

COMMITTEE ON LANDS & BUILDINGS

February 20, 2024 at 6:30 PM

Chairman Levasseur called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Levasseur, Vincent, Thomas, Long, Goonan

Messrs.: J. Belanger, J. Nazaka, K. Clarke, T. Clougherty, M. Gomez, Ald. O'Neil, Ald. Terrio

Chairman Levasseur advised that the first purpose of the meeting is organizational in nature, and requested the Clerk to provide a brief overview regarding typical issues addressed by the Committee.

Matthew Normand, City Clerk, stated this committee shall have jurisdiction over policy regarding city lands and all city buildings with the exception of lands and schoolhouses under the jurisdiction of the Board of School Committee and such other matters as may be referred by the Board of Mayor and Aldermen to this committee. The committee shall review all such referrals and where required, after due and careful consideration, shall report back to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen.

2. Communication from Tabletop Tycoon, Inc. requesting an amendment to their lease at 195 McGregor Street to allow arcade use, and authorization to apply for a special exception from the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Chairman Levasseur asked is there a city position on this.

City Clerk Normand answered I don't know offhand.

Alderman Long stated my understanding was that the city was looking to use this office space.

Chairman Levasseur responded that is why I want to talk to somebody from the city on this. I don't know who would be responsible. City Clerk, you are in charge of licensing so do you know?

City Clerk Normand stated Planning was involved in this a little bit and DPW and Josh Gagne from Facilities manages that property as well.

Jeff Belanger, Planning & Community Development Director, stated it is really up to the Board. This is a lease amendment and that is kind of in a number of different department's jurisdiction. The Solicitor weighs in on it and as Matt said Facilities weighs in on it. This is a tenant that the city has and off the top of my head I don't know how much the city is getting monthly from rent but it is an income source obviously. This person is looking to just change the use a little bit. They would need to go to the Zoning Board of Adjustment because a special exception is required to operate an arcade in this zone but that is separate and apart from what you are looking at tonight. This is just

a lease amendment so it is up to you. They are looking for authorization to amend the lease if you want to.

Alderman Long asked regarding the special exception from Zoning, how do you feel about that.

Mr. Belanger answered I don't take a policy position on those. That is for the Zoning Board of Adjustment to decide. That is their purview and is entirely up to them.

Alderman Long asked you don't see any negative impact from this.

Mr. Belanger replied no I do not see any negative impacts.

*On motion of **Alderman Vincent**, duly seconded by **Alderman Goonan**, it was voted to approve.*

3. Communication from Allen Aldenberg, Police Chief, requesting authorization to expand the capacity of the female locker room within the Manchester Police Department.

*On motion of **Alderman Long**, duly seconded by **Alderman Vincent**, it was voted to approve.*

4. Communication from Jodie Nazaka, Economic Development Director, requesting approval for a brownfield assessment (geophysical survey) of the Arms Lot (Tax Map 900, Lot 2) to be conducted by Credere Associates.

***Alderman Long** moved to approve. **Alderman Vincent** duly seconded the motion.*

Alderman Long stated I believe that there were some assessments done in Arms Lot when we had a proposal to put a building in there.

Jodie Nazaka, Economic Development Director, stated that did come up before I submitted this letter to the City Clerk. We did do some review and there were some conversations that some work may have happened when the Bedford Lot was being developed. I couldn't find any record of that so I actually reached out to the developer and he confirmed that he did not. He wanted to but did not end up moving forward with anything.

***Chairman Levasseur** called for a vote. *There being none opposed, the motion carried.**

5. Communication from Kristen Clarke, Traffic Engineer, requesting authority to negotiate and execute all legal transactions associated with the property and easement acquisitions or eminent domain takings required to complete the RAISE Manchester: Connecting Communities Project.

***Alderman Long** moved to approve. **Alderman Goonan** duly seconded the motion.*

Alderman Long stated could I get more information on the eminent domain portion of this. Is eminent domain just for private property?

Kristen Clarke, Traffic Engineer, answered we don't anticipate needing any eminent domain in the project but the Solicitor's Office recommended that wording be in there in the event that we do. We have to have all of our right-of-way approvals by the end of June so there wouldn't even be time to do eminent domain.

Chairman Levasseur called for a vote. *There being none opposed, the motion carried.*

6. Communication from Fred McNeill, Chief Engineer, requesting authority to negotiate and execute all legal transactions associated with the property and easement acquisitions or eminent domain takings required to complete the Cemetery Brook Drain Tunnel Project.

Alderman Long moved to approve. **Alderman Vincent** duly seconded the motion.

Alderman Long asked do you have information on eminent domain for this.

