A virtual Work Session of the Oxford City Council was called to order by Mayor, Mike Smith on Tuesday, January 19, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. Council members participating were Jason Bracken, David Prytherch, Chantel Raghu, Bill Snavely and Edna Southard. Mr. Ellerbe joined a few minutes later.

Staff members participating were Doug Elliott, City Manager, Jessica Greene, Assistant City Manager, Mike Dreisbach, Service Director; Joe Newlin, Finance Director; Sam Perry, Community Development Director, John Jones, Police Chief; John Detherage, Fire Chief; Chris Conard, Law Director and Mary Ann Eaton, Clerk of Council.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Snavely moved to approve the agenda. Mr. Prytherch seconded. The motion passed by the following roll call:

AYE: Mr. Prytherch, Ms. Raghu, Mr. Snavely, Ms. Southard, Mr. Bracken
Mayor Smith (6)

NAY: None (0)

ABS: None (0)

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Work Session was for Council to discuss a draft Resolution prepared by Councilor Prytherch regarding a Commitment to Governance Guided by Strategic Planning.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Prytherch advised the draft Resolution was his attempt to capture on paper some of the direction he feels Council has been heading in in terms of developing an annual rhythm that will enable Council to move forward continuously. Mr. Prytherch noted he felt this Council has expressed a common desire to develop a strategic planning model looking backwards to see what was accomplished the year prior and setting goals in relation to long-range plans like the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Prytherch advised he felt Council was committed to reporting on their progress and to working with boards and commissions. Mr. Prytherch noted he felt Council has tried in recent years unevenly to figure out how to have those goals guide budget making in a process that can include the public and Council's input. Mr. Prytherch advised the Comprehensive Plan is the long-range plan that Council wants to make progress on although some of those things are years or decades long projects. Mr. Prytherch noted the smaller "gear" is what Council does over the course of a year.

Mr. Prytherch advised he felt Council had been moving in that direction although he hoped Council and staff could make a commitment. Mr. Prytherch noted he felt if Council and staff do not have a rhythm established for their annual smaller "gear" the things will not mesh. Mr. Prytherch turned the discussion over to staff.

Mr. Elliott advised Ms. Greene would provide a few slides noting he and Ms. Greene support many of the things mentioned in the draft Resolution. Mr. Elliott noted he would like to hear from the rest of Council. Mr. Elliott reminded Council of some of the issues in 2020 that interfered with the goals established early in 2020 such as dealing with Covid-19.

Mr. Greene shared her screen and advised whether Council goes forward with the Resolution or not she supports many of the things contained in it noting some of the things were on her "to-do" list in her communications role. Ms. Greene provided a slide titled "Put it to Work," noting the Comprehensive Plan needs to become a working document and staff needed to get in the habit of sharing with Council specific updates with metrics a few times per year and to reach out to citizens for updates annually with a deep dive every five years. Ms. Greene provided another slide and discussed a proposed timeline to accomplish certain tasks and asked for Council's feedback and discussion.

Mayor Smith advised he supported Ms. Greene's suggestions.

Mr. Snavely noted he felt Ms. Greene's suggestions were reasonable and inquired if a Resolution was actually necessary. Mr. Prytherch advised he would like an explicit commitment for example to a budget process that is inclusive. Mr. Prytherch noted whether it was in the form of a Resolution or a "handshake", he did not think it would make that much difference.

Ms. Raghu noted she felt this issue was a longtime coming and advised every year there was frustration with the budgetary process. Ms. Raghu noted she was fine with a Resolution or as laid out by Ms. Greene or something in between as long as it involves input from Council early on in the process. Ms. Raghu noted other cities have clear-cut flowcharts for the budgetary process, which are very transparent.

Mr. Ellerbe advised he felt the Resolution will provide the documentation to allow the necessary resources to be diverted to this particular initiative which he felt was a priority. Mr. Ellerbe noted Council sets goals and staff takes care of those goals within the budget. Mr. Ellerbe advised he felt individual projects should come through boards and commissions.

Ms. Southard advised she liked the proposal presented by Ms. Greene noting whether Council passed a Resolution or not she was fine with it. Ms. Southard noted she felt contingencies for unforeseen situations should be built into the document in whatever form the document takes.

Mr. Elliott advised much of the City spending goes towards existing programs, services and personnel noting there was not a lot left over for discretionary spending. Mr. Elliott referred to the process and noted he shares with Council the process he goes through with staff and then presents a budget to Council although there was noting to prevent Council from beginning a budget discussion at anytime. Mr. Elliott advised if Council wishes to include specific projects in the budget staff would have to figure out how to do those by cutting back on existing programs and services.

Mr. Prytherch advised he presented a draft Resolution because he wanted to see in one place all of the steps noting if a flowchart was posted on the City's website that Council commits to the public they are going to follow it would not make a difference to him. Mr. Prytherch noted he felt the document should be clear so it can be accountable to Council and show how much progress is being made on goals.

Ms. Greene advised when the City's new website was up and running these were the kind of things staff was hoping to show. Ms. Greene noted whether or not Council adopts a Resolution staff shares the same values and goals and will work in that direction.

Mr. Bracken noted he was in support of this and agrees with a lot of what Mr. Prytherch and Mr. Ellerbe have said. Mr. Bracken advised he totally trusts Ms. Greene and staff to move towards this if Council were not to make it explicit by Resolution although he felt it adds strength if it were made explicit.

Ms. Raghu advised this was about transparency and clarity noting it was also about equity. Ms. Raghu advised it has been challenging as some Councilors may find it easier to place something on the agenda compared to others. Ms. Raghu noted Council rules should apply equally to everyone and advised she felt the more this is laid out the more equitable it would be for everyone involved.

Ms. Southard noted this is planning for the future for a City that goes beyond the current Council and beyond the current City staff. Ms. Southard reiterated she liked the timeline presented by Ms. Greene and felt Council should move forward with it.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Southard moved to adjourn at 7:28 p.m. Mr. Snavely seconded. The motion passed by the following roll call:

AYE: Ms. Raghu, Ms. Southard, Mr. Snavely, Mr. Bracken, Mr. Ellerbe, Mr. Prytherch Mayor Smith (7)

NAY: None (0)

ABS: None (0)