

**MINUTES**  
**COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION**  
**October 17, 2022**  
**City Council Chambers**

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Jason Baskin

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, Park and Rec Director Dave Merrill, Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann and City Clerk Ann Kasel

APPEARING IN PERSON: Austin Daily Herald, KAUS Radio, Laura Helle, John Mueller, Park and Recreation Board Members, Library Board Members

Mayor King opened the meeting at 6:03 p.m.

**Item No. 1 – Tree Maintenance Position Review**

Parks and Recreation Director Dave Merrill requested that the Council reconsider the reinstatement of the two full time tree trimmer positions in the department. He stated there is a looming need for extensive tree work in the City and the arrival of emerald ash borer will only create additional work in the near future. He stated the tree trimmers would be part of the team leading the EAB mitigation plan.

The financial impact to the City is minimal at \$13,000 a year. The positions are included in the 2023 budget. The request is supported by the Park and Recreation Department and the Park and Recreation Board.

Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann stated tree trimming is a minor part of the employees' job and they are compensated at a higher rate when they are doing this activity. This is similar to how the Street Department treats its machine operators when they are performing that activity.

Council Member-at-Large Austin stated he was confused as he thought these positions had already been reinstated in the 2022 budget.

Council Member Poshusta asked if other departments get less pay when they do lesser activities.

Ms. Wiechmann stated the employees do not get less pay. There is premium pay for specific job duties which is outlined in the labor agreements.

Council Member Poshusta stated emerald ash borer will be a large project for the City. There are 3,500 ash boulevard trees in the City.

City Administrator Craig Clark noted he believed it was Council Member Baskin that motioned to have the tree pay when they are working on that activity.

Council Member Poshusta noted morale is low again and it would help with the department to have the positions reinstated.

Council Member Baker asked if there is work for two full time positions to be tree trimmers.

Mr. Merrill stated there is work for those positions. He noted there is a big part of the job that isn't related to holding a tool or operating a boom truck.

Council Member Postma stated the discussion should be brought up in the bargaining discussions.

After additional discussion, moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Poshusta, to recommended approval of two full time tree trimming positions. Carried 5-1 with Council Member Postma voting nay.

The item will be on the November 7, 2022 City Council meeting.

## **Item No. 2 – Library Hot Spot Program/Technology Coordinator**

Library Director Julie Clinefelter requested the Council reconsider their decision to not fill the Technology Coordinator position in 2023. She stated Austin Public Schools has eliminated their hot spot program which will remove 400 hot spots from the community. Austin Aspires has grant funding for an additional 100 hot spots but they do not have the infrastructure to administer the program. She stated the Library is working on a grant to fund \$50,000 of the position for one year and requested the Council fund the remaining balance from Library Fund balance.

Council Member Poshusta asked how much time per week does staff spend on the hot spots.

Ms. Clinefelter stated staff spends at least 15 hours a week. She noted for 2023 they plan on pulling all the devices in and getting new devices.

Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert stated the community has lost a lot of hotspots which creates gaps in digital services for the community. Mr. Dankert stated the Council could make the funding contingent upon receipt of the grant.

Library Board Member Ted Hinchcliffe stated the Library Board doesn't want to be in a long term hot spot business but would like the position to work with other entities to solve long term digital issues.

Nitaya Jandragholica stated the requested position is bigger than just hot spots.

Jwokamer Debok, with Austin Aspires, stated there is a need at the school. She stated she has a list of students that need access to the internet and a need for digital literacy.

Mr. Clinefelter stated there is no way the library can take on Austin Aspires' hot spots without the library technology position.

After additional discussion, moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Baker, to move forward with funding the Library Technology position for 2023, contingent upon the receipt of a \$50,000 grant. Carried.

The item will be approved in the 2023 City budget.

### **Item No. 3 – 2022 Capital Improvement Plan**

Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert presented the 2023-2027 Capital Improvement Plan. The plan identifies approximately \$190 million dollars in capital improvements for the City, some of which are contingent on receiving grant funds. The purpose of the work session was to review and ask questions about any of the proposed items. Then the Council will approve the document in December 2022 which authorizes the staff to purchase the 2023 items that are indicated in the CIP. For years 2024 and beyond, the document serves as a guide for the future but is subject to change as the City's needs change.

