

Roll Call

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Mayor Bobby J. Hopewell
Vice Mayor Erin Knott
David Anderson
Don Cooney
Eric Cunningham
Shannon Sykes

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Jack Urban*

Also present were City Manager Jim Ritsema, City Attorney Clyde Robinson, and City Clerk Scott Borling.

Commissioner
Excused

Commissioner Cunningham, seconded by Commissioner Anderson, moved to excuse the absence of Commissioner Urban. With a roll call vote, the motion passed.

Communications

City Manager Ritsema announced "Amnesty Day," would take place on Friday, September 14, 2018.

*Commissioner Urban arrived at 6:03 p.m.

Presentation and
Discussion on the
FY2019 Budget

City Manager Ritsema provided introductory remarks and reviewed the agenda and meeting outcomes. Jennifer Clark reviewed 5-year fiscal projections and the 2019 budget process. Data Manager Karin Conley reviewed the City's data initiative, including current the project status and future timelines. Community Planning and Development Director Rebekah Kik reviewed the 5-year Strategic Goal Maps and the one-year Strategic Goal Projects slated for 2019. Assistant City Manager Laura Lam provided a status update for in-progress Foundation for Excellence (FFE) projects and reviewed in detail the proposed FY2019 FFE budget. Deputy Management Services Director Melissa Fuller discussed the FY2019 budget calendar. A copy of the slides from the PowerPoint presentation was filed with the papers for this meeting.

In response to a question from Commissioner Urban, Ms. Clark stated the OpenGov product was a subscription service, and the annual subscription fee included all updates. Ms. Clark indicated budget preparers and the City Commission would receive training from OpenGov.

In response to a question from Commissioner Cunningham, Ms. Conley explained one goal of the Data Initiative was to make the City's data available to the public. Ms. Conley stated code enforcement data was an example of the type of data that could be made available to the public.

In response to a question from Commissioner Anderson, Ms. Conley stated the Data Initiative was very doable, and she noted the City had the advantage of being able to look to other communities that were doing this and who were further along in the process.

In response to a question from Mayor Hopewell, Community Planning and Development Director Rebekah Kik highlighted the current partnership with Kalamazoo Neighborhood Housing Services to fund needed roof repairs identified through code enforcement actions as an example of a home rehabilitation strategy.

In response to a question from Commissioner Cunningham, Director Kik stated Foundation for Excellence Coordinator Steve Brown and Compliance Specialist Venessa Collins-Smith were always looking for grant dollars that would support the City's strategic goals.

In response to a question from Vice Mayor Knott, Director Kik explained the development coordinator who was working on the Climate Action Plan had left the City's employ, and she was doing interviews to fill this position on September 18th. Director Kik reported City Planner Christina Anderson was working with Paul Manstrom, Chair of the Environmental Concerns Committee, to hold some community listening sessions on the plan, and summer of 2019 was the target for having the plan fully approved.

In response to questions and comments from Commissioner Cooney and Mayor Hopewell, Assistant City Manager Laura Lam stated construction of a physical structure was being planned for Rockwell Park for 2019, in addition to the current Rockwell Park improvement plans. Assistant City Manager Lam clarified the structure in Rockwell Park would not be a youth center.

Commissioner Urban asked whether funds could be earmarked to study the potential use of housing land trusts, where the City or a non-profit organization would own the land and people would own the structures on the land.

In response to Commissioner Urban, Assistant City Manager Lam reported City staff had done some research on community land trusts and were tracking an example of one in Burlington, Vermont. Assistant City Manager Lam stated there were some exciting benefits associated with community land trusts but they seemed to work really well in hot real estate markets, but not so well in smaller mid-western markets with a lot of legacy housing. Assistant City Manager Lam stated a community land trust might work in Kalamazoo, but the question was what other tools were out there if a land trust would not work. Assistant City Manager Lam stated there was a resource question regarding research and a resource question regarding supporting the program.

Commissioner Urban observed that if the City or a non-profit organization could not make a land trust work, it would never work with the private sector, where there were high expectations for profits and return on investment. Commissioner Urban questioned what the City could do to create a real estate market where a community land trust could succeed. Commissioner Urban expressed frustration with the lack of new ideas around affordable housing and remarked on the need for the City to be more creative. Commissioner Urban requested that the strategic goal maps reflect a commitment to explore ideas around affordable housing.

