City of Albion

City Council Meeting

February 21, 2017

1. Call To Order

Mayor Brown opened the regular session at 7:00 p.m.

1. Moment of Silence To Be Observed
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Roll Call

PRESENT: Maurice Barnes (1), Lenn Reid (2), Sonya Brown (3), Marcola Lawler (4) and Andrew French (6) and Mayor Brown. Jeanette Spicer (5) was absent.

Staff Present: Sheryl Mitchell, City Manager; Cullen Harkness, City Attorney; Jill Domingo, City Clerk and Scott Kipp, Chief Public Safety.

V. Mayor & Council Member’s Comments

Comments were received from Council Members Brown and French.

VI. Presentations

 A. Albion River Trail Update-Gregg Strand

Gregg Strand updated the Council on the Albion River Trail highlighting the following:

* The City of Albion and Albion College support the Albion River Trail Expansion which is a 1.2 mile extension.
* This provides the City of Albion a unique opportunity to connect four regional trail systems to the expanded Albion River Trail: the Calhoun County Trail, the Great Lake to Lake Trail, Michigan’s Iron Belle Trail and the North Country National Scenic Trail
* A Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant was awarded for approximately $296,000 in 2015
* The City of Albion and Albion College have made a commitment to the project in the amount of approximately $100,000 in matching funds, in cash and/or in-kind services
* The grants and agreements take about a year to complete.
* The final trail route has been finalized and the engineering complete.
* Once approval is received from the DNR, the project will go out for bid
* The grant is a reimbursable grant. Albion College will act as the general contractor of the project and will manage all financial aspects. The project will not require any funds from the City of Albion.
* The DNR requires an easement be obtained for the River Trail Expansion so the Trail will remain as public use.
* The construction is anticipated to be complete by the end of 2017

Comments were received from Council Member French.

 B. Neighborhood Health Visitors-Tom Brown

Tom Brown and Alfredia Dysart Drake updated the Council with the following presentation on the Neighborhood Health Visitors:

* The Neighborhood Health Visitors program is a year-round activity that trains and deploys community volunteers to connect Albion area residents with health resources and begin Neighborhood Organizations.
* Their goal is to provide Albion area residents with 100% access to health care with zero disparities. They work to make sure that everyone in greater Albion has all the health related help that is available. The goal is to visit all of Albion City, plus Albion and Sheridan Townships.
* The need for this program came about when local industries moved and our Trillium hospital closed suddenly. Access to and resources for health care were drastically affected. Our community came together to develop the "Albion Health Plan".
* Our Neighborhood Health Visitors Program, as part of that plan, works to inform all in our Albion area about local services that are available to address their health needs. These services are:
* Reduce the costs of prescription medications and other health services Provide medical insurance to low income families
* Adjust payments for medical services based on income
* Help find a local primary care provider and hospital services
* Refer you to other services through the 211 Network with our Health Navigator
* FREE digital thermometers , smoke alarms, or other health and safety items are distributed by the Visitors in their neighborhoods
* As of Jan. 2017, they’ve made nearly 2000 door-to-door visits with the help of over 190 volunteers, and 38% are Albion College students! Trained college student’s pair with local NHVs to form visiting teams. Now VISTAS and Build Albion Fellows are helping.
* Tom will be retiring in March of 2017 and moving to Chelsea. A retirement party will be held on Friday, February 24, 2017 at the Ismon House from 4:00-6:00 p.m. and all are invited to attend.

Comments were received from Council Member Lawler.

 C. Update on Albion Forward Survey-AmeriCorps Vista Members

Jeremiah Simon and Danielle Nelson, AmeriCorps Vista Members gave the following update on the Albion Forward Survey:

* The Albion Forward Survey began on January 4th and has gone well. The goal of the survey is to 1) gather community input in regards to economic development, education, health and food access and look at the assets we can build on; 2) identify ways residents of Albion connect to events and services in Albion; and 3) identify transportation needs of Albion residents. The survey takes about 10-15 minutes to complete. There is an online version as well as paper copies that are distributed by VISTAs in person at various businesses, community sites, and organizations.
* Residents’ feedback on the survey has been generally positive. While everyone has their own ideas and critiques, citizens they have spoken with are generally impressed with the survey, are glad it is being implemented, and hopeful that its results will assist the community
* In terms of results so far, they are about halfway to their target number of surveys taken. While it’s too early to offer concrete results and nothing has been analyzed in regards to demographic information such as income, they wanted to share some preliminary results.
* When asked how they find out about services and what’s going on in Albion, the top two answers by far were social media and word of mouth.
* Survey respondents were asked what they would like to see a Neighborhood Planning Council in their neighborhood do if there was one. The top two choices were running a Neighborhood Watch and giving input on developments in their community.

They have learned so far that Albion’s workforce skills are incredibly diverse and serves as a reminder of the rich resources the members of this community has to offer.

