

MINUTES

FACILITIES COMMITTEE MEETING

5:30 P. M., FEBRUARY 24, 2021

A/V CONFERENCE ROOM

Jennifer Pharr, Chairperson, called the meeting of the Charleston City Council Committee on Facilities to order at 5:30p.m., FEBRUARY 24, 2020, in the Audio/Visual Room in City Hall.

Committee Members Present:

Jennifer Pharr, Chair
Courtney Persinger
Naomi Bays
Brady Campbell
Sam Minardi
Chad Robinson
Shannon Snodgrass

1. Approval of Previous Minutes – Councilmember Campbell moved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on 3-2-2020. Councilmember Minardi seconded. There was no objection and the minutes were approved.

2. Discussion with Current Tenants – Councilmember Campbell stated that in late December, Jamie Dickenson (owner of Yoga Power) reached out to him with complaints and concerns about 601 Morris Street. During the colder weather, people had been utilizing the building to do drugs, sleep, etc., as well as damaging and vandalizing the building. He began working with the Administration with ideas of how to safeguard the building. For instance, there used to be a feature that would lock the elevator from accessing a floor during off hours.

Dickenson added that she is in the 5th year of her lease. When she first moved in, the building was full and well kept. Now there are many vacancies. When they leave at night, her business locks the stairwell doors and bathrooms. She added that the problems really started in November. The group from the University of Charleston was loud and disruptive to her business. She met with the Director of General Services to walk with him around the building and asked why the outside doors couldn't be locked. Additionally, they have found doors propped open, people sleeping in the stairwells and needles in the stairwells. She felt like the majority of the problems could be fixed if the security systems that are in place were implemented properly.

Councilmember Campbell shared pictures with the Committee taken during his recent trip to the building that showed vandalism, unsanitary conditions, burn marks and bodily

fluids in the stairwells. He noted that anyone can access the basement, which contains valuable equipment, the electrical system, internet for the building and the security systems for the building. He noted broken sewage pipes and bags of keys left by the previous tenants.

Councilmember Snodgrass asked how the building got to this point, and if there was a maintenance schedule etc. City Manager, Jonathan Storage, replied that there is a dedicated custodial staff assigned to the building. However, the City had recently struggled to fill a retirement within that Department, and its resources were stretched thin. They have recently filled that vacancy, so there will now be someone back to full time at the Morris Building. He added that some of those issues had already been addressed. Storage stated that the University of Charleston Baseball team has never had authority from the City to utilize any of the baseball facilities there, adding that issue has been remedied. The City has reached out to a security firm to conduct an assessment of the doors and other security systems. The CPD has dedicated some of their resources to patrol the building during the evening and night. The Police Academy Association and the NOA group will also be relocated to the first floor of that building. He added that they are also consulting with a real estate agent about marketing the open vacancies. He will be getting in touch with the General Maintenance manager to discuss how to correct issues such as securing access to the basement or access to keys left.

Deb Weinstein, from the YWCA (that occupies the Mel Wolfe and Sojourner's buildings), stated that they have had a good relationship with the City; the General Maintenance Manager has been very helpful. There has been a drug issue at Sojourner's, as opposed to the Mel Wolfe facility which is completely fenced. In early 2017, needles and drugs were being snuck into the Sojourner's facility. They have implemented periodic searched with drug dogs as well as thorough bag searches upon entry to the building.

Councilmember Robinson asked if the issues with Morris Street Building are recent, due to Covid-19 and lack of baseball games being played. Dickenson replied that the building was very active when the baseball team was there, and there was always a police presence during baseball games. She started to notice problems after the team left the building. There have always been problems with the outside doors being open. Mayor Goodwin added that they have been working on keeping baseball in the City, and will have an announcement the following day.

Councilmember Minardi asked Weinstein if there had been any incidents in which an employee or volunteer had been stuck with a needle, and had there been an increase in needle and drug use during the pandemic. Weinstein replied that there was a definite increase in 2017, adding that it has been consistently bad since. They refer their clients with addiction to Health Right. She was aware of at least one incident in which someone working on their duct work was stuck by a needle.

Councilmember Snodgrass added that she hoped they can do better, and asked if there

was an action plan to follow up with tenants. Mayor Goodwin added that, in addition to Storage's previous statement, she will be there every week and they will be given a written report. Dickenson added that she was appreciative of the City's response. Weinstein added that the Mayor does not need to visit their facilities every week; their relationship with the City is very positive and there have been no concerns.

Councilmember Robinson added that the problem will most likely resolve itself with increased activity in the building. They need to ensure that the building is cleaned up and safe for the tenants.

3. Discussions of Current City Leases – Executive Session -

Councilmember Bays motioned to move into executive session due to the discussion of City leases being a sensitive matter. Councilmember Snodgrass seconded the motion. With no objection, the Committee moved into Executive Session.

Councilmember Bays motioned to leave Executive Session. Councilmember Snodgrass seconded the motion. With no objection, the Committee ended the Executive Session.

4. Old Business/ New Business –

Councilmember Pharr announced that the Committee had returned from Executive Session.

Councilmember Minardi motioned to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned.