

## **MINUTES**

Ad-Hoc Committee to Review Fees

May 2, 2022 / 5:15 PM

City Wide Community Center, Harriet Dame Auditorium / 14 Canterbury Road

**In Attendance:** City Councilors – Byron Champlin (Chair), Nathan Fennessy, and Mayor Jim Bouley; City Staff – Brian LeBrun, Deputy City Manager - Finance; David Gill, Parks & Recreation Director; and Crayton Brubaker, Community Development Specialist.

**Excused:** City Councilor Paula McLaughlin

**Public:** Councilor Candace Bouchard, Ward 9; Clement Kigugu, Overcomers Refugees Services; Salvatore Prizio, Capitol Center for the Arts; Jessica Livingston, Multicultural Festival; Fisto Ndayishimiye, Importance TV; Charm Camacho, Project S.T.O.R.Y.; Steven Garside, Friends of Concord Crew; Lidia Yen, Change for Concord; Sindy Chown, Renter of CWCC/West Street Ward House; Sheila Knight, Daughters of the American Republic (DAR) - Buntin-Rumford Webster Chapter; Nancee Donovan, DAR - Buntin-Rumford Webster Chapter; Norma Milne, DAR - Buntin-Rumford Webster Chapter

- 1) **Call to Order:** Chairman Champlin called the meeting to order at 5:18 PM.
- 2) **Approval of Minutes:** Councilor Fennessy moved to adopt the minutes of the April 4, 2022 meeting. The motion was seconded by Mayor Bouley and passed with a unanimous voice vote.
- 3) **Public Forum Regarding Community Center Use/Costs:** Councilor Champlin opened the public meeting and emphasized wanting the discussion to be an open forum and conversational. He introduced the committee members and City staff present at the meeting. Then, attendees each introduced themselves and what organization they were representing.

Councilor Champlin briefly outlined the purpose of the committee, which is to review fees across the City, including the use of public facilities like the City-Wide Community Center (CWCC). Councilor Champlin indicated that the committee wanted to get feedback, assess user experience at the CWCC, increase the use of the facility while meeting the needs of the community.

Mayor Bouley indicated he wants the City to remove barriers that prevent organizations from thriving and ensure that the CWCC is accessible and used.

Ms. Norma Milne asked what the current use of the CWCC is and where the City wants it to be. Mr. David Gill discussed the history of the facility and the current status of the CWCC. He indicated that the facility is busy year-round, especially in the summer because of programming.

Ms. Jessica Livingston asked if the CWCC was a community center or an event rental facility. Councilor Champlin expressed that the CWCC was built with and is maintained by public funding and is for groups within the community. Ms. Livingston asked why groups have to pay if the CWCC is already funded by taxes. Councilor Champlin explained the

current philosophy of why the City charges but noted that the goal is to explore reducing or eliminating charges.

Ms. Nancee Donovan discussed her experience taking a class at the CWCC being free with the option to donate to the instructor.

Mr. Salvatore Prizio asked if there is enough revenue coming into the City so that the most vulnerable communities could use the CWCC for free, thus removing monetary barriers. Mr. Gill explained the current process for fee waiving. This includes groups giving a written request to City administration, then deferring to either the Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee (RPAC) or City Council, which can take up to 60 days. He also outlined rental rates (\$100/hour for regular groups and \$50/hour for nonprofit groups). Mr. Prizio explained how the Capitol Center for the Arts donates a certain percentage of facilities to organizations and suggested the City look into something similar.

Mr. Clement Kigugu described his experience of not being able to rent at the CWCC because of weekend availability and high rental fees that make the facility inaccessible.

Ms. Charm Camacho described her experience renting as an organization without a non-profit tax status. Ms. Camacho explained that her organization provides essential classes for youth like financial literacy, college prep classes, and tutoring and that it was difficult to come up with the money for the rental fee charge.

Ms. Sindy Chown shared her experience instructing classes and indicated she uses the West Street Ward House because the CWCC is too expensive. Ms. Chown also said she often sees the CWCC empty, likely because of fees, which are a barrier to her renting.

