

CITY OF ALTOONA GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
TUESDAY, AUGUST 20, 2013, 6:00 P.M.
DEVORRIS DOWNTOWN CENTER
1431 12TH AVENUE, ALTOONA, PA

Explanation of the Government Study Commission's process - Chairman Wayne Hippo opened the meeting stating the purpose of the commission was to study the current form of government to include department functions and identification of problems and to explore the possibility of a home rule form of government and how it may benefit the City; Chairman Hippo stated the next stage of the process will be to analyze the home rule option; Chairman Hippo stated the Commission called this Public Meeting of stakeholders to receive public comment on how they relate and what their relationship is to City government currently, what struggles they have and what could be improved

Public comment

Eric Wolf, General Manager, AMTRAN stated there are 700,000 riders annually, they have 45 employees and a 4 million dollar budget consisting of federal, state and local money; AMTRAN was formed in 1958 as a joint municipal authority between Altoona and Logan Township and their board consists of five City of Altoona members and two Logan Township members; AMTRAN renovated the former Roaring River Mills property (Trolleyworks) with federal grants and 100% of the property is leased at current market rates and provides income; AMTRAN operates six days a week; AMTRAN also partners with Penn State Altoona with connection between downtown Altoona and the Penn State Altoona campus; 25% of ridership is work related with mall/store workers; the riders are also families with two incomes, seniors and people with disabilities; AMTRAN and the City of Altoona have a financial relationship because there is a local match which the City provides in order for AMTRAN to receive federal and state funds; Act 44 of 2008 requires a 5% increase in local share each year and they need to increase at the municipal level; Mr. Wolf stated he has witnessed City departments do more with less and they cannot cut more services; Mr. Wolf stated that reassessment will not happen and the only thing that the City has the power to do is to get out from under the 3rd class city code

Pat Miller, Executive Director, Altoona Parking Authority and Greater Altoona Economic Development Corporation – the Altoona Parking Authority has existed since 1972 and the City serves as the conduit to bonds; the City is actually fiscally responsible for the reimbursement and is on the hook for any unfunded liability although the Parking Authority pays this; five years ago 3 million dollars of federal and state funds rehabbed the 11th avenue parking garage and added 30 to 35 years of life to the structure; Mr. Miller stated City parking needs to be

expanded as the authority is at 92% capacity at the end of August through May; Penn State Altoona has made an investment in downtown Altoona and they will invest again significantly in the near future and at that time the City will need to float or guarantee the bonds; there is currently an analysis of downtown taking place which will put more pressure on the Parking Authority and as buildings are renovated and people move in there is the question of where do they park; as GAEDC Director and Senior Vice President of Altoona Blair County Development Corporation - Mr. Miller stated he manages EDLF loans and \$600,000 over interest and payments have come back to the City; Community Development Block Grant funds formerly helped to pay for the downtown manager position but HUD will no longer allow that and has changed their regulations; the City does not provide funding for downtown; Mr. Miller stated the City needs to spend money on maintenance of the downtown plazas, streetscapes and gateways; Mr. Miller stated the Parking Authority staff helps and other volunteer groups help; the City provides electricity for the summer concerts and the Christmas tree and the Heritage Plaza and they handle garbage on 11th and 12th Avenues; Mr. Miller stated GAEDC and ABCD try to market the name Altoona and the idea of locate, visit, reside and that finances are needed to create that type of climate; their goal is to create a quality of life for the youngest and brightest to keep them from leaving the area and to keep them at home; Mr. Miller stated the City has fiscal constraints and depends on volunteers; people that are looking at the area are looking at community vital statistics to include population and whether it is growing or declining, income and per capita and if it is above or below the national average, healthcare, education and improvements; Mr. Miller stated the City needs to think about investing in infrastructure and sidewalks and pay attention to the city and to be able to afford to do so and not rely so much on volunteers; Mr. Miller stated some of the downtown businesses actually talk to their clients about the City not doing a good job of maintaining downtown; Mr. Miller stated the City has limited funds and their exit plan out of Act 47 should be adoption of a home rule charter and uncapping of taxes

Drew Emswiler, Altoona Police, President, FOP Lodge 8 stated the Pennsylvania Economy League Study of 2006 or 2007 indicated that by the year 2013 there would be a 3 ½ million dollar deficit; the City needs to question if under home rule would there be this type of deficit and if not consider home rule

Scott Campanaro, City of Altoona, President, AFSCME Council 83 stated he has been a City employee for 7 years and he likes the council/manager form of government; Mr. Campanaro stated that from a union perspective AFSCME represents 18% of the total budget and they cost the city 14% of the total budget and this includes salary, benefits, and pensions; Public

Works represents the service side of the City with 43 workers - which is down from 150 twenty years ago; Public Works has cut back snow routes and plowing and have gone from 24 hour to 12 hour snow removal schedule; they are on a 40 year maintenance cycle of a 25 year road and the infrastructure the City has in place now will not look this way in 10 years; Mr. Campanaro stated that companies that want to relocate here need to see a good infrastructure and there needs to be a City government with resources to maintain its City; Mr. Campanaro suggested that the number of employees in the street cut department within Public Works be increased so that \$300,000 additional revenue can be generated and the department can get caught; Mr. Campanaro stated the electrical department could also expand as they maintain all street lights; Mr. Campanaro stated he is opposed to garbage collection and the City may need a blended system; Mr. Campanaro suggested reassessment based on insurance value as it is difficult to pay for roads based on a 1950's reassessment; Mr. Campanaro believes the City needs to be more aggressive in relocating companies and that provisions need to be made when writing a home rule charter for aggressive recruitment of businesses; Mr. Campanaro stated that AFSCME is in favor of home rule charter for the City of Altoona and bold ideas and sustainability

Bryson Peterman, Altoona Fire, President, IAFF Local 299 was unable to attend the meeting and Altoona Firefighter Shawn Patosky stated Bryson's comments would be forwarded to the commission

All other public comment

Gary Drenning of the Blair County Chamber who serves on the Board of Directors and the Legislative Action Committee stated the Chamber has a huge stake in the outcome of the government study commission's recommendation and that the Chamber is available to offer their assistance to the commission at any time

Media Questions were conducted after the meeting; Bill Kibler, *Altoona Mirror*, Ben Manning, WTAJ TV 10 and Chris Forshey, WRTA attended the meeting

Adjournment of the meeting took place by Chairman Hippo at 7:00 p.m.

Linda Rickens Schellhammer, City Clerk/Recording Secretary