

**MINUTES**  
**COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION**  
**June 5, 2023**  
**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, 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, Taggert Medgaarden, Elaine Hansen, KAUS Radio

Mayor King opened the meeting at 7:33 p.m.

**Item No. 1 – Local Government Aid and the 2024 Budget**

Administrative Services Director Tom Dankert noted there will be an increase in LGA for 2024 in the amount of \$910,769. He stated the joint LEC agreement will net a projected savings of \$125,000 in 2024 resulting in \$1,035,769 of new funding for 2024. The projected wage and benefit increases plus other Council commitments for 2024 are \$1,093,000.

He stated the Council has approved \$50,000 in tax levy for the sound barrier wall. There additionally will be \$1,159,266 in public safety aid for 2024. This is a one-time payment and he is waiting for clarification as to what it can be spent on.

Mr. Dankert stated the paid family medical act would create a significant cost for payroll taxes in 2026.

He provided the information as a precursor to the June 20, 2023 budget discussions.

Council Member Baker provided additional information for his thoughts on the 2024 budget.

**Item No. 2 – Police Staffing**

Police Chief David McKichan discussed the police department staffing stating the 1997 the department had 29 officers and now it is at 34 officers even though population and calls for service have increased.

He stated the existing staff is stretched thin to cover officers on leave. He requested two additional officers for 2023 to be funded with the public safety aid dollars.

Mayor King stated he believes the Police Department is understaffed.

Council Member Helle asked if there are opportunities to add additional staff besides officers to alleviate burdens off officers.

Chief McKichan stated adding licensed officers is the best option but would look at additional options if he could not find officers.

Council Member Baker stated he supports having 36 officers. Council Member Baskin agreed.

Council Member Postma asked if there are additional perks to provide to applicants that would make them come to Austin or to provide additional benefits to support the current officers.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Baskin, to support the Police Department to move to 36 officers while budgeting for 34 officers. Motion failed 4-3 with Council Members Helle, Postma, Fischer and Poshusta voting nay.

Mr. Dankert asked if the 2024 budget would include 36 officers, or 34 budgeted officers with a goal of getting 36 officers at some point down the road.

City Administrator Craig Clark stated the motion is very important for future planning purposes.

After additional discussion, moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baskin to budget for 36 officers in 2024 and authorizing the hiring process to being immediately. Carried 7-0.

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

### **Item No. 3 – Local Option Sales Tax and the Police Department**

City Administrator Craig Clark stated local option sales tax may be used as a funding source for a new law enforcement center. He stated the LOST tax generates \$1.7 million annually. The first step would be to identify the costs for a new law enforcement center. SEH has provided a proposal in the amount of \$16,500 for this needs assessment and the cost would be allocated \$5,500 to the City and \$11,000 to Mower County. He recommended approval of the contract.

The legislature is looking at a new process for the approval of local option sales taxes.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Poshusta, recommending the approval of a contract with SEH for a law enforcement needs assessment. Carried.

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

#### **Item No. 4 - Housing Discussion**

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace requested the Council add a full-time housing inspector to help maintain housing in Austin. She stated the Council recently reviewed the CRE report and this was one of the recommendations from the report.

Housing and Redevelopment Director Taggart Medgaarden provided an update as to the CHIP program that the HRA administers. He stated there have been \$601,886 loans to date. He requested the City donate \$250,000 to the fund to help another 62 homeowners with \$4,000 loans. He stated the program has been very successful.

City Administrator Craig Clark stated approximately 65% of Austin's population is eligible for the CHIP loans. He noted that there may be more need in the community than funding.

Council Member Baker stated he cannot see the return on investment for additional person.

Mr. Clark stated hiring a consultant to do the assessments would cost approximately \$868,000. He proposed using fund balance for this.

Council Member Helle suggested using fund balance for the CHIP program.

The Council decided to address the issue as part of the budget discussion.

The item will be discussed at the June 20, 2023 Council work session.

#### **Item No. 5 – Automated Vehicle Locating**

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the City would like to implement an automatic vehicle locating program for snow plows. This would allow managers to determine which areas have been plowed. This would cost \$15,000 in the first year and \$9,000 per year thereafter.

He stated he would also like to implement a route optimization plan. This would be a one-time cost of \$20,000. He noted it has been proven to improve efficiency by 10% so the upfront cost would be returned with savings from an average snow season.

He stated the vehicle locating may be expanded into other City vehicles. He stated the City could utilize 2023 contingency to get the program started or he could wait for the 2024 budget cycle.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Postma, authorize automated vehicle locating from 2023 contingency. Carried.

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

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

None

**Item No. 7 – Open Discussion**

None.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Fischer, adjourning the meeting at 8:54 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Ann M. Kasel  
City Clerk