Timothy Clougherty, Public Works Director, responded I have the same answer.

Alderman Long asked are you anticipating any.

Mr. Clougherty answered we are not.

Chairman Levasseur called for a vote. *There being none opposed, the motion carried.*

7. Communication from Mark Gomez, Chief of Parks, Recreation & Cemetery, requesting the following:
 - Remove all the wooden posts and signs in the Gill/JFK area;
 - Install a large sign on the exterior of Gill Stadium, of a style in harmony with this historic facility, to include the names of all contributors and a way-finding map to the trees they sponsored; and
 - Make available to family members the existing name plate, should they so desire it.

Chairman Levasseur stated I didn't think this was going to be controversial but I am hearing it may be.

Mark Gomez, Chief of Parks, Recreation & Cemetery, stated there are about 122 signs in and around the Gill Stadium and JFK Coliseum area. These signs were put in probably a little over three decades ago to recognize individuals and organizations who had donated trees to that area. They have basically been a headache from a maintenance standpoint for many, many years. We get a lot of them damaged by vehicles and we get rotted sign posts. We have to replace signs because they have graffiti on them or they get bent and damaged. It takes up a lot of our labor hours. The presence of the signs themselves sometimes complicates snow removal and vegetation removal. We have material and labor costs that I would estimate at around \$10,000 per year. The recommendation is to continue to recognize the individuals and organizations

that made the donations many decades ago by creating a bronze cast plaque that would go on the side of Gill Stadium and have all of the names of the individuals and organizations on that particular plaque. We would also have wayfinding maps so that people that are visiting can identify the tree that they donated or that was donated on behalf of a family member or an organization. If any of the family and friends that might be interested in having the existing nameplates we would make those available to them.

Alderman Long asked the \$10,000 per fiscal year includes maintenance and labor.

Mr. Gomez answered yes.

Alderman Long stated I am of the belief that these people paid for something and the \$10,000 a year is not problematic. Of course we are going to have maintenance and that includes workers to do that. I am not in favor of this.

Alderman Vincent asked is this something where we could reach out to these families to get their thoughts on this.

Mr. Gomez answered we might be able to identify...

Alderman Vincent interjected they have been there a long time I know. I do agree that it is sad they have been there for a long time and they are a pretty important piece for some of these families but I also understand the need for the request as well. I see both sides but am just wondering if there is something we can do to reach out to the sponsors or the families to get their thoughts.

Mr. Gomez responded we would certainly be willing to be proactive to reach out to them and let them know the plans that we have and make sure they know that the signs or nameplates are available to them if they would like to have them.

Chairman Levasseur asked what is the anticipate cost for the plaque.

Mr. Gomez answered it is about \$10,000. That is just an estimate at this point. It might be slightly north of that.

Alderman O'Neil stated I apologize if I get a little emotional about this. These plaques are the history of Manchester. You drive by and you see many names of people that have contributed athletically to the City of Manchester. Mark I don't understand why today it is a maintenance issue but 10 years ago it wasn't and 20 years ago it wasn't. I don't get how it is a maintenance issue. \$10,000 a year is almost somebody spending 10 hours a week working on it to replace them or repaint them. I don't buy that it is a major maintenance issue. Why 30 years later is it a maintenance issue and why now does it complicate snow removal and considered time and money lost? We owe it to the individuals on those signs and their families. It is one of the good things about Manchester. I think this is an awful idea. If we have to come up with a better way of long-term maintenance, I would volunteer to be part of that but I think this is an awful idea. This specifically is one of the good things about Manchester. The families can drive by and see their family member's name there. I hope the committee receives and files the communication.

*On motion of **Alderman Vincent**, duly seconded by **Alderman Thomas**, it was voted to table.*

Chairman Levasseur stated what I have learned being on this Board is if we don't communicate, we pass it and then there are 200 people in here yelling at us. It is better to be safe than sorry.

8. Communication from Mark Gomez regarding the Hallsville School Analysis.
(Note: The attached L&B committee report was referred back to committee at the January 16 BMA meeting.)

Alderman Vincent moved to send the RFP back out.

Alderman Goonan stated I thought there was another plan coming forward from Ed Baroody. I anticipated hearing another option.

Mr. Gomez stated Mr. Baroody expressed some interest a couple of months ago in funding in some manner the re-use of the old Hallsville School as a community and recreation center that would accommodate Parks & Recreation and OYS. Mr. Baroody also has a lot of other ideas to make it a building that really serves the community. I think there have been some conversations outside of this forum that have happened in the interim. I understand that there may be some sentiment to having an RFP go out without restrictions for the re-use of Hallsville so the BMA can have a full set of options at its disposal and then make a decision on what to do with the building. I believe Mr. Baroody's interest persists but I think he is holding off at this point. This is my understanding. I don't want to speak for him and I am not sure if he is present but I think he is holding off for the moment for the Board to decide how it wants to proceed with an RFP.