Presentation and
Discussion on the
FY2019 Budget
(cont'd)

Presentation and Discussion on the FY2019 Budget (cont'd)

Assistant City Manager Lam noted the City had hired a consultant under the Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo Plan to look at best practices around eliminating poverty, which included affordable housing.

Commissioner Cunningham expressed support for a youth center in the Eastside Neighborhood and a structure in Rockwell Park to support the SuperRec program. Commissioner Cunningham stated he had concerns about the plan for Rockwell Park that only included half-court basketball courts and that located the courts in an area where kids would need to cross the road that bisected the park in order to get to the courts. Commissioner Cunningham encouraged the City to engage young people with programs like midnight basketball to keep them off the streets.

Citizen Comments

Next, when an opportunity was given for general citizen comments the following people addressed the City Commission:

The following people asked the City Commission to publicly address the demands of the people staying in Bronson Park:

Carl Wiseman, City resident

Art Morlock, City resident

Heather Saddler, City resident

Faith Vlietstra, City resident

Jessica Decker, City resident

Zachary Lassiter, City resident

Jake Andrews, City resident and Chair of the Kalamazoo County Democratic Party

Frank Murray, non-resident, thanked Mayor Hopewell and Commissioners for their service. Mr. Murray suggested the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission as a temporary housing solution for homeless people.

Mia Henry, City resident, stated she was a member of the Foundation for Excellence (FFE) Board of Directors, and she requested that the FFE Board have more input into the establishment of the City's budget priorities. Ms. Henry stated the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission was not welcoming to everyone and expressed solidarity with the people camping in Bronson Park.

City Commissioner Comments

Finally, an opportunity was given for miscellaneous comments of City Commissioners.

Commissioner Sykes reported she was living in Bronson Park with Occupy Kalamazoo and stated she was waiting for the City to address the demands of the homeless people. Commissioner Sykes invited Mr. Murray to visit the Bronson Park encampment and learn more about the realities of the Gospel Mission.

Commissioner Cooney remarked on the life and recent death of the City's Forestry Supervisor Todd Pryor.

Commissioner Urban stated it was easy for the City Commission to hide behind the actions of the City Manager, and he asked that the agenda for the next City Commission meeting include an opportunity for the City Commission to take a formal position on the City Manager's actions regarding the homeless situation in Bronson Park.

City Commissioner
Comments (cont'd)

Commissioner Cunningham, seconded by Commissioner Sykes, moved that the City Commission discuss the list of demands from the encampment.

Motion to Discuss
the Demands of
the Homeless
Encampment in
Bronson Park

Prior to a vote on the motion, Commissioner Cunningham asked that the list of demands be made available to the City Commission to enable the discussion.

The meeting was recessed at 7:24 p.m. so that copies of the demands could be made available to Commissioners.

Recess

The meeting resumed at 7:31 p.m.

With a roll call vote the motion to discuss the demands from the encampment passed 6-1.

AYES, Commissioners: Anderson, Cooney, Cunningham, Sykes,
Urban, Mayor Hopewell

NAYS, Commissioners: Vice Mayor Knott

Commissioner Cunningham read the demands into the record:

Bronson Park Freedom Encampment

These are our demands:

1. The Kalamazoo City Commission to have an open, public discussion regarding the demands laid out by the #OccupyKalamazoo-sponsored Bronson Park Freedom Encampment.
2. An immediate and thorough investigation of the alleged abuses occurring on site at the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission.
3. Immediate access to mental/emotional and physical health supports for residents of the encampment.
4. A structurally sound, vacant building (or a few vacant homes in close proximity to each other) that BPFE members can coordinate volunteer contractor services for, in order to get the property up to code in time to move in before snow falls.
5. The City of Kalamazoo to utilize the expertise of our members, and national best practices, to develop a long-term "Housing First" policy and program that better addresses the issue of homelessness in the future.

Discussion of the
Demands of the
Homeless
Encampment in
Bronson Park

Commissioner Urban moved that the City Commission request a report from the City Manager on the status of the items and his recommendations for the City Commission to endorse or reject. The motion failed for lack of a second.

