

**MINUTES**  
**COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION**  
**October 16, 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: Council Member Geoff Baker

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, Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann and City Clerk Ann Kasel

APPEARING IN PERSON: Austin Daily Herald, KAUS Radio, Jerry and Suzanne McCarthy, Steve Kime, Jim Burroughs, Dan Urlick

Mayor King opened the meeting at 6:14 p.m.

*The agenda items were taken out of numerical order.*

**Item No. 5 – Complete Streets Policy Discussion**

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the City of Austin adopted a complete streets policy in June 2012 at the recommendation of the Sustainability Task Force. The policy focused on providing a safe transportation network for all types of users and abilities from pedestrians, bicyclists to motorists. He stated this policy assists the engineering team with designing connectivity on street projects. The policy is also utilized when applying for state and federal grants because it adds points to grant applications. He stated recent developments are designed with the policy in mind. Mr. Lang reviewed the City of Austin streets map and the complete streets policy. He noted areas in the 1970's and 1980's did not have sidewalks in them when they were developed. However, that thinking has shifted to wanting sidewalks in a town.

Mayor King noted changes in the policy may have an impact on grants.

Mr. Lang stated that every grant application is different and the complete streets policy is treated differently for each one. However, he noted that having the policy gives the City more points on grant applications.

Council Member Baskin stated the biggest issue is when sidewalk is going to be placed in an area that previously never had sidewalk.

Council Member Helle stated she would like the policy to be equally applied to all residents of the City. She noted the policy was adopted in 2012 to make good decisions for the community overall.

Mr. Lang stated it is the Council's discretion to change the policy how it sees fit but any changes may jeopardize the ability for the City to receive future grants. He stated the City recently received \$4.1 million for the Oakland and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue projects through federal grants.

Mr. Lang explained that it is a difficult concept for home owners who have never had a sidewalk to understand where their property line ends and the right of way begins. That is generally 15 feet from the curb. The City does not compensate homeowners if they have placed landscaping or sprinklers in that right of way area. He noted that many neighborhoods that do not have sidewalk will be up for reconstruction in the next ten years.

Council Member Postma stated the City will require new developers to put in infrastructure in future SW developments so it makes sense to fill in the non-sidewalk areas in town. He spoke in support of the current complete streets policy and would like Council to be unified in their support for the policy.

Council Member Baskin asked how Austin's policy compares to other cities.

Mr. Lang compared some district 6 communities noting that newer communities are very progressive with their complete streets policies while older communities are not. He stated Austin seems to be somewhere in the middle.

Council Member Poshusta asked with the grants the City receives, is there a certain amount earmarked for sidewalk construction.

Mr. Lang stated it is a general lump sum amount used for construction.

Council Member-at-Large Austin stated he was on the Council when the policy was adopted in 2012 and he doesn't see any reason to change the policy.

Jerry McCarthy wanted to remind the aspect of community and this is a greater good for the entire community.

Jim Burroughs stressed the importance of community and noted property values may be diminished because of the lack of sidewalks.

Steve Kime spoke in support of the complete streets policy and the importance of safety for children and families.

Dan Urlick spoke in support of biking in communities and the importance of trails and sidewalks.

City Administrator Craig Clark thanked the public for attending the meeting and invited them back during the street assessment hearings in the spring.

The Council took no action.

#### **Item No. 4 – Public Outreach Update on Oakland and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue Project**

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the City solicited public feedback for the proposed design of Oakland Avenue and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue SW in regard to bike and walking traffic. He stated the following options were presented:

1. On-street bike lane, sidewalks on both sides and parking on one side of the street
2. Off-street 10-foot shared used trail for bicyclists and pedestrians, sidewalk on opposite side, and parking on one side of the street
3. Existing conditions – No bicycle facilities, sidewalks on both sides, and parking on both sides of the street

Mr. Lang stated 49.86% of respondents preferred option 2, 39.89% of respondents preferred option 3 and 10% preferred option 1.

He stated the engineering department will be holding an open house on Wednesday, November 8<sup>th</sup> at the Library for additional feedback. He stated a discussion about the existing signal lights will also take place along with converting one block of Oakland Avenue East from a 2-way to a one-way.

Council Member Helle asked how the City would account for people that are non-English speaking, people without technology,

Mr. Lang stated the City is learning from MnDOT on the matter and the City will hold pop-up meetings. The City will also make flyers about upcoming November meeting and distribute through town.

For Council information only; no Council action needed.

#### **Item No. 4 – Employee Survey Next Steps and Approval of Culture Project with Employee Strategies**

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated there may have been some surprise at how low the numbers came in at to Council but it was not surprising to employees. He noted the City's engineering secretary is leaving for Mower County. He stated the City hates to lose employees. He stated he understands that it is a process and it will take some time for improvements.

Police Chief David McKichan stated the police department was happy to give input on the survey. He stated there needs to be something city wide, possibly with a third party, to create a cultural committee. He stated he wasn't sure about spending \$25,000 on a two-day retreat.

(Andy Zimney and J. Forrest joined via telephone)

Council Member Helle stated she would like to continue with Employee Strategies and suggested some tweaks to their proposal. She suggested the two-date retreat should be in January and suggested the leadership 360's be completed for Craig Clark and Tom Dankert to start with.

Andy Zimney stated moving the session to January is fine and he would like to get the dates locked in. He also stated the leadership 360's can be done at the Council's discretion.

Council Member Joyce Poshusta agreed with Council Member Helle's comments.

Council Member-at-Large Austin wasn't surprised at the low scores. He stated he was disappointed in the lack of ownership in the City leadership and would like to include Trish Wiechmann in the leadership 360's.

Council Member Fischer agreed with Council Member-at-Large Austin. He stated there needs to be better communication with leadership, staff and Council.

Council Member Baskin stated he would like to start on rebuilding trust and increase communication. He spoke in favor of leadership 360's for all the supervisors in the City and added there are lots of measures that Council can do without throwing money at it.

Council Member Postma likes the retreat pushed to a January time frame to include the new Parks director.

Mayor King stated the Council needs to move the needle in the right direction. He stated the Council is a part of the problem. He stated he is happy about the insurance measures that have been implemented so far.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, to contract with Employee Strategies for a 2-day retreat in January and leadership 360's for the administrator and Department Heads. Carried.

The item will be on the November 6, 2023 Council Agenda.

## **Item No. 2 – 2024 Budget Update**

Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert stated there have been some minor updates to the 2024 budget with the reallocation of the \$132,000 from contingency to the health insurance lines in each department, increasing temporary wages at the swimming pool for 2024, reallocating \$10,000 of lost revenue from the Clerk's budget from the loss of the ability to license food, and increasing the 2024 employee survey cost by \$5,000. The proposed contingency would be \$95,000.

He stated the annual truth in taxation hearing will be on December 6, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.

No additional Council action needed at this time.

**Item No. 6 - Administrative Report**

City Administrator Craig Clark noted there will be a City-County meeting on November 8<sup>th</sup> at 4 p.m. for a law enforcement center needs assessment review.

**Item No. 7 – Open Discussion**

Council Member-at-Large Austin stated it was nice that Council Member Helle recognizes the employee anniversaries. He stated the County holds a breakfast for major anniversaries.

Mayor King also noted the employees receive money as a gift.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Postma, adjourning the meeting at 7:51 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Ann M. Kasel  
City Clerk