

**MANAGER’S CONFERENCE MINUTES**  
**Portsmouth City Council Meeting on**  
**January 13, 2025 – 6:49 p.m.**

Members present:

|                  |                      |
|------------------|----------------------|
| Sean Dunne       | 1 <sup>st</sup> Ward |
| Charlotte Gordon | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Ward |
| Andy Cole        | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Ward |
| Lyvette Mosley   | 4 <sup>th</sup> Ward |
| Joey Sandlin     | 5 <sup>th</sup> Ward |
| Dennis Packard   | 6 <sup>th</sup> Ward |

Also, present was City Clerk Diana Ratliff, City Manager Sam Sutherland, Solicitor John Haas and Auditor M. Trent Williams.

1. **Market Square Park Splash Pad**

**CM-24-89**

Mayor Gordon requested that the proposed legislation be brought back as no action was taken at the last meeting of December 16, 2024. She attended a meeting with Auditor Williams, Manager Sutherland, Councilman Cole, and Dr. Mike Raies in which they covered a lot of territory with a lot of ideas. She requested that if approved that this be moved directly to City Council’s agenda for a first reading. Mr. Raies was requesting to move forward with ordering the equipment so that the splash park would be ready for summer. She requested that the four that attended the meeting give their opinion of the proposal. She had spoken with Solicitor Haas who said that he would distribute the proposed legislation to Council prior to the next meeting for time to review.

Mayor Gordon said that Dr. Raies had originally requested \$250,000 for the pumping equipment for Market Square Park and everyone agreed that it was a valid project and that corner had blossomed and developed which had brought a lot of economic growth. She said that surrounding businesses were doing very well, however the numbers from Winterfest were not sustained throughout the year and this was an idea that could in fact help the area to grow through the summer months. She said that the feedback to City Council was that it was a lot of money to give to one entity. The proposal was as follows: The City provide a grant for \$125,000, a loan for \$125,000 loan over a 10-year period with 0% interest, and extend a water credit of \$125,000.

Councilman Cole advised that the pros to the project was how it boosted our downtown redevelopment. Dr. Raies initially requested \$250,000 which was in addition to all the other entities that had already pledged to donate funds to this project. (SOMC, State of Ohio, Glockner’s etc.) He said most of those had donated or pledged over the \$250,000 range and as mentioned \$250,000 was a lot of money. Those at the meeting tried to work to find the best practical way to help the project that they believe in without having the enormous \$250,000 price tag all at once.

Mayor Gordon said that at the meeting Auditor Williams questioned whether the city could loan a non-public agency money? She deferred that question to Solicitor Haas and he replied “yes” and he would include the necessary language in the proposed legislation. Solicitor

Haas asked about emergency language and Mayor Gordon replied that this would need all three readings.

Councilman Dunne stated that he wanted to see the language before moving it forward. He said that it had been problematic for the city to fund McKinley Pool and if there were an agreement that the city provided funding to a private entity with the payback going into a fund for McKinley Pool that would be acceptable. He didn't feel we should prioritize a private entity over one of our local parks and there had been no type of study that suggested what a return would be on this investment. He said if we were investing our own money and not spending other people's money, an assessment on the return would be done before the investment was made. He said there were no suggested tools of assessment if Council was to give the money, how would the city analyze if it was a worthwhile project which would be necessary information for the next request. He felt that it was great that the city had something like this in the downtown, but there had been nothing documented which showed any type of rate of return or any specific business that directly attributed money. Mr. Dunne said that if we're going to invest money, why not use the money for housing people which was discussed in the last meeting or this money could go directly to McKinley Pool. He said that it was important that the city look after its own city spaces. However, he would agree to this if the payback money was put in a fund for McKinley Pool. He said that currently we were a city that does not look after its own public spaces and now there's a suggestion that the city give \$125,000 to a non-profit along with a \$125,000 water credit and this suggest to the public that we're not prioritizing the city parks as well as more pressing issues concerning housing. He suggested that all the money be paid back and have the money go directly to McKinley Pool.

Councilman Packard said that he would be in favor of a 50/50 split of the investment and the hardware that it would take to build this splash pad would stay there. He said if the venture didn't work out or the property was sold, that expense would already be taken care of should the city want to take it over and make it a public park. He said that it should include an equal expenditure commitment to our own Capital Improvement Budget which would show the public that we were willing to look at what Dr. Raies had done with that area because people do value and enjoy it and look forward to it every year, but wasn't sold on the \$125,000 water credit. Mayor Gordon said that it would be an extension of a water credit in case they had trouble meeting their bill and this would allow them to continue to operate without going into the red. Mr. Packard asked if it would be paid back and Mayor Gordon said that it would not be paid back. She said that early on it had been discussed that the city workers would be the ones installing the hardware which would be an in-kind match, but that would void the warranty of the equipment.