Request for a
Report from the
City Manager
(Motion Failed)

Discussion of the
Demands of the
Homeless
Encampment in
Bronson Park
(cont'd)

Mayor Hopewell suggested the City Manager respond to the demands or let the Commission know he was not prepared to respond.

City Manager Ritsema stated he had received the updated list of demands that afternoon, and he reported a work group of service providers had met the previous week. City Manager Ritsema stated the work group had developed a proposal for meeting the demands, but that proposal and a proposal for an alternate location for the encampment were rejected. City Manager Ritsema provided the following response to the demands:

Demand 1 – the current discussion might be addressing this demand.

Demand 2 – the City would need to look into the idea of investigating the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission, as it was not clear whether the Mission received any public support. City Manager Ritsema noted the City was able to investigate criminal acts through the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety (KDPS), but it wasn't clear whether the City had the ability to investigate a private entity beyond alleged criminal acts. City Manager Ritsema stated people needed to report criminal acts to KDPS.

Demand 3 – the area of mental/emotional/physical health supports was tricky, as there were already systems in place to address these needs. City Manager Ritsema stated the question was whether those systems were adequate. City Manager Ritsema reported the work group had started to identify service gaps with the existing systems, but there was still work to do in this area.

Demand 4 – no structurally sound, City-owned properties immediately came to mind that would meet this demand. City Manager Ritsema noted there could be buildings owned by private parties that would work, but the private property owner would need to be willing to work towards meeting this demand. City Manager Ritsema stated the City could play the role of facilitator with a private party.

Demand 5 – a "Housing First" strategy was a great long-term goal and long-term strategy for the work group to address. City Manager Ritsema noted the City was committed to looking at long-term solutions to homelessness, but the work needed to be done with the work group because the City did not have the capacity on its own to provide direct services to people.

Commissioner Sykes agreed that the current discussion was addressing the first demand, and she noted the updated demands had been raised in the work group meetings, so they were not new. Commissioner Sykes expressed appreciation to City Manager Ritsema for his work on this issue but stated the lack of a formal response to the demands was frustrating. Commissioner Sykes observed the priority for the City had been to first move the encampment and then discuss the demands, but the encampment wanted to discuss the demands first and then move. Commissioner Sykes stated people had tried to report abuse at the Gospel Mission to Public Safety Officers (PSO's), but they had been ignored. Commissioner Sykes suggested the City send a PSO to take

reports about the Gospel Mission. Commissioner Sykes acknowledged that Demands 3 and 4 required partnerships, but the City's voice could make a difference with its community partners.

Vice Mayor Knott acknowledged the City had received the demands one week prior but stated she had not wanted to discuss them on September 4th because the work group had been formed to address them. Vice Mayor Knott indicated she had voted "no" on the motion to discuss the demands because she was not prepared to dive into the content. Vice Mayor Knott stated the problem of homelessness was a county and state problem too, and the City's job was to bring people together.

Commissioner Cunningham stated Demand 1 had been addressed. Regarding the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission Commissioner Cunningham stated it was not a problem for the Mission to have standards and rules. Commissioner Cunningham stated he had been hearing about cultural issues and issues with how people were being treated at the Mission, but he was not sure what the City could do about that. Commissioner Cunningham indicated access to mental health services was a huge financial lift, and he indicated it was a state and federal issue that was outside the City's capacity. Commissioner Cunningham stated the demand for a vacant building involved legal, financial, and capacity issues. Commissioner Cunningham stated the encampment had identified new community leaders who were able to join the dialogue about homelessness. Commissioner Cunningham stated his expectation of the City Manager was open communication throughout this process.

Commissioner Urban requested clarification on whether the abuses at the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission were criminal or ethical. Commissioner Urban stated the City could act on criminal abuses, but it seemed that many complaints involved how people were treated. Commissioner Urban stated homeless people were approachable and part of the community.

Commissioner Cooney stated the encampment had done the community a service by making the issue of homelessness a priority, and he stated it was time for the community to come together and discuss the issue. Commissioner Cooney expressed support for a Housing First policy but noted homelessness was a problem for the federal, state, and county government and not just the City.