Police Chief David McKichan discussed the Police Department's capital improvement plan and noted that it is budgeted to replace three marked police cars in 2023. The Department has been using funds from the forfeited vehicle reserve balance to outfit the vehicles. He also noted other computer upgrades and other equipment purchases over the next five years, including the possibility of adding body cameras.

Fire Chief Jim McCoy presented the Fire Department's capital improvement items. The Fire Department is planning to replace a rescue boat and rescue equipment in 2023. The Department is planning to replace the ladder truck in 2024 at a cost of \$1.5 million.

Library Director Julie Clinefelter stated the Library will be replacing its furniture in the 2023 capital improvement plan. Replacement of the self-check machines are scheduled for 2024.

Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert reviewed Parks and Recreation requests noting the roof of the covered bridge needs to be replaced and the observatory is in need of repairs.

Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert discussed Administration's capital improvement projects stating that funds are being budgeted for public works equipment, a new

copier, computers and other engineering equipment. Each year \$20,000 is set aside for computers and associated equipment. The iPad replacement project that was removed from the 2023 budget has been moved for 2024.

Steven Lang reviewed the Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) noting the large Waste Water Treatment Plant improvement project along with other projects at the plant.

Steven Lang presented on the proposed improvements to the Central Garage including a water heater replacement. The older vehicles get rolled down from supervisors to the crew and the vehicle causing the most problems gets sold from the fleet.

Steven Lang stated the Waste Transfer Station is in need to some repairs over the next few years including a new compactor in 2023. The City entered into an agreement for the lease of the transfer station so additional improvements may be made in the future.

Steven Lang stated the airport is planning fuel tank upgrades, lighting upgrades and the beginning of a project for the multi-unit T Hangar. Many of the airport projects are contingent upon grants from the FAA or MnDOT.

Steven Lang reviewed the non-MSA streets, noting that these are not supported by the state gas tax. These are local projects paid for with local tax dollars and assessments in order to fund the construction. Each year the street department looks at the proposed streets to see if they need to be reprioritized based on deterioration. In 2023, \$1.8 million dollars in projects are scheduled.

Steven Lang discussed the MSA streets that are funded with approximately \$1 million of state gas tax money each year. The City assesses all of these property owners under the same assessment policy as non-MSA residents. This assessment policy eliminates the favoritism for one street of homeowners versus another. The projects scheduled for 2023 total \$3.5 million dollars

Steven Lang discussed the upcoming trail projects. There are three additional trails slated for the City of Austin through 2026.

Steven Lang noted the Sanitary Sewer capital improvement plans. Each year funds are allocated for manhole replacements; for inspection of all City mains and inspection of all private lines and plumbing; and for replacement of mains with street construction projects. Lift stations are also scheduled for reconstruction.

Steven Lang noted Miscellaneous Street projects scheduled for 2023 including an LED lighting conversion.

Steven Lang discussed the items under Miscellaneous Other Projects including tile line installation, sidewalk and pedestrian upgrades, hazardous building removal, Ramsey Dam. Other arena improvements are also scheduled.

Parks and Recreation Director Dave Merrill stated the City would purchase a robotic field painter for 2023. The Park and Rec equipment fleet is also older and various purchases of vehicles and equipment are scheduled over the next five years.

Steven Lang discussed the storm water utility district noting that there are various projects scheduled over the next five years to the current system. There have been drainage issues identified that will be addressed through these projects. Mr. Lang also noted some flood mitigation items that may be completed if a bonding bill is passed at the legislative level.

Mr. Dankert presented some economic development areas including 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE redevelopment and Port Authority property clean up. He also noted funding for daycare projects has been set aside.

Mr. Dankert concluded the discussion stating he would make minor modifications to the capital improvement plan and bring it back to the Council for adoption in late 2023. No additional Council action needed at this time.

#### **Item No. 4 – 2023 Budget Discussion**

None.

#### **Item No. 5 - Administrative Report**

City Administrator Craig Clark stated the Park and Rec and City Council retreat will be on November 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Item No. 6 – Open Discussion**

None.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Fischer, adjourning the meeting at 7:33 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Ann M. Kasel  
City Clerk