



The Biddeford Beat

CITY OF BIDDEFORD WEEKLY NEWSLETTER | TUESDAY, OCT 11, 2016

Volume 16.7

A1

Special addition from Employee & Volunteer Edition (A4):
Code Enforcement Recognition

Special Congratulations (A4):
Congratulations to 3rd Quarter New Hires

Sommesville Bridge Rededicated

A number of years ago, the Cities of Biddeford and Saco rededicated the Sommesville Bridge that spans the Saco River between the two Cities. The bridge extends from Pine Street in Biddeford to Market Street in Saco. The Cities added a dedication to Mr. Robert Boilard for his many years of advocating for and protecting the Saco River. *(continued on A2)*

Charter Questions Part II

We recently shared with you in previous weeks that 19 questions will be on the local municipal ballot for Biddeford citizens to consider. These questions are directly related to the work the Charter Commission performed over the last year. Unless you are a local government junkie, you might not know what a 'City Charter' is. In this article, we will try to explain what the Charter is and how it impacts your daily life.

The Charter creates the rules by which the elected and appointed officials in the community must operate. For example, the Charter establishes the annual budget approval process. It dictates items such as the length of an elected official's term and when the elections will take place. Some have referred to charters as the 'Constitution' of the community. *(Continued on A3)*

Downtown Parking

In May, a draft report was issued to the City Council and the Planning Board regarding parking in the downtown. A copy of that draft report, 'Biddeford Public Parking: An Analysis of the Real Costs of Free Parking and Implications on Downtown Design,' is available. We would encourage you to read the entire report at your convenience [click here](#). *(continued on A5)*

City Received \$250K Grant to Reduce Crime

It's the City's goal to decrease criminal activity so the younger generation doesn't carry this unwanted behavior forward. If the trend of generational crime continues it could drive our community to the point of no return.

Through a Grant we have added a third officer to our Street Crimes Unit. This unit deals with quality of life issues that range from local drugs, disorderly housing, domestic violence, drug trafficking and other issues that plague our community. *(continued on A2)*

Reminder: Strategic Planning Steering Committee

A Strategic Planning Steering Committee has been in full force as of August 2016 and always has the door open to the public for feedback on how best to implement a strategy to develop and preserve the character of the City. Join us at the next meeting, Thursday, October 13, 2016 at City Hall's 2nd floor conference room.

For more information and schedule of meetings please visit our webpage, [click here](#).

Apartment Building Status Update

The City of Biddeford has approximately 650 properties that fall within Life Safety Standard criteria. As of September 30, 2016 the following has been completed:

- 318 Requests have gone out
- 111 Full Inspections Completed
- 52 Apartment Buildings Scheduled for Inspection
- 75 Meeting with Landlords

Please call Code Enforcement for details 207-284-9236.

(continued from AI Grant)

Our Criminal Detective division is also busy dealing with more complex crimes. Another issue that we are dealing with is domestic violence. We recognize that this crime touches everyone. It is the job of the criminal justice system to protect, support and serve our communities. Most citizens do not learn about the criminal justice system until they've become victims of crime, which is the worst possible time to try to understand the complexities and responsibilities of each of the "players" in the system.

This issue is compounded when the crime is one of intimate violence. Domestic violence cases require police officers, prosecutors, probation officers, Caring Unlimited and Court Advocates Department of Human/Health working in close collaboration in the support of victims and holding the perpetrator accountable. This is a community issue that involves more than just the victim and perpetrator. It is imperative that we have an officer specially assigned to investigate and follow-up on all domestic violence arrests, calls for service and field questions about how to break the cycle of violence.

Our approach to dealing with the two underlining issues is to assign an officer to our Street Crimes Unit and to Domestic Violence investigations. This will not only encompass community involvement but many agencies, such as Caring Unlimited (DV group), Federal Drug Enforcement, Maine Drug Enforcement, Violent Crimes Task Force (US Marshals), Courts, Probation & Parole and other agencies that we currently work with on a daily basis.

The City needs to help instill confidence in our community knowing when they take the initiative to call police we will be there for them. Although we have established bonds within our community, we want to devote more time within the community to meeting with residents and business owners. Community stakeholders are essential to achieving this goal. Community engagement involves trust and this is possible with two-way communication and action.

The City will continue to fully implement Community Oriented Policing in Biddeford in hopes that we can improve the community's trust in the police and reduce crime, through these interactions. For this to work it will take a community that involves all aspects public service. The Biddeford Police Department needs to work not only on the crime but with our community relations. We need to find a way to better incorporate our community in resolving issues that the community feels are important, to create a better quality of life while building the trust with the Biddeford Police.

