

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
September 19, 2022
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:

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert and Police Chief David McKichan
Public Works Director Steven Lang, Fire Chief Jim McCoy, Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace, Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann, City Attorney Craig Byram

APPEARING IN PERSON: Austin Daily Herald, KAUS Radio, Laura Helle, Chris Grev, Helen Jahr, Dee Dee Marx, Kelly Bahl

Mayor King opened the meeting at 6:07 p.m.

Item No. 1 – Discussion of Park Board Roles and Responsibilities

Council Member Waller stated that the Park and Rec Board met and noted that the job description for the Park and Rec Director had been modified without the Park and Rec Board knowing. She stated she would like the job description to be changed back to where the Director reports to the board. She stated the Board would like to work in collaboration with the City to develop the description and other issues.

City Attorney Craig Byram provided an extensive memo regarding the history and changes in the Council and the Park Board. He stated the City of Austin Charter was revised in 2010 and there was specific conversation about the Park Board's duties and responsibilities. There were amendments adopted at that time. There was a resolution adopted in 2012 granting powers and authority to the position of the City Administrator.

Council Member-at-Large Austin stated he was on the City Council at the time and that resolution was adopted for issues with a certain department and the administrator at the time asked for the Council confirmation of his authority. He stated he shares the Park Board's concerns with the changes and doesn't feel the changes should have been made without Council approval. He stated he recently met with the mediator and would like to continue with the mediation process. He requested that the Council and Park Board continue the mediation process. He recommended tabling the matter until the mediation.

Park Board Member Chris Grev stated she has been in correspondence with her attorney and is awaiting on a response. She would like to continue with the mediation.

City Administrator Craig Clark stated if there is a difference in opinion from the City and the Park Board, they will meet and discuss the issue.

After additional discussion, the item will be tabled until the mediation.

Item No. 2– Renewal of Tax Abatement Program

City Administrator Craig Clark requested the renewal of the City’s tax abatement program from January 1, 2023 to December 31, 2025. He stated there have been 53 abatements approved for a total of \$23.9 million of value added to the City.

After additional discussion, moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baskin, recommending renewal of the City’s tax abatement program. Carried.

The item will be on the October 3, 2022 Council Agenda.

Item No. 4 – I-90 Noise Study

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated there have been requests from residents along I-90 for a noise study along areas of the interstate. Mr. Lang noted that the area does not meet the MnDot criteria for MnDot to pay for a noise study. He stated if the City felt the study was warranted the City would need to pay for the study and develop plans for and pay for the wall. The approximate cost of a noise wall construction project in one area is \$1.285 - \$1.835 million.

He stated there are many areas through Austin that may have noise concerns.

Mr. Lang noted there is a Greater Minnesota Standalone Noise Barrier Program which is a competitive program for greater MN areas to become eligible for state funded noise barrier projects. There is a local match to the project would be \$250,000 to \$350,000.

He discussed the different residential areas of Austin and which areas are most impacted by the interstate noise and noted that there are multiple areas of similar nature to the Pasture Heights area.

Council Member Baker suggested completing one noise study for the Pasture Heights addition to see what the results are.

Council Member Postma asked if the City’s share would be assessed to the benefitted property owners.

City Administrator Craig Clark stated that would need to be discussed with the City Attorney.

Council Member Poshusta noted there are downfalls to noise barriers including public safety, ice on roadways, affects breezes, attracts graffiti, and isn’t a complete solution to the problem.

Mayor King stated the property owners should be surveyed to see if they would be willing to pay an assessment for a noise wall.

Mr. Lang stated the study would provide the impacts to residents and it would be difficult to determine the assessments to homeowners prior to the completion of the study.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Baskin, recommending the approval of a noise study for Pasture Heights Addition in the approximate amount of \$7,500. Carried.

Item No. 5 – Closed Session

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Postma, to close the meeting at 7:05 p.m. for labor negotiations pursuant to Minn. Stat. Section 13D.03 subd 1(b). Carried.

See DVD of Closed Meeting.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Waller, reopening the meeting at 8:06 p.m. Carried.

Item No. 6 - Administrative Report

City Administrator Clark noted two Hormel Foundation grants are in need of a fiscal sponsor if they have any chance of being funded. Both the Farmers Market request for funding for a permanent structure, and the Paramount Theater's request for a new facility addition are being requested to fall under the City's umbrella in the event they are funded. The Farmer's Market project was intended to fall under the DCA and ACGV as a fiscal sponsor, but they have not yet agreed to accept this, hence the need for us to then take responsibility. No objections noted.

Item No. 7 – Open Discussion

None.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, adjourning the meeting at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann M. Kasel
City Clerk