Ms. Livingston discussed the non-applicability of nonprofit status to organizational need. Ms. Livingston provided an example of an individual who ran a citizenship class who stopped because of fee charges. Ms. Livingston noted that equity in accessibility is important regardless of tax status and that New American youth are one of the most vulnerable populations and that various accessibility barriers should be removed.

Mr. Kigugu explained that the outcome of holding more events would help out the City in one way or another. The Overcomers organization helps refugees with various expenses including rent, hospital bills, etc. Mr. Kigugu explained that hosting events at the CWCC will also help the physical and mental needs of the community and help to connect people and break barriers in Concord.

Mr. Prizio indicated there should be a healthy balance of allocation of space for the public good and that the City should engage these vulnerable communities.

Mr. Steven Garside expressed that rooms could be subdivided for more use and that the Concord Crew uses the CWCC during the winter when they cannot practice outside.

Councilor Fennessy asked what rooms are being used by the different organizations. Several attendees described their room usage. The group expressed that the hours of operation for the Heights Library at the CWCC do not correspond with the hours of the greatest need for New American children and adults, and that many New Americans would have a safe space to do school work if the CWCC/Heights library location were more accessible.

Mr. Fisto Ndayishimiye described his experience coming to Concord in 2016 not knowing English and the extreme importance of the CWCC/other public facilities for kids in the Heights to learn, play sports, have the opportunity for artistic expression, etc. He expressed that making the CWCC free would be a tremendous help for local organizations.

Mr. Kigugu emphasized the importance of tutoring availability and English as a Second Language classes for kids in the community.

Ms. Camacho asked how many meeting rooms there are. Mr. Gill indicated there are 6 total rooms, including 2 fitness rooms, and that many are not used during the daytime. Ms. Camacho asked whether lowering rates would increase use of the facility and accessibility. Councilor Champlin noted it isn't all about revenue and the goal is to remove barriers and let people use the space.

Ms. Milne praised the CWCC facilities, but said there may not be a lot of public awareness of the CWCC. She indicated her organization is happy to pay current rates if it helps make it more equitable for other organizations.

Ms. Livingston emphasized the equity component and that some programs don't have access to a lot of capital. Mr. Ndayishimiye expressed that New American kids may not be used to a diversity of opportunities and some may not be aware of what programs are available to them. He continued saying that organizations are able to connect kids to positive environments and can help alleviate stress from parents who may be working multiple jobs. Ms. Chown said improving opportunities for youth would also lower crime and improve quality of life.

Mayor Bouley indicated the committee understands and agrees with the concerns expressed at the meeting. He explained he wants to figure out how to practically make the discussed items happen. Ms. Chown suggested a subcommittee be formed to explore this. Mayor Bouley also indicated that from the outset, the CWCC was intended to be for the community's use. Mayor Bouley noted he wants to figure out which populations are most vulnerable and doesn't want to base rates on non-profit status.

Ms. Livingston urged the committee and City Council to use this policy making process to make a statement about equity. Councilor Champlin explained that the City Council makes policy and directs City staff. Councilor Champlin also stated that the committee wants feedback on the rate structure and how to make it equitable.

Ms. Camacho asked what would happen if a pilot program were to occur with significantly lower rates. Mayor Bouley discussed potentially not charging at all, but also noted the policy structure must be built to be consistent, reasonable, and rational. Councilor Fennessy suggested clarifying and specifying different rooms and rates at the CWCC, such as the gym, the auditorium, and the classrooms. Councilor Champlin noted the future application process should be accessible.

Ms. Donovan expressed that there should be some sort of small fee in order to have organizations have a stake in ensuring good use of the CWCC. Ms. Chown said it is important to take care of the facilities like taking care of a home.

Mr. Ndayishimiye suggested engaging community organizations when making the policy and the topic should be discussed further to meet the needs of Concord's various CWCC users.

Ms. Livingston asked if this discussion would be a part of the budget process. Mayor Bouley said the City Manager writes the budget and Council discusses and approves, and that multiple obstacles would be evaluated in that process.

- 4) **Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be coordinated between staff and the committee at a later time.
- 5) **Adjournment:** A motion to adjourn was made by Councilor Fennessy and seconded by Mayor Bouley. The motion was approved with a unanimous voice vote and the meeting adjourned at 6:44 PM.