

ALTOONA GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, JULY 16, 2013 – 6:00 P.M.
CITY OF ALTOONA TRAINING FACILITY & COUNCIL CHAMBERS
1320 WASHINGTON AVENUE, ALTOONA, PA

CALL TO ORDER – by Chairman Wayne Hippo at 6:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL – taken by City Clerk Linda Rickens Schellhammer-Present were Study Commission members: David Duncan; Heather Eckels; Richard Flarend; Beverly Green; Robert Kutz, Vice-Chairman Richard Fiore Jr. and Chairman Wayne Hippo

ALL PUBLIC COMMENT – offered and none given

OLD BUSINESS – Chairman Hippo stated Council approved the commission's request for a budget of \$2050 by Council Resolution No. 0086-13 on 7/10/13

Chairman Hippo stated the Devorris Downtown Center August 20th public hearing at 6:00 p.m. has been approved by Penn State Altoona and the fee has been waived

Commission member Dave Duncan reviewed a structured approach to commission and recommended the commission engage in two activities to include how the City of Altoona works and how should the City of Altoona should work; Mr. Duncan recommends the commission use the business model to work through the study process with each member taking responsibility for studying one or two items and using support staff where necessary to accomplish the study; Mr. Duncan recommended the members provide a report of their findings as to how the city is currently working; Mr. Duncan stated the stakeholder analysis has already been provided to the commission; Mr. Duncan took DCED representative Michael Foreman's document to provide a timeframe with activities to be accomplished within the timeframe; Mr. Duncan referred to and reviewed the fishbone diagram that can be applied to a city with the five categories of activities that the living organization needs to carry out; Chairman Hippo asked if they can focus on seven and how and when the commission can best identify the categories that need to be focused on; Mr. Flarend stated that getting involved in one category will involve many others and it is all encompassing and many are inner related; Ms. Green stated that it appears that the commission agrees that all are important and suggested this be used as a guide to see if all of the categories are being covered as the discussions flow; Mr. Duncan agreed with that stating they could just focus on money as the root cause; Vice-Chairman Fiore stated the balancing of the money and the services through the organization is the one part that the commission can make a recommendation on and feels that this will come as the commission progresses into the process and the initial interviews with city staff will help the commission to learn what the limitations of the current form of government are and it will develop the model and

help to fill in the model, then, the commission can fill in the specific details and target what they didn't get in the first round of interviews; this will have to be done before they make a decision; Chairman Hippo stated it will be a great guideline and measuring tool; Mr. Duncan stated he would make sure the commission followed this to make sure all that is appropriate is covered; Chairman Hippo stated the timeline provided will work and that by the end of October the study phase will be done;

Identifying stakeholders – Mr. Duncan asked Planning Director Lee Slusser to address the city's comprehensive plan document and how the city looked at the stake holders; Mr. Slusser stated they broke them down into groups they wanted to see represented at the table and then picked names; they developed 12 focus groups; the categories represent different interests in the community and different geographies; Mr. Slusser agreed to allow the group to use his information; Chairman Hippo stated the commission should identify those that have an interest and have them speak at the public hearing; the commission was asked to get their recommendation to Linda Rickens Schellhammer as soon as possible; Chairman Hippo reviewed his list to include Eric Wolf of AMTRAN, Mike Hofer of CBRC, Pat Miller of GAEDC, the Altoona Parking Authority and ABCD Corporation, City Controller and Republican Committee Chairman A.C. Stickel, Democratic Committee Chairman Frank Roosenhoover, former Mayor Tom Martin, the Altoona Water Authority, the Altoona Area School District, the 3 local unions, UPMC Altoona; those that cannot attend the public hearing will be scheduled to attend commission meetings in August and September

ADOPTION OF THE JULY 16, 2013 MEETING MINUTES – Upon motion of David Duncan seconded by Beverly Green with all in favor to adopt the July 16th meeting minutes and no further discussion was held

DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR INTERVIEWS – Lee Slusser, Planning Director

Mr. Slusser provided the commission with a review of the functions of his department and a copy is attached to the minutes of this meeting stating most of the department is paid for out of grants; Mr. Slusser stated his department follows the PA Municipalities Planning Code as opposed to the 3rd Class City Code; Mr. Slusser stated the major problem of his department is lack of resources and important things may be done poorly due to a lack of funding; Mr. Slusser said they are in favor of a City Manager form of government; Mr. Slusser stated they have less CDBG funding each year; some of the money received is used in other city departments; they used to do more paving and plant more street trees than what is currently done; they used to fund six police officers and now they are down to funding only two; CDBG eligible areas of the city are shrinking; Vice Chairman Fiore asked what limitations Act 47 has placed on the planning department and what opportunity would home rule provide; Mr. Slusser stated Act 47 has increased the department's workload and there is money to do it with in terms of the downtown study and the hiring of a consultant but much of DCED's money comes with strings and is limited; Vice Chairman Fiore stated and Mr. Slusser agreed the benefit is the investment in downtown and Penn State; Ms. Eckels asked about the advantages of Act 47; Mr. Slusser stated earned income tax on commuters is an advantage; Mr. Flarend asked about grants for developing redevelopment studies; Mr.

