

Town of University Park

Report of Meeting

Policy, Rules and Municipal Structure Committee

Thursday, August 7, 2014

7:00 pm

University Park Town Hall

6724 Baltimore Avenue

Committee Members Present:

Heidi Sorensen, Chair, Ward 5

Joe Thompson, Ward 1

Bradlee Hess, Ward 3

Others Present Included:

Mayor Len Carey

Roy Alvarez, Council Member, Ward 7

Jim Gekas, Council Member, Ward 2

Debra Suarez, Woodberry Street

Harold Freeman, Woodberry Street

Tasey Hannah, Pineway

Laura Donnelly, Underwood Street

Raphael Lorente, Woodberry Street

Dave Brosch, Tuckerman Street

Linda Verrill, Van Buren Street

Todd Stewart, Van Buren Street

Bridget Warren, Van Buren Street

Michelle Leonardi, Queens Chapel Road

Meeting called to order: 7:05 pm

Ms. Sorensen - Introduction

Ms. Sorensen welcomed all and explained that the meeting will focus on the draft scope of work (attached) for the Editor of the University Park Newsletter. This is a topic that the Town Council and Committee began discussing last year. One topic that has been discussed is whether a written agreement will be necessary for the Editor and the process for developing that agreement.

Mayor Carey

Mayor Carey stated that there is no written contract for the Editor of the newsletter. The current rate is \$1,000.00 an issue (\$11,000.00 per year) and since this is above the

\$10,000.00 threshold which the Town requires, the contract must go to bid. Mayor Carey pointed out that the Council can override this procedure.

Ms. Sorensen - Suggested topics for discussion

- All content in the Newsletter not received directly from the Town must be attributed.
- No periodic article or column may be added to the Newsletter without permission from the town.
- Will the Town purchase the Adobe InDesign software for the Editor.
- The position involves copy editing, but not content editing or editing of the substance of copy.
- The editor shall report directly to the Town's Mayor and will interact directly with the Town's designated printer.
- Preference will be given to bids that demonstrate a quick turnaround between content submission and submission to the printer.
- Any preference or requirement that the individual be a Town resident or have close ties to the Town in some other way.
- Whether the newsletter editor should be independent, meaning not be an employee of the Town, not be an elected official of the Town and not serve on a Town committee.
- Does the editor need experience in editing and publishing and whether that will be one of the qualifications the candidates for editor will be evaluated on.

Questions and Comments

- Q.** Are there any restrictions on what can be done with the Newsletter in the by-laws or constitution? What is already put in place?
- A.** Mr. Gekas noted that Section 402(b)(1iii) of the Town Charter states that the Council has the power to pass ordinances for the specific purpose of publishing and distributing a Town newsletter to provide information to the citizens of the Town relating to governmental activities of the Town, to provide official notices as required by Charter or Ordinance, provided, however, that publication of such notices in the Town newsletter shall not be considered a substitute for any requirement for advertisement, in a newspaper of general circulation in the Town or the posting of notice in a public place.
- A.** Mr. Thompson pointed out that Section 401 (a) of the Town Charter defines the mayor as the chief executive officer and the head of the administrative branch of the Town government. Section 402 (b) defines the power of the Council to pass ordinances related to the newsletter.
- Q.** Why does the Mayor get a free ride in the Mayor's Column? Could be an editorial, his views expressed, may not be the views of the Council as a whole.

The issue can be not how the newsletter is put together but how it functions and who can put items into it. It could be a great political weapon for Mayors.

- C. There is a problem considering the newsletter as independent. It is a Town newsletter, paid for by taxes and a way for the Town to make the residents aware of what's happening.
- C. You either have to allow all the Council members put in a column every month unedited or not.
- A. There is nothing in the Town Charter that would prevent any Council member from putting a column in the newsletter; it just hasn't been done to date.
- C. Just stay with the current design which is an informational only newsletter.
- C. The newsletter is charming, unique, and expresses the character of the Town. The thought of bidding this out to someone outside of the Town is unthinkable. It has to be a Town resident. It should be someone who has experience in editing.
- C. Concerned about putting it out to bid for the lowest bidder. It needs to be a Town person who can read the history of the Town.
- Q. How do you envision the RFP process actually happening?
- A. Mayor Carey stated that the RFP will be built around the scope of work. The Mayor will ask the Council for suggestions in terms of the scope of work. There is a huge advantage if the editor is very familiar with the Town. The Mayor said that he plans to work with a group of people to evaluate the responses to the RFP and would bring his preferred option and at least three other competitive options to the Council for discussion and approval..
- C. It is a charming thing to live in a town that sends this newsletter, it makes it feel you live in a small town, so the editor should be someone in Town. It really can't be independent. Would like the Mayor and Council members to tell him what they think because if he does not like what they think, he is going to vote against them. The Mayor's column or a Council member's column should not be edited for content.
- C. What kind of newsletter do we want? If we want to have opinions, maybe the newsletter is not the place, maybe a blog posting that everybody can put up.
- C. It could be a mess if everyone had an opinion in the newsletter. It would be nice if there was another way for elected officials to put out their opinion beside the newsletter.

- C. This is a newsletter, factual information, the Mayor writes his column and discusses what is happening in Town, it should not be an opinion, it should just be what is happening. Maybe opinion is not appropriate.
- C. Sometimes the Mayor's column is expressing an opinion and is it actually persuasive in some way.
- C. Opinion should not be used argumentatively.
- Q. Is it required in the by-laws that a contractor reports to the Mayor? This can set the Mayor up for a real problem, a potential conflict of interest, plus it has the appearance of too much oversight and control and not a good position to put the Mayor in. Would like the editor to report to an editorial board, including the Mayor, Town Council, and some residents.
- C. Keeping opinion out is the best thing.
- C. Does not think the newsletter is independent since it is paid for by Town taxes. The Mayor or any Council member should be able to express an opinion in the newsletter.
- C. Consider a page dedicated to columns but the rest of the newsletter should be informational.
- C. There is opinion in the newsletter, which can be found in the minutes.
- C. Has no problem with opinion, but stating what you believe other persons' opinions or motivation is problematic.
- C. It's a mistake to use opinions to do other than inform in the Town newsletter. It should be used to provide contact for information to people and to go beyond that, to argue a view point is not for the newsletter, a different forum should be used for that.
- Q. How do we voice our opinions and how do we talk about it?
- C. An editor ought to be able to hold the writers to the editorial guidelines and if the writer ignores this then it should be a Council matter.
- C. Is there a mechanism for the Mayor or any Council member, if the editor finds a problem, that there is another source, like an editorial board that could resolve the issue?

- C. Where is the most appropriate place for opinion and it might not be our charming little newsletter? Maybe in the newsletter but one page that says “this is opinion only”.
- C. In terms of the RFP, the criteria needs to be much more specific.
- C. The editor should not be a Town employee and they should be a Town resident.
- C. Should not be an elected official. Not sure that a Town employee couldn't do the job, since opinion may not be included, there is no reason to eliminate a Town employee.
- C. The list serve is an excellent resource for the Town.
- Q. Are there moonlighting policies that would prevent Town employees from taking additional employment?
- A. The personnel manual has moonlighting policies.

Conclusion

Mr. Hess pointed out that at the last Council meeting, a decision would be made on the topic of the newsletter by September 30, 2014. Mr. Thompson said that any written comments on this subject can be e-mailed to the Committee members.

Meeting adjourned: 8:25 p.m.