(continued from AI Sommesville Bridge)

Mr. Boilard was instrumental in getting the State Legislature to create the Saco River Corridor Commission and was a steward for this great river for many years of his life. A plaque was installed on the bridge commemorating this dedication. With the recent bridge replacement the plaque was removed, the new bridge was constructed and the Cities reinstated the plaque on Tuesday, October 4, 2016 with Mayor Casavant, Mayor Michaud and members of Mr. Boilard's family present.

Unfortunately, Mr. Boilard passed away approximately two and a half years ago but we are sure he was looking down on the new bridge and his family with a great smile on his face and a sense of appreciation.

Thanks again Bob, for a job well done.



*"Somesville Bridge"
Rededication of Plaque*

continued from AI Charter Questions)

The Charter can only be changed by the voters in the community. It is for this reason that you will be asked to consider the [19 Charter Commission recommendations](#). You can find additional information about the Charter Commission's work on our website, [click here](#).

If all of the 19 questions are approved by the voters, the following changes would be made to the way the City current operates:

MAYOR:

- The chief executive of the City of Biddeford shall be the Mayor, with the exception of the Department of Education.
- The Mayor shall propose city policy, for City Council's consideration.
- The Mayor will not hold any other elected city, county, state or federal office.

CITY COUNCIL:

- The City Council shall serve as the Municipal Officers, and be composed of the nine City Councilors.
- Compensation for each city councilor shall be at the rate of \$150 per month, not to exceed \$1,800 per year. Council President shall receive an extra \$25 per month, not to exceed 300 per year.
- Council vacancy shall occur if a member violates any part or section from the whole of the Charter.
- The City Council will create an ordinance and establish procedures to allow the public to address the City Council at all council meetings. Said ordinance will also establish procedures to allow any City Councilor (with concurrence of at least one other city councilor) the authority to place any item on the agenda (on a date of his/her choice).

CITY MANAGER:

- City Manager shall prepare/submit the annual municipal budget, to include a capital improvement 5 year budget plan.
- The City Manager shall establish residence within the City of Biddeford within six months from the date of hire, unless otherwise approved by the City Council.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

- School Committee members shall receive compensation at the rate of \$100 per month, not to exceed \$1,200 per year.
- Superintendent of Schools shall establish residence within the City of Biddeford within six months of being hired, unless otherwise approved by the School Committee.
- The School Committee budget submitted to the City Council, whose decision on the budget shall be final; subject to MRSA 20, 1487 & 2307, School Budget Validation Vote, unless Biddeford voters wish to discontinue the School Budget Validation process by public vote.
- A School Committee vacancy shall occur in the event of the employment of a member by the City of Biddeford or the School Department as an employee or agent.

POLICE & FIRE COMMISSIONS:

- Police Commission will be deleted from the current City Charter, and replace with the following: POLICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE. The City Council shall create an ordinance to establish a Police Advisory Committee in the Code of Ordinance.
- Fire Commission will be deleted from the current City Charter, and replace with the following: FIRE ADVISORY COMMITTEE. The City Council shall create an ordinance to establish a Fire Advisory Committee in the code of ordinance.

continued from A1, A3 Charter Questions)

ALL OTHER:

- Petition for recall of the Mayor, Councilor–At–Large and School Committee Member must be signed by not less than 15% of the registered voters from the City who voted in the previous Gubernatorial Election.
- In the case of a majority vote for the recall of the Mayor, City Council or School Committee Member, such official shall be removed. Thereafter, a vacancy shall be declared in that office.
- The City Council, by ordinance, may create, change and abolish offices, departments, and agencies other than the offices, departments, and agencies established by the Charter.
- All residential and commercial properties within the City shall be reevaluated by a total city wide valuation every ten years; a statistical update every five years, along with in-house partial updates when needed to meet State requirements. The City will budget/appropriate (every budget year) a reserve equal to one tenth of the cost of a total City wide valuation. This appropriation will also cover the cost of the statistical update every five years.
- The City will create an ordinance to establish the powers and duties of the Harbor Master in accordance with MRSA Title 38, Chapter 1, Sub-chapter.
- The Code of Ordinance shall be revised and amended as necessary and within nine months of this revised Charter.
- In the event the City Council fails to adopt a budget by the beginning of the fiscal year, the proposed budget as presented by the City Manager shall automatically become the city budget for the new fiscal year.
- The City Manager shall prepare and submit to the Budget Committee, the Mayor, and the City Council a five (5) year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) at the second regular meeting of the City Council in November of each year. Funds may be transferred from one department to another provided the resolution authorizing the transfer is adopted by 2/3rd of the entire City Council and the vote is recorded.
- General meetings of citizens; a moderator will be selected by the assembled body.
- City boards/commissions/committee meetings shall be publicized and duly posted on the central bulletin board at City Hall, at least 24 hours prior to the meeting and shall produce results of the meeting.
- In the case of vacancies, if the Mayor has not filled the vacancy within thirty days, the Council President shall proceed to fill the vacancy.

