Pass the historic district ordinance that will open up possibilities for developers to gain tax credits from building rehabilitation;
3. Explore the financial feasibility of establishing a multi-year process of inspecting all rental residential units in the city for health and safety code violations;
4. Develop the Mill Park brick building, consistent with the Capital Riverfront Improvement District (CRID) Master Plan, to include provision for a cultural heritage center;
5. Carry out a beautification project in each of the four wards every year; for each project, the appropriate ward councilor will team with one at-large councilor to identify the project, recruit volunteers, and carry it out;
6. In the upcoming budget process, consider cost options to reinstitute some form of clean-up day, where residents have the opportunity to dispose of junk that has accumulated in the past year; and
7. Explore ways to improve local codes, including the consideration of creating a "vacant buildings" code to specifically address the issue of poorly maintained commercial buildings in the downtown, and the consideration of ways to tighten the home occupations ordinance.

GOAL C: ADDRESS SOCIAL ISSUES

"As a regional service center, Augusta will always have a population of people with lower incomes and/or special needs."

Augusta Comprehensive Plan, 2007, page 17.

The recession is over, but still 18% of Augusta residents live below the poverty line. Around half of the children in Augusta schools receive free or reduced price lunches, an indication that poverty rates are even higher for young people. The rate of "cognitive disability" in Augusta for 18-34 year olds (17%) is three times the rate of the rest of Maine. All of these are populations that experience hunger and homelessness, and are often involved in the criminal justice system.

As this is going on, state government is proposing major changes to General Assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programs, all of which will reduce resources available to address these issues.

Other concerns include a continuing drug problem in the city, lack of pay increases for working people, and a continuing need for decent affordable housing.

2015 Outcome: A measurable increase in drug enforcement activity and a measurable reduction in heroin-related overdoses in the city.

Actions for 2015 include:

1. Support a focused public safety strategy aimed at the elimination of heroin use in Augusta;
2. Upon the receipt of policy information from City staff, the Mayor and Council will deliberate upon the advisability and potential impact of a local minimum wage ordinance;
3. Ask the Joint Conference Committee of the Augusta School Board and Augusta City Council to study the issue of childhood hunger, define the scope of the problem, and recommend steps towards its alleviation; and
4. Continue to work with the Augusta Housing Authority to assure the development of more affordable housing in Augusta.

GOAL D: CONTINUE TO BUILD A GREEN AUGUSTA

"... Augusta is perfectly positioned to be a "green city" that sets standards for action on preserving open space and wildlife habitats, reducing energy usage, and promoting environmentally sustainable development and lifestyles while continuing to embrace residential and economic growth."

Augusta Comprehensive Plan, 2007, page 21.

Augusta is already a national leader in environmental practices. It has the first Platinum LEED-certified grocery store in the nation, the Hannaford's at Cony Circle. It is the first city in the nation to have a dam removed strictly for ecological reasons.

This year three important natural resource projects are moving forward. The first is the completion of negotiations with the Kennebec Land Trust to accept a donation of 164 acres of unspoiled land behind the Capitol Building called Howard Hill. The second is the connection of the Kennebec Rail Trail with the waterfront park on the west side of the River. The third is an adoption of a forest management plan for the approximately 450 acres of open space the City already owns.

2015 Objective: To increase recycled material recovery rates in Augusta.

The City's green goals can be furthered by these additional actions:

1. Execute the 6-month pilot project for single source recycling, evaluate the impact on recycling rates and costs, and identify improvements for the future;
2. Conduct a Council workshop on the concept of "Complete Streets" – streets that accommodate all forms of transportation, from driving to walking to riding bicycles. In preparation for this event, city staff (or a summer intern) shall assess the physical conditions of sidewalks within the city, gaps in the network, and access issues (such as Memorial Park on the west side rotary);

GOAL F: COMMUNICATE WITH PARTNERS

"Augusta will look outside of itself for partners in state government, in neighboring communities and school districts, and in the private sector, to jointly invest in new technologies, share staffing, and consolidate services."

Augusta Comprehensive Plan, 2007, page 2.

The Governor is proposing a comprehensive tax reform that would eliminate revenue sharing, reduce state aid to county jail (the difference would be made up by the property tax), and reduce public school funding. At the same time, it would enable the City to impose partial property taxes on the larger nonprofit institutions located here. Other legislators are reintroducing legislation that would reduce Augusta's excise tax revenues.

It is impossible to tell at this time how it will all shake out. The situation presents major dangers. But it also presents opportunities. Legislators may be open this year to ideas that have been rejected in the past.

2015 Objective: To emerge from the legislative session with no net harm done to Augusta's fiscal position.

The situation requires close communication between city councilors and the legislative delegation, and between councilors and school board members.

1. Press the legislative delegation to reintroduce the idea of payment in lieu of taxes for state properties, on the same principle that is now being discussed for nonprofit properties;

2. Arrange Council-legislator meetings on a monthly or bimonthly basis, particularly in the spring, to discuss trends and strategic possibilities;
3. Conduct quarterly meetings of the Joint Conference Committee of City Council and the School Board, as well as enhancing the use of televised Council meetings to highlight the achievements of students;
4. Review and restructure existing Council committees to insure the best use of Council members' time; and
5. Provide an opportunity for councilors to raise issues not on the formal agenda at meetings.

FURTHER IDEAS TO CONSIDER IN THE COMING YEAR

Beyond the larger goals that are addressed above, Council members identified smaller actions that the City should consider in their activities in the coming year. These include:

1. Consider expanding coverage of the existing property maintenance code to single family owners;
2. Implement an "adopt a garden" program key city parks, as was done in the past;
3. Hold a forum and invite speakers to discuss the likelihood of passenger train service to Augusta;
4. Conduct a Council informational workshop on the pesticides notification process;
5. Examine the feasibility of funding more staff for fire, police, and code enforcement, in order to improve service delivery;
6. Accelerate the implementation of LED lighting in the city.
7. Consider the purchase of garbage trucks that load with automatic arms as a way to enable fewer people to staff each truck;
8. Provide a monthly on-line newsletter for the public;