VP Mosley addressed McKinley Pool and recalled that Mayor Gordon had a company come from Cincinnati four-years ago to give an estimate on the cost to redo McKinley Pool which was close to \$2,000,000, but because of the historical status there were no grants available. She said that Service Director James was looking to make some changes with the pool to help defray some of the costs. She said that when it was previously brought up to invest in the pool, it was voted down.

Councilman Cole said that he was looking at what it could do for the downtown area, however, just like what Councilman Dunne had said, there were a lot of things that the money could be used on for improvements which was a reality. He said that the downtown area had

been a very positive part of our city's growth with redevelopment, infrastructural changes, and new businesses opening and all of that was predicated on people getting out and showing up. This corner of Market Square had been a vibrant part throughout the winters as we've watched Friends of Portsmouth promote Winterfest and other organizations holding different events. He wasn't sure about the statement of accountability for it being a positive investment for our downtown area, but the city did a count through cellphones that showed over 30,000 people showed up for Winterfest and with that volume of people, it had to be beneficial to our downtown businesses and it had opened opportunities. He said that as the riverfront development started to progress, it would start to turn into something for us and hopefully be able to extend the reach with antiques, mountain biking, and kayaking with the extension of things to do in our city constantly growing. He felt that it was a good opportunity and beneficial for Portsmouth and "no" he couldn't give a dollar figure, but moving forward Dr. Raies would be locked in a 20-year lease and that's a guarantee of 20 years for recreational use for the city and a good investment.

City Manager Sutherland stated that the city had put money into its local parks with the following:

\$466,000 Mound Park - \$228,000 was grant money which included the \$135,000 that was used for the Pickleball courts.

\$50,000 Bannon Park (basketball court which was used as matching funds)

York Park – Poured concrete and installed new playground equipment.

Tracy Park – New Electrical lines

Cyndee Secrest Park – Committed to investing \$125,000 and he felt that the chances were good to receive the grant.

Councilman Packard asked about Rose Street Park and that they had a commitment from Shawnee State Park to help with the fields because the past couple of years, the kids have had limited play because the fields were in such poor shape.

Councilman Dunne said that the city invested in the public parks which was part of what people's tax monies were being used to have these facilities and something the city had to do. He said when they received the estimate on McKinley Pool which was closer to \$800,000, the reason it wasn't supported at the time was because of "fiscal watch" and the city felt that it should be supported by outside grants. He said only one grant was applied for and it was important to have clarity. He said the city needed to separate the idea "Is it a good idea to have something in the downtown that brings people to Portsmouth?" He said "yes, it was great" and people have done great work with it, but when you say were putting money in something to support the businesses in the downtown, the city should be able to clarify what that meant. He said it should be more than supporting the local businesses and overall quality of life and when you look at the importance of various parks being made safe and things that families could do during the summer, all of those were important, but the parks still need a lot more funding. He said it wasn't long ago we were asking the public to adopt a park because the city couldn't look after them due to being stretched thin on city workers. He said the city couldn't do anything competent with Spartan Stadium and when looking at other parks that's the priority of what a City Council should do with the money. He said if we gave the money as a full loan, that would still be providing assistance and support to the splash pad idea and where else would someone get a 0% loan and the city would still be giving a financial benefit to the project. He said that there were other grants available for projects like

McKinley Pool and we should be searching for those, but we've had angry people saying that the city was ignoring McKinley Pool. He was glad that the emergency language would not be included which would give members of the public time to come to Council and speak about it or speak directly to their Councilmember.

Mayor Gordon asked Auditor Williams to discuss about how the money would be used when it was paid back. Mr. Williams said that some of the ideas discussed at the meeting was to take the money being paid back and put it into an account where it could be used for similar purposes and other organizations or non-profits who would have similar projects which was entirely doable. He said it would go back into the fund and Council could earmark it for those types of projects. He said the city has a group that's willing to put \$2,000,000 and only asking for the City of Portsmouth to commit a fraction of that, which was still a large amount of money compared to the entire project, but ultimately, the money paid back could be used at Council's discretion for similar projects and similar nonprofit agencies. Councilman Packard said that currently we don't have anything to review and Solicitor Haas replied that 90% of the time Council doesn't have the legislation because he doesn't draft it until it was voted to be moved forward. Mayor Gordon said that if it was written as proposed, it could always be amended at the first reading or even table it. Solicitor Haas agreed to email the proposed legislation prior to the next meeting. Clerk Ratliff stated that the request should be modified because it is different that the request that was made in CM-24-89. The new proposal is:

\$125,000 – Gift

\$125,000 – Loan with 0% interest

\$125,000 – Water Credit

Vice President Mosley motioned to accept alternative #2 to modify the legislation.

There were no questions or comments: **VOTE: 5 ayes – 1 nay (S. Dunne), legislation moved forward.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:26 p.m. on a motion by Vice President Mosley with all in favor.

Submitted by: Diana Ratliff – City Clerk - For the full audio version of the Manager's Meeting, please go to [www.portsmouthohio.org](http://www.portsmouthohio.org) under City Manager 2025 "Audio".