* The top two transportation needs so far are going to and from the doctor and going to and from grocery shopping. Community classes related to exercise, stress reduction, and food tastings and demonstrations so far are the top 3 health and wellness classes respondents are interested in.
* They have also learned that so far 25% of those surveyed could not see a doctor, receive treatment, and/or get a prescription because of cost. 20% of those surveyed have worried about having enough food at least once in the past year, which was mainly due to cost of food.
* On a positive note, almost one hundred people have expressed interest in volunteering in Albion and have given them their contact information so that they could get in touch with them when opportunities arise.

Comments were received from Council Members Lawler, French and Barnes.

VII. Public Hearing

 A. Proposed Revocation of the Liquor License for Singh & Singh of Albion, LLC,

 D/B/A Fedco Party Store

Mayor Brown opened the Public Hearing for the Proposed Revocation of the Liquor License for Singh & Singh of Albion, LLC, D/B/A Fedco Party Store at 7:30 p.m.

City Manager Mitchell stated the public notice for the revocation of the liquor license for Singh & Singh had been posted. This action arose due to delinquent personal property taxes that were owed to the City of Albion for Singh & Singh of Albion, D/B/A Fedco Party Store for 2013 and 2014.

Comments were received from the following:

Sonny Singh, Owner Fedco Party Store that stated he enjoyed having a business in the City and that he did come down and make payment arrangements with the City.

Lonnie Brewer, 1200 Hillside Rd, Apt #9, stated he was involved in the meeting with Sonny Singh along with Council Member Lawler and City Manager Mitchell for payment arrangements for the past due personal property taxes. He would also like to see the business kept downtown.

Bill Dobbins, 15901 E. Michigan Avenue, stated he feels the business is a distraction in the revitalization of the downtown area. Being across from the Downtown Hotel, the business is in a key target area for the reinvestment of the downtown. He feels the physical appearance of the building is a reflection of how the business is run. He would like to see the business move to another location. He asked if the City is properly inspecting the building. He feels the bar can no longer be set any lower. He feels the bar needs to be raised and that it should no longer be acceptable for businesses to not pay taxes. The City needs to draw a strong line and move the downtown in the right direction.

Nidia Wolf, 409 Irwin Avenue, stated she had worked for several years with Fedco as the Director of the Downtown Development Authority to clean the place up. She stated attempts have been made to clean up the front of the building but she feels the bar also needs to be raised.

Wayne Arnold, 906 Hall St, stated he would like the business assisted with helping to fit into the downtown revitalization and also to renovate the building.

Dave Atchison, 108 W. Erie St, stated there has been several large liquor containers and broken glass around the Fedco Building. Several guests of his establishment have stated they felt uncomfortable being in the downtown area due to intoxicated people around the Fedco building. He does not feel the business compliments Albion.

Robert Solis, 208 W. Center St, stated the owners are trying to clean up areas around the building when they see it and feels they deserve an opportunity to pay their taxes.

Lonnie Brewer, 1200 Hillside Rd, Apt #9, stated Double Vision had the same type of problem with trash when they were located downtown due in part to some of the trash cans being in front of the businesses. He feels this issue is due to the Downtown Hotel not wanting Fedco downtown and feels the City should support a business that caters to low income families.

Maria Cordova, 411 S. Ionia St, asked about the vacant buildings near and around the Fedco building and what would be done with those being brought up to code. Does this apply to all buildings in the downtown? Are other businesses also behind on their personal property taxes.

Mayor Brown closed the Public Hearing at 7:49 p.m.

The Council continued discussion on the Proposed Revocation of the Liquor License for Singh & Singh of Albion, LLC D/B/A Fedco Party Store with the following comments:

City Attorney Harkness stated businesses were identified that owed personal property taxes. This was only one of the businesses that was identified. The most cost effective method for the City to collect these taxes is through a recommendation to the State Liquor Commission for revocation of a liquor license. A letter was mailed from the City Attorney’s office and the business in question did not respond to the letter. A second letter was mail certified to the business and again no response was received. The recommendation of a revocation of a liquor license must be done prior to April 1st. The business has made arrangements with the City of Albion and are making good faith payments for the past due taxes. A significant portion of the amount due to the City should be paid prior April 1st. This action has been initiated only due to the past due personal property taxes owed to the City of Albion.

Council Member Barnes stated he feels there may be racial motives for this action taken against Fedco. He would like to know what the policy and procedure is for code violations and if those are being followed.

Council Member Lawler stated that Mr. Singh did indicate to her that he had called the City to try and make payment arrangements but left a message and a call was never returned. She asked the Council to focus on the task at hand which was the payment of the delinquent personal property taxes.

Council Member French asked if the Resolution needed to be passed at tonight’s meeting to maintain proper procedures.

City Attorney Harkness stated the Resolution would need to be approved by the second meeting in March. This would ensure that if it did need to be submitted to the State Liquor Commission, it would meet the April 1st deadline. This resolution would only be sent to the State Liquor Commission if the payment plan failed. The Resolution allows for the City to hold the business to a standard of maintaining payments.

Council Member Brown expressed she felt the timing was suspicious.

Mayor Brown stated that positive things are happening in Albion and he wants to be sure the City is consistent and fair with action that is being taken. Revitalizing the downtown is a key element and he wants to be sure that are keeping our current businesses. There will be another business that has been identified as owing delinquent personal property taxes and that will be coming to Council for a public hearing and approval of resolution.

