

COMMITTEE ON LANDS & BUILDINGS

September 5, 2023 at 6:15 PM

Chairman Long called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Long, Fajardo, Levasseur, T. Sapienza, Trisciani

Messrs.: M. Gomez, Alderman Heath

1. Communication from Mark Gomez, Chief of Parks, Recreation & Cemetery, requesting an allocation of \$5,000 to the Public Works general fund for a reuse analysis of Hallsville School.

Alderman Trisciani moved to approve. Alderman Fajardo duly seconded the motion.

Alderman Levasseur stated in lieu of the fact that the school district has decided that they want to spend \$300 million on the first phase of a revamping and renewing and building of new elementary schools and middle schools and the fact that they are going to close down Wilson Street and put everyone in modulars, it makes sense to me that we should at least send a message to the school district that it behooves the school district, and the taxpayers of this city, to reconsider selling off or using Hallsville for anything but what it was originally built and intended for and that is a school. My understanding is that they did a study and the cost to renovate the property was \$8 million. If you renovated that building for \$8 million, you could then close Wilson for a year and renovate it to a much smaller tune. This \$300 million price tag in the first phase without knowing, first of all, where the elementary school is going to go and secondly where a high school is going to go just doesn't make any fiscal sense. It also doesn't make any strategic sense. I am perplexed by the fact that we always wanted smaller class sizes, especially at the elementary level. We have been told for years and decades that I have been on this Board or involved in these issues that smaller class sizes actually were the way to go, especially at the elementary school level. So, I really think repurposing or rethinking how we are going to use Hallsville should be put on hold until we figure out not only what the next phase is that the school district has in mind but also what this Board would actually consider for a price tag. If you look at \$300 million plus you look at possibly another \$200 million for the second phase, we are talking about half a billion dollars at probably a 5.5% bond rate which would be an enormous amount of money that the school district would have to pay back and with a tax cap, both boards would have to decide whether or not it is fiscally prudent. I would respectfully request that we hold off until we have a very in-depth conversation about those schools, the wards, and the amount of money. We have a new mayor coming in in January and I think it behooves us to hold off. That is my opinion. Thank you.

Chairman Long stated the \$8 million cost for Hallsville was for 20 apartment units and office space. I think it is a good idea to spend this \$5,000 to see what we can do. We are looking at a community center and we are looking at departments that could possibly move in there. I think the \$5,000 to get a cost for those items would be a good use of the money.

Alderman Levasseur stated respectfully my argument wasn't about making it an elderly center. My opinion is that it should remain as a school and be renovated as such. That is my opinion.

Alderman T. Sapienza stated I think it is important to allocate this money because we need space. When I drive by the corner of Bridge and Maple and I see the Ash Street School, I remember when it looked like Hallsville and now it is absolutely beautiful. We needed space then and we got rid of it and that story is a long one but this is a gem and it would be a shame if we don't keep it. I know there are some departments that are desperate for space. They do a great job with what they have but they could do a better job if they had more space and they are doing critical functions. The Office of Youth Services for example and others. We have to save this building.

Alderman Heath stated Hallsville School is really used quite extensively, the community center, but I also want to add at this point in time that the \$5,000 you are talking about this evening is absolutely essential to approve. There is a lot going on. The building needs some updates and I think this will give you the answers. One of the things that I think is really important that we look at is we really need some lighting around that building. Most of it is pretty well boarded up now. They have done a good job. The school has a lot of integrity and there are other agencies interested in using it. It is a great space and neighbors love having the school there. I would like it if we could pass this \$5,000 and see what it would cost and if we can come up with the funds because it is very, very valuable to us as an entity. Thank you.

Alderman Levasseur asked what is the \$5,000 going to be used for and what is it going to get us. Are we talking about some volunteer engineering company that is going to come in for the purpose of reuse? We are looking at \$150,000 to have a study on where to put bike lanes so how do you get away with only \$5,000 to figure out a reuse? Can you answer that for us please? I never heard of a study for \$5,000 but if it is a good company I want to hire them for a lot of other things.

Mark Gomez, Chief of Parks, Recreation & Cemetery, stated our Facilities Division at Public Works has done some extensive studies on the building. The most recent being in 2020 that looked at all of the building systems and the building envelope. We have a fairly good assessment at this point of what upgrades are needed to the systems, when those would be due, and the life cycle of the various elements of the building. What we don't have is an understanding of what the cost would be to customize the space for OYS and Parks & Recreation specifically. That is primarily what we are asking the architect to do in this case. We reached out to Fred Matuszewski who has quite a bit of experience working on local reuse projects in Manchester in historic buildings. I agree that the price he gave us is very good. I think it is small money to get an assessment done and I think whatever he produces is going to be helpful no matter which direction the Board ends up going in with the property.

Alderman Levasseur asked so the assessment you are doing is going to be to retain the building for Parks & Recreation and OYS? It is not an assessment of a special use for other things?

Mr. Gomez answered correct.

Chairman Long asked can we amend the motion to recommend that the \$5,000 come out of contingency.

Aldermen Trisciani and Fajardo agreed to amend the motion and second.

Chairman Long called for a vote. The motion carried with **Alderman Levasseur** being duly recorded in opposition.

There being no further business, on motion of **Alderman Fajardo**, duly seconded by **Alderman T. Sapienza** it was voted to adjourn.

A True Record. Attest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Normand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Clerk of Committee