Code Enforcement Recognition Award

By Roby Fecteau, Code Enforcement/Health Officer

The Biddeford Code Office would like to recognize Danielle Charron. Danielle has been employed by the City of Biddeford for 13 years and her whole career has been in the Codes Office. Her talent and attitude has kept the office together through very trying times when employees have come and gone.

Her attitude and professional demeanor has demonstrated good quality customer service even in difficult situations. The City of Biddeford is grateful to Danielle as an employee.

Congratulations to 3rd Quarter New Hires

- Allison Kennedy – Cub Care Counselor
- Andrea Fagan – Executive Assistant to Mayor, City Mgr and COO
- Carol Demeule – Teen Center Supervisor
- Cathy Eccleston – Cub Care Counselor
- Devon Spates – Police Officer
- Greg Higgins – Life Safety Codes Investigator
- James Everson – Police Planner
- Jeffrey Moulton – Laborer, Public Works
- Justin Lavertu – Police Officer
- Kylie Williams – Cub Care Counselor
- Nikki Billingslea – Cub Care Director
- Oscar Corral – Firefighter/Paramedic
- Peter Gilman –Police Officer
- Samantha Bogar – Administrative Assistant, Assessing
- Scott Welton – Life Safety Codes Investigator
- Sharon Buonanno – Cub Care Counselor
- Taylor Richardson – Firefighter/Paramedic

(continued from A1 Parking)

The Executive Summary and Conclusion sections of the draft parking report are reprinted here for your convenience.

Executive Summary

Downtown revitalization is complex. There is an effective role for municipal government in the process. When successfully done, the policy decisions made by municipal leaders will help guide and shape the private sector investments. Those policy decisions will shape the economics of downtown especially who pays and who benefits from the policies.

Parking policy is one of the main influences in urban areas. Contrary to popular belief, 'free parking' is anything but free. Free parking is free to the consumer of the space. It is not at all free to those who pay the bills in the community. In the case of Biddeford, it is the property taxpayers. Every penny of the estimated cost is paid for by property taxpayers whether the taxpayer ever parks their vehicles in downtown or not. At the same time, the out of town employees that park in the downtown are indeed getting the parking space free of charge.

Parking policy goes beyond dollars and sense. Many do not understand the complex relationship between parking, pedestrians, and traffic within a downtown. All of these either help or hurt to create energy, excitement and a unique experience for the visitor. No matter how hard the community or private sector tries, surface parking lots will never be a contributor to the downtown experience. It is the experience that will make Biddeford's historical downtown the envy of so many others or just another mill community's downtown. Policy decisions will significantly determine the future.

The City has invested significantly in previous reports to determine the *demand* of parking in the future. The two principle reports are found on the City's web site in their entirety. For the purpose of understanding the long term costs associated with meeting the projected demand, those numbers were assumed to be accurate. The costs, both in terms of economics and design implications, whether done by the private sector or the public sector, are essentially the same. The ability to reduce and guide the impacts appropriately when combined with the economic return to the City from property tax revenues, makes the municipality the more efficient and appropriate entity to address parking demand.

Conclusion

A thriving and growing downtown is a wonderful thing. Not only is Biddeford's downtown an example but it is also in transition of significance. It has gained recognition as the place to invest, to visit and to become part of it. All of this comes with its challenges. The most notable is the community's need to address the parking policy. Ironically, a lack of a parking policy is still a policy. Most will argue that no policy is the worse kind of policy and has terrible implications for the future of the downtown. Some of those implications, such as tearing down buildings by the private sector, are nearly impossible to reverse.

Free parking is not free. Whether one looks at the national experts on the issue or simply looks at internally driven numbers for the City of Biddeford contained in the report, the property taxpayers in the community are paying for the privileges of people in the downtown to park free. If you are a property taxpayer and you use one of the free spots on a fairly regular basis, you probably see the current policy as one that works for you. On the other hand, if you seldom park in the downtown and pay taxes in the community, the non-residents that get to park free appreciate your financial contribution to their bottom line.

Parking policy in urban areas are more complex than who is paying for the parking. It will dictate whether the private sector will remove structures to create parking. It will determine whether there will be convenient parking for shoppers. It will help to determine the 'flow, feel and fabric' of the downtown. Successful downtowns have figured out that parking needs to be an integral part of downtown design.

Surface parking lots are 'anti-downtown.' People go to downtowns for the energy and excitement. No matter how hard one tries, you cannot create a surface parking lot that provides energy and excitement. If they do, it is probably negative energy and excitement. They take away buildings, green space and parks that do contribute positively to the 'experience'.

A stated parking policy, whatever it might be, should be established. While complex in its implications, a better understanding of the complexities is necessary. Public engagement and better understanding by all stake holders is necessary to develop a policy that will not only serve those in the downtown area but also those that are currently paying for the free parking.