Council Member Barnes stated the discussion should focus only on this business and the taxes they owe.

Council Member Lawler stated the business did make payment arrangements and fully understand the personal property tax process.

Council Member Reid asked if the business did understand the personal property tax process and should have the opportunity to correct this.

Council Member French stated the Resolution allows for the City to hold the business to a standard of maintaining payments.

VIII. Citizen’s Comments (Persons addressing the City Council shall limit their comments to **agenda items only** and to no more than five (5) minutes. Proper decorum is required.)

Comments were received from Bill Dobbins, 15901 E. Michigan Avenue; Nidia Wolf, 409 Irwin Avenue, Singh Singh, Owner-Fedco, 217 S. Superior St; Lonnie Brewer, 1200 Hillside Rd, Apt. 9 and Robert Solis, 208 W. Center St.

1. Consent Calendar (VV)
2. Approval Regular Session Minutes – February 6, 2017

 French moved, Lawler supported, CARRIED, to approve the Consent Calendar as presented. (6-0 vv)

1. Items for Individual Discussion

A. Request Approval Resolution # 2017-03, A Resolution to Object to the Renewal of and Request for Revocation the Liquor License for Singh & Singh of Albion, LLC, D/B/A Fedco (RCV)

 Comments were received from Council Member Barnes, Mayor Brown, City Attorney Harkness and City Manager Mitchell.

Barnes moved, French supported, CARRIED, to Approve Resolution # 2017-03, A Resolution to Object to the Renewal of and Request for Revocation the Liquor License for Singh & Singh of Albion, LLC, D/B/A Fedco as presented. (4-2 rcv) (Lawler and Mayor Brown dissenting)

B. Request Approval 1st Reading Ordinance # 2017-02, An Ordinance to Amend Ordinances 66-139 and 66-176 Solid Waste (RCV)

 Comments were received from Council Member Lawler and City Attorney Harkness.

French moved, Lawler supported, CARRIED, to Approve 1st Reading Ordinance # 2017-02, An Ordinance to Amend Ordinances 66-139 and 66-176 Solid Waste as presented. (6-0 rcv)

C. City Manager Report

City Manager Mitchell updated the Council with the following items:

* She congratulated Mayor Brown and Council Member Brown on winning the WOTABU Road Rally that took place over the weekend
* The goal setting sessions are scheduled for Monday, February 27th and Tuesday, February 28th. These will be held at the Ludington Center at 7:00 p.m. and will be facilitated by Patrick McLean of the Ford Institute.
* Albion Junior Optimists (JOI) will host the State Convention the weekend of March 3rd-4th. This will be an overnight event with approximately 50 young people.
* The City is converting from Pitney Bowes to Lake Michigan Mailers for mail service. Projected savings of $2,000/yr.
* City Income tax forms are now available at City Hall, Albion District Library or can be downloaded from the City’s website.
* Property taxes were due February 14th. Residents can still pay for 2016 taxes at City Hall through February 28th. After February 28th, all real property taxes must be paid to the Calhoun County Treasurer.
* The Board of Review organizational meeting is March 7th at 2pm in City Hall. The Board of Review will convene March 20-21 from 9am-4pm and March 23 from 3pm-9pm. Written appeals must be received by March 21 at 5pm and appointments scheduled by March 2nd.
* Sled design judging will begin at 11:15am on Saturday, February 25th at the large pavilion in Victory Park.
* The City will be applying for the I.C.E. grant which is an infrastructure and improvement grant and is due on April 7th. In order to secure grant, the City must have a Capital Improvement Plan in place using the following timeline:
* By March 1     Public Notice
* March 14       Work Session   Planning Commission (and City Council
* March 21        Public Hearing & Planning Commission Resolution to

 Recommend to Council

* April 3             Council Resolution to Adopt

 D. Future Agenda Items

* Council Member French asked for the modification of the Council Rules of Procedure be added to the next agenda.
* Council Member Reid asked for an update on Holland Park be added to the next agenda.
* Council Member Barnes asked for updates on the Albion Malleable site and Austin Avenue be added to the next agenda.
* Council Member Brown asked for an update on the opening of the Dialysis Center and also a joint meeting with the Marshall School Board be added to the next agenda.
* Council Member Lawler asked for information on demolition legislation and discussion on $100/Day Fee for not complying with the Single

 Hauler Ordinance be added to the next agenda.

E. Motion to Excuse Absent Council Member (s) (VV)

Barnes moved, Brown supported, CARRIED, to Excuse Council Member Spicer. (6-0, vv)

1. Citizen’s Comments

Comments were received from Marcus Trammel, 707 N. Berrien St; Gary Thompkins, 7th District Calhoun County Commissioner; Council Member Reid and Mayor Brown.

1. Adjournment

 French moved, Reid supported, CARRIED, to adjourn council session. (6-0 vv)

Mayor Brown adjourned the meeting at 8:50 p.m.

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Date Jill Domingo City Clerk