

December 16, 2009

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY

The Committee on Public Health and Public Safety convened on December 16, 2009, with Chairman William White presiding and Committee Members Aldermen John Connolly and Rebekah Gewirtz also present and voting. Also present were Alderman Sean O'Donovan, Administrative Assistant Matt Dias, Personnel Director Jessie Baker, Volunteer Coordinator Rachel O'Leary, Superintendent of Inspectional Services George Landers, Commissioner of Public Works Stan Koty and Cindy Hickey from the Council on Aging and residents Lydia Costa and Claudia Morrow.

188134 - Program to serve seniors who own their homes with such services as property maintenance and snow removal, and

188384 - efforts to assist seniors and physically incapacitated citizens who reside on the even side of and whose driveways are plowed in all winter:

Commissioner Koty explained that the snow removal policy has been the same for years and will continue again this year. In the past, the city would assist homeowners with clearing snow from properties in cases of emergency, however now the vehicles used for snow plowing are too large to accommodate such requests. Mr. Koty assured the members that the DPW would act accordingly when a call is received regarding an emergency situation.

Ms. Hickey spoke about a program offered by the Council on Aging to assist senior citizens with snow shoveling. The council matches seniors with individuals who will shovel snow at reasonable prices and these individuals are paid directly by the seniors hiring them. The council performs a CORI check of any shoveler 18 years old and over and of any senior person requesting shoveling. If a senior has a verifiable financial situation making it difficult for him or her to pay the shoveler, the council may choose to waive the payment. Ms. Hickey noted that the program has been extended to disabled residents, from time to time, and monitored through the Council on Aging. Alderman O'Donovan requested the names of disabled Ward 5 residents who have requested assistance. Chairman White suggested placing a notice about the program on the city's cable channel as well as in the local print media.

Regarding the odd/even plowing situation, Ms. Hickey told the members that she receives calls on both sides of the issue from residents. Alderman O'Donovan asked if the odd/even plowing has been discussed with the Administration and Commissioner Koty replied that any such talks concerned the Fire Department and he pointed out that the city has more parking spaces on the odd side of streets. Chairman White stated that he believes some communities have instituted alternate side plowing to deal with the inequity.

188448 - update regarding the position of Volunteer Coordinator.

Ms. Baker introduced Rachel O'Leary as the city's new part-time Volunteer Coordinator. Ms. O'Leary brings 10 years experience to the position.

188528 – Issues regarding 515 Somerville Avenue:

Chairman White informed those present that a request was sent to Mr. Mark Copola, the owner of the property, who apparently had not received it yet. Mr. Landers said that he contacted the property owner 2 weeks ago and had property secured. The owner is experiencing problems including funding issues, damage to neighboring property and asbestos on the property. The property can't be graded until the DEP is satisfied with conditions there. The city granted a 6 month extension of the owner's permit because the 2-year window under the ZBA was about to expire and additional time was needed to correct the deficient conditions.

Lydia Costa, the abutting neighbor, explained that Mr. Copola obtained a permit and wasn't supposed to break the slab at the property, but did. Ms. Costa stated that the state shut Mr. Copola's operation down multiple times. Numerous violations have been recorded with regard to fire prevention regulations, etc., and the bank holding the note has been put on notice. The most recent contractor working on the site failed to disconnect the building's sprinkler system and as a result, brought down 3 walls of the building as well as the roof. Ms. Costa called OSPCD and asked for enforcement of all applicable regulations. According to Ms. Costa, the DEP's position is that they want the site cleaned up. As of now, the property is up for sale. Mr. Landers added that almost everything the Ms. Costa and her husband brought to the city's attention has come to fruition. Ms. Costa told the members that she has been keeping Alderman Heuston and the DEP apprised of development with the property. A full fuel tank was ruptured with construction equipment, putting lives in jeopardy and the Fire Department had to call the police to control the situation. It was at that point in time that the DEP took control of the site. Chairman White inquired about revoking the permit and his motion that a communication from the Public Health and Public Safety Committee be sent to the Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development asking that consideration be given to revoking the permit at 515 Somerville Avenue and that the Executive Director appear at the next meeting of the committee to discuss the situation, was approved.

Chairman White's motion that a communication be sent to Ms. Iris Davis at the DEP requesting that she appear at the next meeting of the Public Health and Public Safety Committee to discuss the situation at 515 Somerville Avenue, was approved. (Her phone # is 978-654-3200 x-3399)

The committee discussed matters before it and took action on the following item:

188384: Order - By Ald. O'Donovan, That the Commissioner of Public Works describe to this Board's Committee on Public Health and Safety all efforts to assist seniors and physically incapacitated citizens who reside on the even side of our streets, and whose driveways are plowed in all winter.

RECOMMENDATION: Should be placed on file

VOTE: Unanimous, 3 - 0 in favor

Alderman William A. White, Jr., Chairman
Committee on Public Health and Public Safety