

July 23, 2013

13-19

A special meeting of the Caribou City Council was held 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, July 23, 2013 in Council Chambers with the following members present: Mayor Gary Aiken, Deputy Mayor Kenneth G. Murchison, Jr., David Martin, Philip McDonough II, Joan L. Theriault, and David R. Genthner, Sr. Councilor Kouhoup arrived at 5:18 pm.

Mayor Aiken explained the purpose of the meeting was to hear from the public on the sale of City Parking Lots that were put out for bid.

Mayor Aiken opened the meeting to the public.

Hugh Kirkpatrick addressed the Council stating he agrees City expenses are too high and should be reduced and that he and other business owners would be happy to look at the budget with the Council. Mr. Kirkpatrick handed out the Urban Renewal Plan that was adopted in 1969 and Maine State Statutes Title 30, Chapter 203. He believes it would be illegal for the City Council to sell the parking lots associated with the Urban Renewal Plan. He stated the plan to sell the parking lots is blatantly anti-business and shows a mindset against business from the Council. He also compared property valuation on a per square foot basis of buildings in the downtown mall and buildings on Sweden Street outside of the Downtown Mall and stated the buildings in the downtown mall were being valued at a higher rate because of the free parking and if the council were to sell the parking lots the valuation of those buildings would decrease.

Sam Collins addressed the Council and stated many businesses located in that area because of the free parking that is offered. If the parking lots were to be sold he would ask for a revaluation of the buildings he owns in the Downtown Mall as the property would be less valuable. He stressed the City has been making great strides to become more business friendly and to be a Certified Business Friendly Community and we should move forward with more business friendly activities.

Colleen Duplissie addressed the Council and stated she bought her space for The Maine Dance Academy due to the free parking. Her business brings 200 families from other cities into our community on a weekly basis. If the parking lots were to be sold that would create a large safety issue for her students.

John Swanberg addressed the Council and stated he owns a building in the downtown area. He stated that as a practical matter of divvying up the costs of parking lot maintenance, if a group of business owners were to join together to buy the lots, would be extremely difficult. He said it would be hard to come up with a fair and equitable plan for sharing the costs amongst the businesses.

Wilfred Martin addressed the Council and stated the parking lots were designed for the urban renewal project and that a few years later the group deeded them to the City. He said the Council should have offered the lots for sale to the businesses rather than putting them out for bid. Mr. Martin asked about deed restrictions. City Manager Bleess stated the deed restrictions terminated in 1994. Mr. Martin asked if the City had the paperwork on the deeds. Manager Bleess informed him the City does have the paperwork. Mr. Martin stated it is not a good argument to make the City pay for the maintenance of the parking lots, but the City should give them to the businesses.

Dave Levesque addressed the Council and stated the main reason he decided to locate his business in Caribou was because of the free parking. The easier the City can make it for businesses the more likely they are to locate in Caribou.

Kirk St. Peter addressed the Council and said he was disappointed in the process and how it only will pit neighbor against neighbor. He asked why the parking lot on Herschel Street and the on-street parking on Sweden Street was not included. Councilor McDonough informed him that the Herschel Street parking lot has always been a parking lot and the Council wanted to keep that lot for public parking. Mr. St. Peter stated the asking price of \$180,500 for approximately 305 parking spaces did not seem reasonable.

Clinton St. Peter addressed the Council and stated he owned the Caribou Office Park. If a third party were to buy the parking lot it would leave him without access to his building. He said it is already tough getting tenants into his building and adding the burden of paying for the parking lots would make it that much harder.

Cheryl St. Peter addressed the Council and said that other people built and own buildings with parking lots, but those are all owned by the same person. Having multiple business owners all owning one parking lot does not make sense.

Philip St. Peter addressed the Council and informed them he owns One Vaughn Place and the parking lots at that building and maintains them. He said a private company could maintain the parking lots for cheaper than what it costs the City to maintain them.

Paul Camping addressed the Council and said that Caribou is a tough city to do business in. With this issue the Council has a delicate balancing act to perform. He believes that we are heading in the wrong direction as a community. He stated he thought selling the parking lots was the right thing to do, but now he knows the other side of the coin. He suggested Council look at privatizing the parking lot maintenance or a PILOT agreement with the businesses for the maintenance of them. He hopes an amicable solution to this issue.

Milo Haney addressed the Council and asked if this was a public meeting. Mayor Aiken informed him it was. Mr. Haney said we should have another meeting on this. He stated the City should downsize taxes and that the City is top heavy. He recommended the Council downsize departments to get in line with other cities around us.

Dave Levesque addressed the Council for a second time and said he is taxed highly already on the building and personal property taxes.

Carl Soderberg addressed the Council and informed them he is a building owner in the Downtown Mall. He owns a lot of construction equipment and pays a lot of taxes to the City. He asked how selling the parking lots would turn out.

Mayor Aiken said local businesses could band together and buy the parking lots. Mayor Aiken asked what the reply would be if we went to local businesses to ask for their help on this. Mayor Aiken also commented on how there is always a group of people that thinks whatever they are passionate about is very important, such as the snowmobile trail groomer, library or other City departments. Mayor Aiken also stated he hopes the business owners will come to the budget meetings to be held in October to help the Council out in the budget process.

Mr. Soderberg asked if the businesses didn't know this was coming how were they supposed to help the City out.

Dave Levesque addressed the Council for a third time and told the Council to look for ways to grow the City not just to cut everything.

Clinton St. Peter addressed the Council for a second time and said it was not a fair comparison to compare the library to public businesses. Mayor Aiken informed him it was not a comparison, but a

statement that people are passionate about various things the City does and the balancing act that is required by the Council in weighing all of the decisions.

Councilor Murchison stated he had traveled around the state recently and visited cities that have very little free parking and cities that have very ample free parking and how much easier it is to get around in and find places to park in cities that have free parking.

Councilor Murchison made a motion to put the bidding process on hold and to seek legal advice on the urban renewal questions that were raised earlier. Councilor McDonough seconded. (4 yes, 1 No Martin) So voted.

Mayor Aiken reminded the audience that the City is at the bottom of the totem pole when it comes to government. The state can balance, and has balanced, the state budget by simply not paying the Cities the Revenue Sharing they are supposed to. This causes many tough decisions to be made on the city level

There being no further discussion the meeting was declared adjourned.

Austin Bless, City Manager