Slusser stated due to Act 47 they have received money; Ms. Eckels asked about reassessment and the problems the city is facing; Mr. Slusser stated if the city reassessed they would not be in Act 47 and the city would be at 14 mills; Mr. Flarend stated the 3rd Class City Code grants reassessment and asked what it would cost if the city were to reassess; Chairman Hippo stated millions of dollars; Mr. Flarend asked if there were any codes restrictions under the 3rd Class City Code versus if the city were home rule; Mr. Slusser stated the building code is a state law and we have no choice and have to enforce it, zoning and land development are local options and could be thrown out; Mr. Flarend asked if the city used countywide enforcement in codes would there be any restrictions; Mr Slusser stated the former codes director for the city, Ed Cardy, recommended it but none of the municipalities were interested; the city uses a private firm; the city does countywide planning through the Blair County Planning Commission for between 12 and 13,000 dollars per year; Mr. Flarend asked outside of Altoona what type of development opportunities are there; Mr. Slusser stated most is in downtown and in the Pleasant Valley corridor although nothing in Blair County is particularly booming; Mr. Flarend asked how many more would there be if they did not have to pay re-zoning fees; Mr. Slusser stated maybe slightly more; Ms. Green asked what works well in the planning department; Mr. Slusser stated efficiency and gave the example that if somebody comes in with a project they have the ability to have a group around the table fast and they can respond to opportunity quickly; Mr. Slusser also stated the codes are more flexible; Ms. Eckles stated that the city has a declining population and loss of tax base and asked how more people can be attracted to move into the city with a higher or lower millage rate; Mr. Slusser stated it would not be millage itself and there would need to be investments in neighborhoods where people want to live, spur gentrification, increase police, spend money on sidewalks; Mr. Slusser stated the City of Pittsburgh as the best model; Mr. Slusser stated the municipalities with the higher millage rates are experiencing increased growth and gave Hollidaysburg and Bellwood as examples

DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR INTERVIEWS-Dave Diedrich, Public Works Director

Mr. Diedrich provided the commission with a review of his department and a copy is attached to the minutes of this meeting; Mr. Diedrich stated the city is the same size and it has not changed regardless of other changes; Mr. Diedrich provided factual information about the city, organizational chart, budget, and personnel and is attached to the minutes; Mr. Diedrich had 71 workers in 1996, 61 in 2011 and is now at 55; Act 47 has stopped the decline and held the number steady although it will not increase; the department never laid off workers they just never replaced retirees; raising the EIT balanced the budget and they will be able to hire; garbage is not collected by the city for private residents and this is a council decision; the city does do leaf collection and they are involved in enforcement; the department cleans the city owned buildings and nothing is contracted out; there used to be 5 custodians and now there are 3; Mr. Flarend asked how traffic is tracked through the city and if home rule can change this; Mr Diedrich stated most are using state routes like 7th street, Broad Avenue, Union Avenue; Mr. Diedrich stated they can view his complete annual report on the city website at www.altoonapa.gov under public works; the advertising requirements were changed to include the formal contract bid limit which was \$10,000 and is now \$18,500;

there needs to be 3 bids informally; there are still the preparation of bid documents but no advertising fees; it is approximately \$1000 to prepare bid specs; the state fuel system is free and the city gets charged the rate minus taxes; the city uses an online sale for city property now which has brought the city more money compared to previous sales; Mr. Diedrich asked for certain items to be kept in the 3rd Class City Code to include sections on streets, sidewalks, bridges, sewers, assessment improvement, public services, public buildings, water courses/authority, parks and playgrounds; other concerns are prevailing wage rate limits \$25,000, formal contract bid limit greater than \$18,500, advertising contracts two time in the newspaper is costly; Mr. Diedrich stated Act 47 wants the department to implement a pavement management system which is a great idea but the department does not have the people or the money; Mr. Diedrich states changing lights to LED's would save ¼ of a million dollars; this money could be used for paving as the roads are on a 30 year cycle; CDBG money for paving can only be in low to mod areas; the federal money can be used but if you use it you have to put ramps in at the intersections at \$1000 per ramp; Act 47 supported an increase in paving and there may be \$500,000 set for the next 2 years; Mr. Diedrich asked for 6 million over 4 years and Act 47 gave him 2 million over 2 years; Mr. Diedrich said vehicles are on a 10 year cycle and you don't need to have a truck fall apart in a snow storm and wait 8 months for a new truck; Mr. Diedrich said they have kept up with this but now feel with Act 47 they are taking a step back; Mr. Diedrich said Act 47 wants him to close the parks department to save \$50,000 and contract it out; Mr. Diedrich said if competitively bid it would cost \$100,000 more than what they are paying now and they have not shown money; Act 47 also wants Mr. Diedrich to consolidate fleet maintenance with the Altoona Area School District, Blair County, Logan Township and the Altoona Water Authority; Mr. Diedrich stated he talked with all of them and the Water Authority is on board; Mr. Diedrich said it would cost money to implement this and they would have to get a facility; the school district contracts most all vehicles out except for a few police vehicles; Mr. Diedrich asked that they keep the City Manager form of government, raise the threshold of formal bids and add a cost of living adjustment, keep 7 elected officials focused to the manager rather than to the department directors; Ms. Green asked if the city should look at options such as charges for street lights in zones; Mr. Diedrich said you cannot use liquid fuels money for streetlights; Mr. Diedrich said they may want to look at assessments for streetlights

ESTABLISH AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING – agreed to continue interviews with department directors with questions related to what they feel are limitations under this form of government and what they plan to accomplish if a home rule charter is placed on the ballot; the commission agreed to place this on their next agenda and beyond if needed

OTHER ITEMS – Ms. Eckels stated she noticed a facebook page for the commission; Mr. Duncan stated he developed it and he would get the legal opinion of Solicitor Larry Clapper; Mr. Flarend asked about the use of team box and how vital it is to comment on documents; Mr. Duncan stated he will speak to Larry Clapper about this as well

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENT (TIME PERMITTING) - There was no public comment

Chairman Hippo acknowledged Bill Kibler of the *Altoona Mirror* who asked several questions

ADJOURNMENT – by Chairman Hippo at 8:00 p.m.

Linda Rickens Schellhammer, City Clerk/Recording Secretary