

**MINUTES**  
**COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE COUNCIL WORK SESSION**  
**September 12, 2023**  
**Jay C. Hormel Nature Center**

**PRESENT:** Mayor King, Council Members Geoff Baker, Michael Postma, Laura Helle, Joyce Poshusta and Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin (3:12 p.m.) and Paul Ficher (3:29 p.m.)

**ABSENT:** Council Member Jason Baskin

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

**ALSO PRESENT:** Andy Zimney, Jay Forrest, Lynn Thompson, Greg Bell, Randy Hofner, Andy Jensen

Mayor King opened the meeting at 3:00 p.m.

Andy Zimney with Employee Solutions reviewed the results of the employee survey. He stated the results are anonymous and there isn't a way to trace them back to an individual employee. He stated the survey overall resulted in low scores and there are opportunities for improvement within the organization. He stated there were 122 responses to the survey with 11 one-on-one interviews with 20 people participating in focus groups.

Mr. Zimney said the average score for a first-time assessment is 57% for positive responses to all questions. Austin's average score for positive responses is 30% for the questions. Overall, only 25% of people had a positive response for their satisfaction of working at the City. The lowest scoring question on the survey was – Do my benefits meet my needs. Only 8% of respondents responded positively to that.

City of Austin employees stated the attributes they associated with an ideal job were honesty, integrity, respectful, to be appreciated, supportive and trustworthy. Employees stated the attributes about working for the City of Austin were undervalued, unappreciated, frustrated, divided and challenging.

Employees had the following answers to what is the single biggest improvement that could be made as an organization: new leadership, better benefits, communication, to feel valued and a new human resource director.

Mayor King asked what the most important thing is to increase employee satisfaction.

Mr. Zimney stated the most important improvement would be to create trust in the organization. He stated other areas cannot improve without trust.

Mr. Forrest stated on October 4<sup>th</sup> the presenters will be at the City to share results with departments throughout the day.

Mr. Zimney stated the batteries are low within the organization and the City needs to find a way to charge the batteries.

He states certain themes were apparent throughout the organization.

#### Lack of vision

He stated the City has a lack of cohesive vision. 77% of employees say their work positively impacts lives, which is common for public organizations. He stated the City needs to build on this in the organization.

There needs to be clear goals and strategies, leaders need to collaborate effectively and ensure their values and actions are aligned. The general sentiment of employees was there is nothing to look forward to and zero incentive to stay at the job.

#### Lack of appreciation

The survey found that employees do not feel appreciated. They said the pay is competitive but the benefits offset the pay. Somehow the City needs to improve the benefits to make the employees feel valued. Employees felt like they were burdens on the finances and there was lots of negative feedback about the negotiation process.

#### Lack of trust

The survey found that there is a severe lack of trust in the organization, which is very unusual. Mr. Zimney stated he has never heard employees asked repeatedly if the sessions were being recorded.

Employees stated that they generally trust their coworkers but don't trust that city leadership has the employees' best interest at heart.

#### Lack of leadership

The survey revealed that employees would like to fire leadership and that managers need more training in how to lead effectively. The top-level leaders don't collaborate effectively and the leadership team needs to set the tone for the organization.

Mayor King stated there have been cultural changes over the last decade and asked if the City is more negative than other places.

Mr. Forrest stated the negativity at the City is more pronounced than most other places they have seen. He stated their business has been very busy because employers have realized they need to be better to their employees.

Council Member Postma stated he believes contract negotiations have snowballed the negativity in the City. He asked how to better deal with contracts.

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace stated she previously worked as an attorney and was in many adversarial situations. She stated how she has been spoken to as an employee in contract negotiations has been demoralizing.

Mr. Zimney stated he doesn't know how to magically change the negotiation process. But it appears that the tone of how employees were treated in the past is distinct when comparing to other organizations.

He stated the City has the "friendliest bunch of disgruntled employees" they have ever met. However, he stated he feels employees are on the brink of apathy and that will not be good for the organization.

City Administrator Craig Clark asked how do we navigate this situation with the lean budget.

Mr. Zimney stated other cities have navigated the same situation. But it is a difficult question with no easy answer. He noted no organization has all the time and money that they would ideally want. He has worked with non-profits with much tighter resources and there is no reason why an organization can't have lean operations with trust and appreciation.

Mr. Zimney presented ideas to improve in the following areas:

#### Vision

- 2-day cross functional planning session to develop shared purpose, values and goals
- Launch culture leadership team from employees, leadership and council
- Develop employee communication strategy which may include a newsletter, town hall meetings, open houses, day in the life videos

Mr. Zimney noted it may be helpful to have a third party to facilitate first two recommendations.

Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert stated he feels his obligation is to the taxpayers.

Mr. Zimney stated the taxpayers need to be factored in the equation but it's nearly impossible that the employee satisfaction numbers aren't having an impact on the quality of employee and employee work, which in turn impacts the quality of service to the taxpayers.

#### Appreciation

- Make benefits more in line with comparable cities

- Establish a wellness committee
- City Manager meetings with employees 1 on 1
- Have more lunches together

Council Member Baker stated he was concerned that the Council isn't admitting there is a big problem.

Mr. Zimney stated he has had a business for 20 years and the City's scores are the lowest he has ever seen.

### Leadership

- Launch leadership development programs
- Provide training and coaching
- 360 degree assessments for leaders

### Trust

- Support time and space for personal relationship building
- Improve transparency and communication
- Rebalance positional vs. relational authority
- Have more direct, candid, and respectful conversations about difficult topics

Mayor King stated he acknowledges there is a problem that needs to be fixed and accepted responsibility for his part of it. He stated he would like to jump start fixing the issues with providing better insurance coverage for employees.

Council Member-at-Large Austin also stated he would like to spend money on employees but then would need to spend less in other areas. He stated the culture in the City needs to improve.

Council Member Helle stated the action starts with the Council and something needs to be done.

Council Member Baker stated the City has done a poor job of explaining benefits to employees.

Mr. Zimney stated the Council needs to look at what is best for the City as a whole to move forward. He noted you cannot hyper-focus on a minority of employees that may never be fully satisfied with their jobs. The City needs to have better communication with employees and make sure it is creating space for employees to be heard.

Fire Chief Jim McCoy stated when the comp and class was implemented the employees were given raises but also administration went after other things in the employee contracts. That eroded employee trust. He stated that he works as a committee for big fire department decisions and feels that the City needs to do a better job functioning as a team. Many minds are better than one. He added that he believes the City can have a happy work force and happy citizens.

Moving forward, the departments will have their sessions on October 4<sup>th</sup> where they will be able to give feedback on the survey. That information will be compiled and relayed to Council.

The meeting concluded at 7:13 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Ann M. Kasel  
City Clerk