

**MINUTES**  
**COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION**  
**November 1, 2021**  
**City Council Chambers**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King. Council Members Paul Fischer, Rebecca Waller, Michael Postma, Jason Baskin, Joyce Poshusta and Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Oballa Oballa

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert and Police Chief David McKichan

STAFF APPEARING ELECTRONICALLY: Assistant City Engineer Mitch Wenum, Fire Chief Jim McCoy, Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace, Park and Rec Director Kevin Nelson, Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann and City Clerk Ann Kasel

APPEARING IN PERSON: Honorary Council Member Kris Heichel, Austin Daily Herald, Randy Kramer, Laura Helle, Eric Olsen

Mayor King opened the meeting at 6:24 p.m.

**Item No. 1 – Downtown Boulevard Trees**

Mayor King stated the tree issue will be on the agenda for the night.

Parks and Recreation Director Kevin Nelson stated there are four trees along 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW between the Coffee House and the old bank building. The property owner of the bank building is requesting the healthy trees be removed on his side of the road stating the roots of the trees are causing issues with the basement wall and the property owner of the coffee house is requesting the unhealthy tree on his side of the road be saved.

Council Member Waller stated the Park and Recreation Board should be allowed to consider the issue and there is a Parks and Recreation meeting Wednesday.

Mayor King stated he is not opposed to the Parks Board reviewing it.

Council Member-at-Large Austin stated he emailed the concerned citizens that it was moved to the Park Board meeting on Wednesday.

Council Member Poshusta stated she would like to refer the matter to the Parks and Rec Board.

Council Member Baskin asked what the recommendation from City staff it.

Mr. Nelson stated he is still formulating a recommendation and added he doesn't have a deep history of the downtown trees.

Council Member-at-Large Austin stated the property owner offered to purchase additional trees to be planted in a different location to replace the removed ones.

Randy Kramer, 205 24<sup>th</sup> Street NW, stated he is the owner of the town center building directly to the south of the trees. He stated the trees provide a lot of shade on the north side of the road and the one of the south side of the road is dead. He stated if the trees stay there needs to be a plan for leaf maintenance. He noted that the sidewalk is unlevel and poses a hazard.

Assistant City Engineer Mitch Wenum stated if there are tree roots going into a sanitary sewer service it is still the property owner's responsibility to clear the roots. Also, in a sidewalk heaving situation a tree will not be removed.

Laura Helle, 1009 8<sup>th</sup> Street NW, stated the more shade in the downtown area the better. She stated in residential neighborhoods the trees enhance the value of properties. She urged the Council to plant more trees in the City.

Eric Olson, 1204 10<sup>th</sup> Street NW, stated he was speaking on behalf of his wife that works in the area. He stated the logo for the City of Austin is a tree.

Council Member Poshusta asked if the sidewalks can be repaired without removal of the tree.

Mr. Wenum stated a sidewalk can be repaired by cutting away the section of root that is causing the issue. He noted he will inspect the sidewalk.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Waller to send the matter to the Parks and Recreation Board. Carried.

Council Member Poshusta would like staff to look into a clear policy for this type of matter.

### **Item No. 2 – 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW Traffic Discussion**

*Removed from the agenda.*

### **Item No. 3 – MERC Property Update**

Assistant City Engineer Mitch Wenum stated the property located in the 100-200 block of 4<sup>th</sup> Street SE is owned by Minnesota Energy Resources Corporation (MERC). He stated the title to the property is being cleaned up in addition to the MPCA clean up on the property. He asked if Council would like to take over ownership of the property. There may be ongoing maintenance and clean-up costs but the City may want to own the property for easement purposes. The property is flood plain area so it cannot be developed.

Mr. Wenum asked if there is interest from the Council to acquire the property.

Mayor King asked if we could use local option sales tax for the purchase.

Mr. Dankert stated local option sales tax would be eligible for the property.

Council Member-at-Large Austin asked if they would be willing to donate the property. And he stated that he would also like to know of the clean-up liability.

Council Member Postma stated it would be additional maintenance for the Parks and Recreation crew.

The Council stated they are not interested in the property.

#### **Item No. 4 – City Chambers Remodel**

City Administrator Craig Clark stated he received a quote to update the dais for additional seating for the honorary Council Member. The estimated cost is \$4,503. In addition, Mr. Clark would like to update the carpet in the chambers at an estimated cost not to exceed \$15,000.

Mayor King stated it is valuable for the honorary council member to be at the dais.

Council Member Postma asked if a hard surface was considered.

Mr. Clark stated they looked into carpet squares.

Council Member-at-Large Austin asked if there are additional honorary council members lined up.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Fischer, to move forward with a Council chambers remodel. Carried 5-1 with Council Member-at-Large Austin voting nay.

#### **Item No. 5 - 2022 Budget Discussion**

No Council discussion.

#### **Item No. 6 - Administrative Report**

None

#### **Item No. 7 – Open Discussion**

None.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Waller, adjourning the meeting at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Ann M. Kasel  
City Clerk