

**MINUTES**  
**COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION**  
**March 6, 2023**  
**Conference Room A**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King. Council Members Paul Fischer, Laura Helle, Michael Postma, Jason Baskin, Joyce Poshusta

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert, Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann and City Clerk Ann Kasel

APPEARING IN PERSON: Christina Petsoulis

Mayor King called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Baskin, to move to closed session pursuant to Minn. Stat. Section 13D.05 subd. 3(b) to consider and receive attorney-client privileged information related to a former employee's pending litigation under Minn. Stat. Section 299A.465 – Health Insurance Continuation Appeal at 4:02 p.m. Carried.

Mayor King reopened the closed session at 4:59 p.m.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Postma, adjourning the Council meeting to the regular meeting on March 6, 2023 at 4:59 p.m. Carried.

**COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION**  
**Continued**  
**City Council Chambers**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King. Council Members Paul Fischer, Laura Helle, 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, Assistant City Engineer Mitch Wenum, 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, Tim Ruzek, Eric Brownlow, Mary Lindgren, Taggert Medgaarden, Susan Stranberg

**Item No. 1 – Whitewater Feasibility Study**

Parks and Recreation Director Dave Merrill requested \$5,000 from the Capital Improvement Plan be reallocated from temporary repairs to the Riverland baseball backstop to the Austin Whitewater Project feasibility study. He stated the repairs at Riverland can be completed with inhouse materials and labor. The Whitewater feasibility study is proposed at \$49,950. He stated he has worked different organizations to raise funding for the project. He noted the Council could also contribute an additional \$5,000 from contingency.

Council Member Baskin asked how much is in 2023 contingency.

Administrative Services Director Tom Dankert stated that fund is at \$77,000.

Council Member Baskin spoke in support of the project and funding from the CIP.

Council Member Baker asked if there is time from a Park and Rec management standpoint for the project.

Mr. Merrill stated he doesn't feel like the project will add too much work load.

Council Member Postma didn't think it was a city project; he thought it was citizen led. He stated he supports the project at a \$10,000 contribution.

Council Members Poshusta and Helle agreed with the \$10,000 contribution.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Poshusta, to approve \$5,000 from the CIP funding and \$5,000 from 2023 contingency for the whitewater project feasibility study. Carried 5-2 with Council Members Baker and Baskin voting nay. Carried.

The item will be on the March 20, 2023 Council Agenda.

**Item No. 2 – Discussion of 24 month City Council Plan**

City Administrator Craig Clark reviewed the housing needs assessment and reviewed the City's housing progress. He introduced Eric Brownlow who reviewed stats which compared Austin, Albert Lea, Stewartville and Owatonna. He stated that Austin is slowly heading in the right direction with housing. He noted that the number one driver for people to move to a community is schools. He stated housing is a circle and the City needs to remember that if a new higher priced home is built then a middle class person and move into the house they leave.

Council Member Helle stated she would like to take action on preserving existing housing stock.

Council Member Baskin stated he would like to see a plan of how to increase single-family housing starts and preserving housing stock.

City Administrator Craig Clark stated the housing inspector will be dedicating additional time for the issue and becoming more proactive.

Police Chief David McKichan provided an overview on body cameras. He stated he doesn't support the cameras if it falls on existing staff. He would request an additional staff member to manage the system.

Council Member Baker stated it is more complicated than he anticipated. He requested an estimate of the cost for 2024 implementation.

Council Member Helle asked what is the benefit to the City.

Chief McKichan stated the cameras capture a lot of valuable evidence and information but add a lot of costs and challenges also.

Council Member Postma stated the public perception is that the City would have body cameras especially since the County has implemented the system.

The Council directed Chief McKichan to include the cost in the 2024 budget for consideration.

Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann provided information about an employee survey. She provided examples from other government entities. She noted there are not funds in 2023 budgeted for a survey.

Council Member Poshusta stated it cannot be handled internally.

Council Member Postma agreed that an external organization would give the survey more of a feeling of legitimacy.

Council Member Baker stated it should be handled externally. He stated it's important to generate feedback from employees.

Council Member Baskin agreed with an external survey process. He noted it is important to establish a base line and then get input in following years to track progress.

The Council directed Ms. Wiechmann to come back to Council with external survey proposals.

### **Item No. 3 – Storm Sewer Relocation 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Apartments**

HRA Director Taggert Medgaarden stated there is a storm sewer pipe running through the middle of the proposed 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Apartment building which they were not aware of. The project costs did not include the relocation of the infrastructure to the perimeter of the property.

Susan Strandberg stated the project was awarded tax credits in December for the project. She stated Three Rivers is moving forward quickly with the project but did not anticipate a storm sewer running through the middle of the project. She stated the site was formerly occupied by residential housing. The project needs additional funding to move forward. She stated Three Rivers may be able to contribute \$5,000 to \$10,000 for the project and asked the City to contribute the remainder, which is estimated to be \$70,000 to \$75,000.

Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert stated it would come from the stormwater utility fund.

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the storm sewer would need to be replaced at some point in the future.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, to contribute funding from the stormwater utility fund for the relocation of the storm sewer on the proposed 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> apartment site. Carried.

The item will be on the March 20, 2023 Council agenda.

#### **Item No. 4 – Flood Plain Management Update**

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace provided a yearly update on the flood plain management. She reviewed the City's flood history, property acquisition efforts and stated the City has completed \$40 million in mitigation projects with another \$18 million planned. The planned future projects include the Waste Water Treatment Plant levee and various scattered site acquisitions.

No Council action needed.

#### **Item No. 5 – Revision to Accessory Structure Ordinance**

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace requested the Council approve a revision to the accessory structure ordinance stating it only applies to attached structures and it could be equal to the size of the residence. This would apply to R-1 structures.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Baskin, recommending approval of an updated accessory structure ordinance. Carried.

The item will be on the March 20, 2023 Council meeting.

#### **Item No. 6 – Wine ordinance update**

City Clerk Ann Kasel requested the Council approved ordinance updates to the wine section of the liquor code.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Baskin, recommending approval of an updated wine ordinance. Carried.

The item will be on the March 20, 2023 Council meeting.

**Item No. 7 - Administrative Report**

City Administrator Craig Clark provided information from the legislature.

**Item No. 8 – Open Discussion**

Council Member Baker stated he would like to discuss the Park and Rec retreat and the Park and Rec master plan at the next work session.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adjourning the meeting at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Ann M. Kasel  
City Clerk