

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
November 20, 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, Fire Chief Jim McCoy, Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace, Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann and City Clerk Ann Kasel

APPEARING IN PERSON: Chad Wangen, Ryan O’Gara, KAUS Radio, Austin Daily Herald,

Mayor King opened the meeting at 7:09 p.m.

Item No. 1 – PFAS Discussion

Public Works Director Steven Lang continued the discussion on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The Council originally was presented information in November of 2022 on the topic. He stated it is a man-made chemical that is designed to repel water, oil and grease. The PFAS substances show up in many places including the waste water treatment plant. He stated elimination of PFAS is best addressed at the source of the PFAS because the materials are concentrated at that point instead the PFAS mixing in with the rest of the water in the treatment plant. A possible source of PFAS is landfill leachate and Austin has two landfills. Those landfills currently have ICM agreements which allow their leachate to be trucked to the waste water treatment plant for treatment. He noted the Lansing Landfill’s ICM expires at the end of 2023 and posed the question to Council if they want to renew the ICM.

Mr. Lang presented two options for the Lansing landfill:

Option 1 – Mr. Lang stated the City could choose to let the ICM expire without renewal. This would eliminate the PFAS from the landfill coming into the waste water treatment plant. He stated this may impact the City’s ability to dispose of City materials at the landfill in the future, which may create an increased cost for the City to haul materials to another landfill.

He stated the City could also choose not to renew the ICM with the Austin landfill that expires in 2025. This would eliminate accepting leachate from landfills and thereby eliminating the exposure to the City to treat that water for PFAS.

Option 2 – Mr. Lang stated the City could renew the ICM with the landfill while they work to reduce PFAS at the source in their landfill. This may create the added issue that if a PFAS treatment plant is set up at the landfill, more volume of leachate from other landfills may be treated there and would result in additional leachate coming to the waste water treatment plant.

Mr. Lang recommended the Council choose option 1. He stated the City is responsible for the waste water discharge into the Cedar River and the City needs to make sure the water is as clean and safe as it can possibly be. The safest option is not to take leachate from the landfills.

Mr. Lang stated there are processes that can remove PFAS from the water. One of them is a foam fractionate treatment where the foam is injected into the water and the PFAS substances attach themselves to the foam. The foam is then removed from the water and encapsulated so the substances are contained and buried. There are also other types of removal processes including an ion exchange process, high pressure membranes and granular activated carbon.

Mr. Lang stated legislature has ordered that the PFAS chemicals be removed from products by 2033 but the products that are currently produced will be around for decades.

Council Member Fischer asked if the City cuts ties with the landfill where would the leachate from the landfills go.

Chad Wangen, landfill facility manager, stated they have a secondary agreement with the City of Albert Lea to take some of the leachate but if the City of Austin is eliminated then the leachate would need to be trucked to Minneapolis or St. Paul. It costs them approximately \$150 to truck a load to the Austin waste water treatment plant but it would cost approximately \$1,000 per load to the cities. That would be approximately eight times the cost of taking it to Austin. He stated they have trucked 642 semi loads to Austin in 2023 but some years they have done as many as 1500 loads.

Mr. Wangen stated the company accepts waste in an area that extends from Winona to Owatonna to Fairmont, Minnesota and some from Iowa. The area the landfill currently uses plus the expansion area to the west would result in another 30-40 years of landfill drop-off use.

Mr. Wangen stated the company needs to know the City's intent because contracts for his company are due in January and the trucking of leachate will factor into the contracts. He requested the City continue to have a working partnership with the landfill until a standard is set for PFAS by the State.

Ryan O'Gara, with SKB Environmental, stated the company has a landfill in Rosemont that is a test pilot for the removal of PFAS. They have invested \$4 million dollars in testing a removal option for PFAS. They are willing to meet any standards that are set and are asking for additional time to find a solution.

Waste Water Treatment Plant Superintendent Chad Heard stated the City is expecting a new permit in 2024 from the MPCA which could include standards for PFAS.

After additional discussion, moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Fischer, to renew the ICM agreement for the Lansing landfill for two years while they continue to work on a PFAS treatment option with the protection that the ICM would be reopened if the State implements regulations on PFAS. Carried 5-2 with Council Members Helle and Postma voting nay.

The item will be on a future Council meeting.

Item No. 2 – Employee Discussion Groups

City Administrator Craig Clark stated he has scheduled meetings with some of the departments and has with the Fire Department. He stated he believes it's important to have everyone in the room at the same time.

Council Member Baker stated employees do not want Craig and Trish in the meetings.

Council Member Helle stated employees need to have time to express their opinions but at some point everyone needs to come together in the same room.

Council Member Fischer questioned the need for the meetings.

Council Member-at-Large Austin stated doing nothing isn't acceptable.

Mayor King stated Craig and Trish need to be in the employee meetings to move forward.

Item No. 3 - Administrative Report

City Administrator Craig Clark stated the employee food drive will take place through December 8th at noon.

Item No. 6 – Open Discussion

None.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Postma, adjourning the meeting at 8:24 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann M. Kasel
City Clerk