Commissioner Anderson thanked City Manager Ritsema for his sincere efforts and ethical principles as he worked with the encampment group to try to take responsibility for areas where the City was responsible. Commissioner Anderson observed that no city had solved the problem of homelessness, and Kalamazoo would have a very difficult time trying to solve the problem by itself. Commissioner Anderson stated the City was doing the best it could to address homelessness locally with a collaborative approach. Commissioner Anderson expressed interest in finding a specific, immediate, practical task the City could do to address the situation.

Commissioner Sykes stated some of the abuses at the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission were criminal, and she suggested the City send officers

Discussion of the
Demands of the
Homeless
Encampment in
Bronson Park
(cont'd)

Discussion of the
Demands of the
Homeless
Encampment in
Bronson Park
(cont'd)

to take reports from people and start investigations. Commissioner Sykes expressed appreciation for Commissioners' support but stated it would be helpful for the City Commission to formally support the work of the City Manager to show people he had the support of the Commission.

Commissioner Sykes, seconded by Commissioner Urban, moved that the City Commission support the City Manager in moving through the demands as listed, understanding that he will need to come back to the City Commission for direction and ideas.

Discussion took place regarding the exact meaning of the motion and what the City Manager was being asked to do.

Commissioners Anderson, Cooney, and Mayor Hopewell expressed opposition to the idea of the City Manager investigating the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission in response to Demand 2.

City Manager Ritsema reported that Pastor Brown of the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission wanted to address the issues raised by the encampment representatives, as they were new to him. City Manager Ritsema offered that the City could look at the appropriate entity to investigate the Mission.

Discussion continued on the Demand 2 regarding the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission and whether the City Manager should address that demand.

In response to a question from Commissioner Cunningham, Commissioner Sykes stated she wanted the City Commission to express support for the City Manager as he worked through Demands 2-5.

In response to a question from Commissioner Cunningham Mayor Hopewell asked the City Clerk to read the motion on the floor.

City Clerk Borling read the motion.

Commissioner Sykes expressed a willingness to amend her motion to state that the City Commission supports and directs the City Manager to move through items 2-5 in collaboration with the folks from the encampment and the work group, doing the business of the City as it pertains to City policy without going overboard to specifically single out one agency but simply to understand where the City's responsibility lies; and for the City Manager to let the City Commission know if there is a roadblock where he cannot move through an item.

Discussion continued on the nature of the motion relative to investigating the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission.

City Manager Ritsema requested very clear direction on the demands and asked about the timing for completion. City Manager Ritsema noted the City had made a commitment to meet weekly with the work group.

City Attorney Robinson suggested the current motion be withdrawn and a new motion be made: "In response to the demands presented by the Bronson Park Freedom Encampment the City Commission affirms that the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety will investigate alleged

criminal acts against the homeless; and that the City Manager is directed to work through demands 3-5 with the workgroup and report back to the Commission periodically."

Commissioner Sykes withdrew her motion, and Commissioner Urban withdrew his second of the motion.

Commissioner Sykes, seconded by Commissioner Urban, moved that in response to the demands presented by the Bronson Park Freedom Encampment the City Commission affirms that the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety will investigate alleged criminal acts against the homeless; and that the City Manager is directed to work through demands 3-5 with the workgroup and report back to the Commission periodically.

With a roll call vote this motion passed unanimously.

AYES, Commissioners: Anderson, Cooney, Cunningham, Sykes,
Urban, Vice Mayor Knott, Mayor Hopewell

NAYS, Commissioners: None

Vice Mayor Knott stated it had been a good night with good conversation resulting in a motion with clear, transparent language for the City Manager. Vice Mayor Knott indicated Commissioners needed to involve their counterparts in the rest of the county on this issue.

Mayor Hopewell thanked the leaders of Comstock and Portage for responding to the City Manager's calls regarding some of the demands presented on September 4th.

The meeting adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott A. Borling
City Clerk

For City Commission approval on October 15, 2018

Approved by: _____
Bobby J. Hopewell, Mayor
Dated: October 15, 2018

Discussion of the
Demands of the
Homeless
Encampment in
Bronson Park
(cont'd)

Response to the
Demands of the
Homeless
Encampment
Approved