Alderman Goonan asked would that be a public/private partnership. I would hate to lose that as a community center or anything like that. I always thought this was a historic property. Maybe it didn't reach that level but I went to school there and I would hate to lose the building. I think this could help the community, especially in that area. I thought there was more discussion to be had on this rather than putting it back out and if it is put back out is it going to be knocked down?

Chairman Levasseur responded no. This is the plan. We sent out an RFP once before and we did have a couple of bids that when awry on us. Then a private person came and said they were interested in the property but in order to appear that we are not giving a special favor to one individual, I think it has to go out to bid with no restrictions. Of course, he has every right to just come in with a bid. This committee will have the final say if we are lucky enough to get any offers at all. This committee and then the full Board will have final say on what eventually goes there. If somebody wants to tear it down and put up a gas station, obviously that is not going to pass. The only reason we want to go without restrictions is because we think we stopped a few projects because the requirement was that the gym be kept open so anybody who wanted to come in would have to take on the liability of keeping the gym open. We just want to send it out without restrictions and see what we get back. Maybe we get a local guy like Ed who

comes in and does whatever he wants to do but again we will have final say on whatever project goes in there. I hope that makes everyone feel a little better.

Alderman Long stated I am wondering if we should get a recommendation that is non-binding from the Heritage Commission. This is a historic building and we have a Heritage Commission. Why would we not have them weigh in on this?

Chairman Levasseur replied I prefer not slowing this down any further.

Alderman Long stated I would also add Wilson because we know that is coming back to us.

Alderman Terrio stated this city has a long history of making bad real estate deals so I do have some concerns about giving the property away. I know it was going to be a public/private partnership but I do have some concerns. About a month ago, I took the liberty of walking and talking to a lot of the abutters to the school, approximately 15 properties on Jewett Street, Errol, Woodman and Hayward. I talked to about 9-10 residents of the 15 houses that abut the property. I wanted to get a feel from the neighborhood. They are disappointed. They love parking there and I said if it goes to private development you are going to lose that and they understood. Almost all of them were okay with somebody coming in and building an office or office/residential. There was only one abutter who didn't want any residential. There was also one abutter, and she was the only one, who said she hoped it turned into a homeless shelter and a drug rehab. Everybody else was against that idea but there was one abutter who did want a homeless shelter/drug rehab. The feeling of the neighborhood that I got was the overwhelming majority wanted office space and/or residential space. That is why I support sending out an RFP because that is what is going to happen. It is either going to be office space or residential.

Chairman Levasseur asked Mr. Gomez do you have the RFP or did Planning do that. Jeff, did you do the original RFP when we sent it out with the condition that the gym be maintained?

Mr. Belanger answered yes we did the original work.

Chairman Levasseur stated so if the motion passes and we have two weeks until the next meeting, would you be able to send out another RFP without that restriction.

Mr. Belanger asked so what is the restriction going to be.

Chairman Levasseur responded no restrictions.

Mr. Belanger asked why not just do a public sale.

Chairman Levasseur responded whichever way. I am just saying if it has to be under the RFP process do that but if not...do we not send out an RFP at all and just hire a real estate agent?

Mr. Belanger stated typically under the Lands & Buildings process, if it is going to a public sale with no restrictions that is part of the Code of Ordinances Section 34 that says it has got to be done by public sale absent good cause and if there is no restriction I am not sure what the good cause would be.

Chairman Levasseur stated the reason I am asking for an RFP is so that we maintain some kind of strings to the proposal. If a real estate agent comes in and gives us a solid offer, do we still maintain our position that we can deny the offer if we don't want it there.

Mr. Belanger replied if you do an RFP you can control that.

Chairman Levasseur stated that is why I prefer an RFP.

Alderman Thomas duly seconded the motion. Chairman Levasseur called for a vote. The motion carried with Aldermen Long and Goonan duly recorded in opposition.

9. Request Brenda Masewic Adams, Tax Collector, to accept a below market value offer for property located at 1080 Montgomery Street.

Chairman Levasseur stated my understanding is that we do not have to go into non-public.

City Clerk Normand replied correct. I think what she is looking for is authority to accept the highest offer on the property located at 1080 Montgomery Street.

*On motion of **Alderman Long**, duly seconded by **Alderman Vincent**, it was voted to authorize the Tax Collector to accept the highest offer on the property located at 1080 Montgomery Street.*

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

A True Record. Attest.



Clerk of Committee