



CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS

City Council Meeting

June 9, 2023

City Council Room
Special City Council Meeting focusing
on Homeless Shelter and Services

 Print

4:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER

ROLL CALL

SALUTE TO FLAG

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD / 15 MINUTES

PRESENTATION(S):

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

CONSENT AGENDA

MAYOR'S DEPARTMENT

1. [Discussion and Vote: Authorization for Mayor to Sign Contract with RISE for Homeless Shelter Services](#)

ACCOUNTS DEPARTMENT

1. [Award of Bid: RISE Contract for Homeless Shelter Services](#)

FINANCE DEPARTMENT

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENT

SUPERVISORS

ADJOURN



June 9, 2023

CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS
City Council Meeting Room
474 Broadway
4:00 PM

PRESENT:

Ron Kim, Mayor
Dillon Moran, Commissioner of Accounts
Minita Sanghvi, Commissioner of Finance
Jim Montagnino, Commissioner of DPS
Jason Golub, Commissioner of DPW

STAFF PRESENT:

Angela Rella, Deputy Mayor
Stacy Connors, Deputy Commissioner of Accounts
Joseph O'Neill, Deputy Commissioner of DPW
Jason Tetu, Deputy Commissioner of DPS
Anthony Izzo, City Attorney
Michael Philips, Assistant City Attorney

STAFF EXCUSED:

Heather Crocker, Deputy Commissioner of Finance

RECORDING OF PROCEEDINGS

The proceedings of the meeting were taped for the benefit of the secretary and public record. Because the minutes are not a verbatim record of the proceedings, the minutes are not a word-for-word transcript.

Call To Order

Mayor Kim called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m.

Roll Call

Kim – Aye
Sanghvi – Aye
Golub – Aye
Montagnino – Aye
Moran – Aye

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Kim reminded the audience there is one (1) rule and three (3) suggestions: each speaker would have four (4) minutes to speak. Kim suggested the audience remember they are members of a community speaking to public members of that same community, be kind, because kindness is never wasted, be factual because accuracy and truth are the foundations of our democracy.

Sherri Grinter, of Saratoga Springs, gave thanks and congratulated the City and all involved in the hard work to get to the point where the City is voting on homeless shelter services. Grinter stated eighteen years ago the police were instructed to cut up the tents of the homeless. Grinter recommended the shelter to consider to dissolve incidences and stop fights before they evolve. Grinter stated when an incident gets out of control the tendency is to ban all involved from the shelter for the entire season. Grinter stated a panel should be developed to discuss and vote whether a resident is banned from the facility. Grinter stated it would be better to direct the offender to receive mental health rather than turn them away from the housing facility. Grinter stated the unhoused cannot take more of being pushed away and told they are no good.

Dan Breheny, of Hamilton Street, Saratoga Springs, stated he lived in one of the closest homes to the proposed RISE shelter. Breheny stated he is not demonizing the homeless population, but rather supports a facility for them to live. Breheny stated he works within the social service field and appreciates the City's efforts. Breheny stated his main concern is the speed the project is going forward. Breheny stated to understand the cause leading to the homeless crisis and feels the project is moving quickly after the bid for the services had just been opened on May 30, 2023, and the proposal made public soon after. Breheny stated the speed of the decision to vote and approve the proposal does not lend itself to the amount of scrutiny that is required in the review process, of the proposal, by the City. Breheny stated there are a lot of details that are important to those that live near the proposed shelter. Breheny stated there had been a lot of problems Shelter of Saratoga ("S.O.S.") had when operating the Code Blue shelter at the same location. Breheny stated he would think if this project was in view of the Council Members' homes, the Council would seek more scrutiny.

Brendon Henderson, of Saratoga Springs, stated to operate a business on South Broadway for the past three (3) years. Henderson stated to support helping the most vulnerable people in society. Henderson stated South Broadway business-owners are effected with the Code Blue shelter being so near. Henderson stated there had been a lot of crazy incidences in and around his storefront. Henderson stated it to be wise for the City to allocate funds for a task force to work with local businesses regarding the incidences they run into with the homeless community, which may not require a police presence. Henderson stated there are trespassing, verbal and physical fights, drinking and drug issues. Henderson described an incident in which a naked man violently thrashed themselves in the snow and bushes and ran into the building smashing their fists into the building.

