

Council Retreat 5-16-24

Members in attendance: Tierney, Kilian, Gisselman, Watson, Larson, Rasmussen, Neal, Lukens, Mayor Diny, Attorney Jacobson

Absent Excused: Henke, McElhaney, Martens

Call to order 5:00 by Rasmussen

Dinner & Legal Reminders: Attorney Jacobson presented about open meetings, open records, quorums and records requests and retention. Discussion followed of what constitutes a record, a meeting and a quorum. Additional resources will be sent to members' emails for their independent review. Rasmussen will request League handbooks for three members who need them via the clerk.

Rasmussen handed out a list of which department handles which issues so alders have a resource for where to begin when contacted by residents about certain things that come up often.

Rasmussen referenced 2022-2027 strategic plan book. Jean in the Mayor's office will be emailing everyone a copy in pdf format to review so we keep it in mind as we do our policy and budget work.

Planning and Issues Discussion: Members took turns brainstorming a list of issues they have noted that their neighborhoods are concerned about. Items were added to the list on behalf of Henke & McElhaney who emailed their items for the list to Rasmussen ahead of the meeting. Discussion was had on each item from a local perspective. Discussed residents' concerns about the issues surrounding costs, ability to pay, economic conditions and trends. Members talked about conversations they had with people during the campaign season and with neighborhood groups.

Gisselman exited meeting

Brainstorm list included: Road conditions, taxes/budgets, water rates/PILOT payment (how?), affordable housing, homelessness, spending/debt, keeping and attracting youth and young professionals, attracting and retaining talent, development/redevelopment, environmental remediation, nuisance properties/animals, getting progress on the mall site, adding public employee child care benefit as a recruiting tool.

Watson suggested creating video or infographics for the public to help explain assessment, water rate development, TID's, taxes and tax bills. Group agreed more simplified ways to help people understand complex issues would be helpful.

Lukens mentioned residents' interest in monthly water bills vs quarterly. Rasmussen shared info she got from Public Works Director and the Finance Director on that, indicating she was told until they have all customers changed over to one type of meter, it's not possible to have a way to easily read and bill all monthly. Progress has been slow and water dept is changing over meters as part of their workflow but they have to work it in with the rest of their work assignments. Rasmussen believes there may be as many as half of the meters left to go before this is done based on her recent discussion with staff. Customers can pay in between bills which equates to monthly, but we have not good way yet to create a monthly statement for people.

Watson exited meeting

Members marked on flip charts which three items they wanted to work on most from the brainstorm list. Items that scored highest are: 1. Affordable housing 2. Homelessness 3. Development/Redevelopment Growth

Group recognized that we have to keep an eye on all these issues as the opportunity arises, but we'd like to prioritize the top three in our committee and group work this term.

Discussion was had about 2025 budget. Group agreed that with the revaluation, that to get mil rate to an acceptable place, the finance workshops in October will be key. This will be a year where we will have to reel in requests for added staff beyond the positions we already have, reel in new capital spending that is not at critical need and reel in supplemental spending requests for new spending where need is not critical. CIP committee and finance committee will have to make some tough decisions in ranking and selecting what to fund and take a conservative approach to what projects we move forward given the possible impact of the revaluation on taxpayers.

Discussion was had about the water rates and PILOT. Rasmussen stated Finance committee last term committed to studying the PILOT and the impact of phased reduction of the amount paid by the utility. Public Works Director and Finance Director indicated that the needed information for the beginning of that analysis should be available in August. Rasmussen will circle back to them and Finance Chair Martens to verify they will place that discussion on the agenda for August.

Discussion was had about Affordable housing, how those are funded and tax credit they need to be able to do this work, "missing middle" concept and shortage of housing at all levels.

Mayor Diny mentioned regressive nature of the revaluation tax burden and it's impact on lower income taxpayers. Also mentioned PILOT capturing revenue from non taxpayers that use services but pay no taxes toward any of it. There are more water customers than property taxpayers. There is some concern that reduction in PILOT gives a pass to tax exempt entities and further places burden on property taxpayers where there is a hole in the general fund budget that the PILOT was funding. Yet to be seen if there are enough cuts to offset that burden, but doing it too fast or too soon, could negatively impact our efforts to cut mil rate also during a tough budget year. Diny feels we may need to get that mil rate to about \$8.50 from \$10.89 now to make a dent people can tolerate. Unclear until late October where we will fall on that, as the budget has many moving parts that don't line up til manufacturing valuation and HR benefit costs are known. Diny also mentioned we cannot control the actions of the schools, county or NTC, in trying to prevent increases, we can only control our own spending. Tierney mentioned she and her husband knocked on 1200 doors during the campaign, and spending was a concern of many she spoke to.

Discussion was had about attracting young professionals, workforce and talent. Neal discussed the need to expand the tax base to thin out the tax burden for residents. Advised people need a reason to move here. What is in Wausau for me and my family? That question will be on their minds when they decide where to live and work, maybe even more so than the water and road concerns many have here now.

Larson pointed out the city has made real strides on roads and has recently purchased equipment and added more ARPA funding recently to make headway on roads going forward.

Mayor Diny pointed out he is on a committee working to save UWSP at Wausau. Group agreed that was a huge asset to the community if we can collaborate to keep it here, although

enrollment is declining at a rate that is making that difficult. Losing that offering is one more challenge in attracting or retaining youth. Tierney and Neal talked about their kids not returning to live and work in Wausau and that it is an example of what is happening.

Reviewed as a group the top three items selected as the main issues we want to try to target. Rasmussen advised we don't have to solve entirely, but we should be able to say next summer that we have moved the needle or made progress on some of those items as we go if our work is successful.

Discussed upcoming committee of the whole about homelessness. Rasmussen stated she has met with Diny and they have discussed possibly splitting it to two meetings vs one 5 hour meeting given the amount of info requested. One to take stock of the current local work in progress and state of things now, so we can get a good read on what is happening now. Second, to identify the path forward and a strategy for what happens next for progress, so we can get a plan together for some action steps.

Discussed housing projects happening currently and impact of the affordable projects in the works and the impact they will bring. Group agreed they can't come soon enough. Need is only getting worse. Lukens mentioned housing study results about the number of units at all levels that are needed in the next year and how under built we are now even though it seems we have so many market rate units going up. Diny discussed impact of taxes on rent. Mentioned we must control taxes where we can or rent will only increase and impact will be worse on those who can least afford it.

Rasmussen indicated she would summarize the discussion from tonight and share it with the members, including those who could not be with us.

Meeting adjourned at 7:40pm