Mayor Kim stated there would be good reason to bring together business-owners and residents of the South Broadway neighborhoods to have a monthly conversation. Kim stated it would be prudent to stay on top of the issues being described. Kim stated the City had been facing challenges regarding the unhoused community and does not want community members to have to face the burdens described issues without support from the City. Kim stated this to be the first time the City had a fulltime homeless shelter and monthly meeting with residents and business to receive the attention warranted to discuss issues that arise and have an active dialog would make sense while the program is rolling out.

Aileen Paris, of Hamilton Street, Saratoga Springs, stated all in the neighborhood near the proposed shelter location have had some type of experience with the homeless community that frequent RISE. Paris stated to have had a thousand dollar bicycle stolen from her enclosed porch. Paris stated to have had chased the person who had stolen the bike and retrieved it from one of the homeless population. Paris stated there to be frequent screaming, yelling and fighting happening in the neighborhood, which Paris described as probably due to mental or alcohol and drug issues. Paris stated to have volunteered at another shelter and is not against shelters, in general. Paris stated there are endless calls to the police to come to the area. Paris stated the area lends itself to a homeless encampment, which was fine until more and more people would come and fights would break out. Paris stated to be open to a monthly meeting partnership and attention is required to be paid to the area.

Sam Brewer, of Lake Avenue, Saratoga Springs, stated to be concerned about the safety plan within the bid package submitted by RISE. Brewer stated the safety plan to be woefully deficient as it pertains to the relation of the staff and guests within the homeless shelter operated with City funding. Brewer stated a homeless shelter in Vermont had an incident, which in 2023 a homeless resident purchased a hatchet and went back to the homeless shelter and hacked her to death. Brewer stated the Vermont shelter did not have a safety policy in place. Brewer offered the Council training in the art of survival involving creating distance between the person and the threat. Brewer stated the Council is insistent on creating and allowing an additional threat come into our community and the Council would learn from their mistakes on their own. Brewer stated the vote on the homeless shelter would follow the Council Members for the rest of their lives. Brewer stated the Council would reap what they sow with any mistakes they make; stating their actions would be a failure to protect the people their entrusted to protect. Brewer stated the RISE safety policy to be deficient and stated he would like to see it revised.

Sybil Newell, Executive Director of RISE, of Saratoga Springs, stated the RISE had been working diligently to bring about a program to get people of living on the streets. Newell, stated the policy and procedures of RISE to be used at the shelter are based off the guidelines of the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Services for Certified Shelters. Newell stated the proposed shelter would not be a certified shelter, but would run under the same policy, procedures and safety as certified shelters are run. Newell stated the RISE response to the City's Request for Proposal ("RFP") had not been the complete policy and procedure manual, but a brief outline had been submitted. Newell stated RISE had 45 years of experience of running 24/7 staffed programs for individuals who have mental health concerns or substance-use disorders to ensure the safety of staff and residents.

Mayor Kim asked Sybil Newell whether she would be open to attend or provide a staff member to the Mayor's Meeting of business-owners and residents of the South Broadway area. Newell stated she would ensure attendance of a member of RISE to the Mayor's Meetings.

Mayor Kim closed the Public Hearing at 4:19 p.m.

ACCOUNTS DEPARTMENT

Commissioner Moran stated before he moved onto the Award of Bid he would address a statement he made during the last City Council Meeting. Moran stated a conversation was had about the treatment of an individual coming to the police department to answer a subpoena. Moran stated he had made the statement the individual had been slammed against the wall by SSPD. Moran stated his statement had been hyperbolic and he apologized for choosing the wrong words. Moran stated the Commissioner of Public Safety had told the Council that the individual being discussed was not being arrested. Moran stated when an individual is put against the wall, frisked and handcuffed, it appears, to him, the person is being arrested. Moran stated any individual treated in the described manner would feel the same. Moran stated if there is question why members of the community are expressing their frustrated while at City Council Meetings, it's because of the way they are being treated. Moran stated to be sorry for any of the words he said that negatively affected the men and women of the SSPD.

1. Award of Bid: RISE Contract for Homeless Shelter Services

Commissioner Sanghvi stated her office had been questioned about the quick movement on the humanity crisis. Sanghvi stated homelessness is not just an issue for Saratoga Springs, but is happening throughout the country. Sanghvi stated since Code Blue has ended for the season the homeless population has nowhere to go. Sanghvi stated private donors and organizations have stepped in to assist and provide resources enabling the City to act. Sanghvi stated the homeless shelter services proposed is a temporary solution and the Mayor's Homelessness Task Force is working on a permanent solution. Sanghvi stated the homeless issue is usually addressed at the county level in most areas. Sanghvi stated Saratoga County has a budget in the amount of \$378 million with an unassigned fund balance in the amount of \$61.6 million. Sanghvi stated the county's unassigned balance is larger than the entire City Budget. Sanghvi stated the county has more mental health and addiction resources to assist in the homeless issue than the City of Saratoga Springs. Sanghvi stated the county could do a lot more and urged the Saratoga County Supervisors to do a lot more to advocate for assistance of the City's homeless issues. Sanghvi stated Code Blue is a mandated program by the state and not financially provided for directly by the county. Sanghvi stated the City is funding the program with \$239,385.00 from the fund balance, because the City funds are to be in good shape. Sanghvi stated in future years the Finance Department would create an assignment in order to use the monies from the City's allocated portion of the NYS opioid settlement. Sanghvi stated it is time for Saratoga County to acknowledge their role in assisting Saratoga Springs with their homeless issues. Sanghvi stated if the money being supplied now by the City is not enough then the Mayor's Office would use monies earmarked for not-for-profit grants and the Finance Department will use their monies earmarked for participatory budgeting to fund the homeless shelter service initiative. Sanghvi stated the humanitarian crisis requires the City to take the steps they are taking without undue burden on taxpayers. Sanghvi stated a balanced budget is an important and moral document and this effort demonstrates our values as a community.

Commissioner Moran moved and Mayor Kim seconded the Award of Bid to RISE in the amount not to exceed \$239,385.00 for 2023.

Ayes – All

5 – 0

Motion carried.

MAYOR'S DEPARTMENT

1. Discussion and Vote: Authorization for Mayor to Sign Contract with RISE for Homeless Shelter Services

Mayor Kim stated the journey to a homeless shelter within the City of Saratoga Springs started with the Woodlawn Avenue garage. Kim stated when he began as Commissioner of Public Safety the issue of homelessness in Saratoga Springs was not as prevalent as it is now. Kim stated in rural areas homeless people would appear as campers. Kim stated as the City has developed there are less places to camp. Kim stated as time went on the Woodlawn Ave garage began to turn into an area of the City where the homeless population would congregate. Kim stated to share in the same objectives as Commissioner Sanghvi in making sure the county steps up in their obligation to the City regarding homeless services. Kim stated the City is at risk with the Woodlawn Avenue garage continued use of the homeless in the manner it has been. Kim stated the Senior Center on Williams Street had been discussed to be used as a homeless shelter months after the 2021 administration came into office. Kim stated he had, at the time, questioned whether those who brought the proposal to the City had assessed how the location would be received by the public. Kim stated it became clear of the public's reception of the homeless shelter location soon after the October 2022 announcement of the location. Kim stated soon after, the Mayor announced the Mayor's Homelessness Task Force. Kim stated Tom Roohan had come forward and has headed the task force and the task force has done a wonderful job. Kim stated the task force has had to face very difficult issues while tasked to determine whether the City required a low-barrier 24/7 year-round shelter facility and identify a location and agency that could provide their requirements. Kim stated the task force would provide a report to the Council in July. Kim stated it to be evident there is not a readymade existing building within the City to facilitate the long-term needs of the City. Kim stated the City of Saratoga Springs is the focus of the county's homelessness problems and the City is not getting adequate support from the county.

Mayor Kim stated Sonny and Julie Bonacio, former Mayor Meg Kelly, and RISE had stepped in to assist the City with the issues it faced with homelessness services, because the City cannot tolerate the inhumanity of the issues. Kim stated the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness had determined it to be a two year project to achieve a permanent shelter. Kim stated the City would have to locate a site, financing and constructing a building would be need to be acquire. Kim stated the City had moved quickly on the homeless shelter services because the opportunity had been presented by those in the community that love the community and had stepped in and helped. Kim stated the City has dedicated \$239,385 and the Bonacio's had already spent \$100,000.00 on their commitment. Kim stated it to be a historic time and great relief for the City in moving forward with this project. Kim stated in the next months the City will engage in communication with the state, county, and private citizens to assist in overcoming the homelessness challenges the City and community face.

Commissioner Moran stated the generous and philanthropic nature of The Bonacio Family is to be recognized and acknowledged.

Mayor Kim moved and Commissioner Moran seconded to authorize the Mayor to sign the contract with RISE for homeless shelter services.

Ayes – All

5 – 0

Motion carried.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Sanghvi moved and Commissioner Moran seconded to adjourn the meeting at 4:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Brindisi
Assistant City Clerk

Approved: June 20, 2023
Vote: 5 – 0