

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
March 4, 2024
City Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King. Council Members Paul Fischer, Laura Helle, Geoff Baker, Michael Postma, Joyce Poshusta and Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Jason Baskin

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 Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann, and City Clerk Brianne Wolf.

APPEARING IN PERSON: Austin Daily Herald, Kyle Skov with WHKS, Honorary Council Member Miguel Garate

Mayor King opened the meeting at 5:50 p.m.

Item No. 1 – Waste Water Treatment Plant Change Order Update #3

Public Works Director Steven Lang gave a quarterly update about Waste Water Treatment Plant Expansion changes. Mr. Lang stated that there are twenty-one work change directives for a total of \$864,810.00. The amount of \$432,953.83 is a cost increase to the domestic side, and the amount of \$432,953.83 is a cost increase to the industrial side. Mr. Lang stated that the project has an overall change order cost of \$1.1 million to date, and they budgeted about five million dollars in change orders.

Council Member Baker asked Mr. Lang to address the \$264,000 Wage Rate Schedule. Mr. Lang stated that with the grants involved, there are federal and state dollars with this project, so it required prevailing wages. Mr. Lang stated four different sets of prevailing wages are required.

Mr. Lang stated that the plans and specifications included verbiage for all of those. Mr. Lang stated that one was missing during the bidding time. Due to that one's absence, the State of MN Highway Heavy schedule was not attached.

Contractors hauling materials to the project used their normal wages or whatever the federal wage required. Mr. Lang stated there were also mechanical increases in wages due to not having that highway-heavy schedule included in the plan and specs. Mr. Lang stated that is what is totaling the \$264,000. Mr. Lang stated that the difference between the wage that was bid and the increased wage is required by the state's prevailing wages.

Motion to approve by Council Member Baker and Council Member Poshusta. The item will be placed on the March 18, 2024 City Council Agenda.

Item No. 2 – Oakland Avenue/1st Avenue SW Update

Assistant City Engineer Mitch Wenum introduced Kyle Skov from WHKS to talk about the modifications to the intersections on the Oakland Avenue/1st Avenue SW project.

Kyle Skov from WHKS presented on Oakland Avenue and 1st Avenue SW. Mr. Skov discussed the proposed traffic modifications. He stated that they placed traffic cameras at the six intersections with signals to count the traffic movement and analyze the data to determine the peak hour of traffic. Each location is given a grade “A-F” based on delay experience.

Mr. Skov stated that the counts help them determine the peak hours of traffic. He also stated that the traffic was evaluated for 2023. He stated that all of the signalized intersections for this project performed at an “A” or “B” rating, except for one that had a “C” rating for afternoon traffic. He stated that over the next twenty years, there would only be a 1% increase in traffic, including cars, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

Council Member Baker questioned the current plan because it states that there will only be a 1% growth in traffic over the next twenty years. Council Member Baker stated that the plan that was presented stated there would be growth in this area of pedestrians and bicyclists.

Assistant City Engineer Mitch Wenum stated that the eight-foot-wide path that would be put in would provide connections to the surrounding trail network and provide better opportunities for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Mr. Skov stated that the data shows signal lights weren’t warranted for any intersections. Mr. Skov recommends that four signals stay and be updated with a GPS clock to set delays and synchronize all locations.

Mr. Skov stated that the four lights would cost approximately \$50,000. Mr. Wenum did state that they would have to bring the lights into ADA compliance.

Mr. Skov discussed six different intersections and the addition of bumpouts in those intersections. Mr. Wenum also discussed the addition of turning lanes on this project. Mr. Wenum specified that the road would have plenty of room for two lanes of traffic.

Mr. Wenum discussed turning the road in front of Firestone into a two-way. Mr. Wenum stated that this would be an efficient way to pair up the one-way. Council Member Baker stated that he doesn’t have a compelling business reason to do this, and this leaves Firestone with one route to get to the business. Mr. Lang stated people will have to access from the main Street or the westbound traffic. Mr. Lang also stated that this is a “destination” business that people make appointments to go to. People know they will go to Firestone rather than just stopping in there. Council Member Baker stated that he would like engineering to speak with the business about what they want. Mr. Lang spoke about changing the entrance to 1st Avenue SW by Kwik Trip to a one-lane. Council Member Postma stated that he is worried about the backup that may occur.

Mr. Wenum stated that there is less space for queuing, but it eliminates traffic when crossing over into two lanes. Mr. Lang stated that the lane would extend much closer to 11th Street and would be able to handle almost as many vehicles as the two-lane system would.

Mr. Skov discussed driveway locations and the six driveways leading to Godfathers Pizza. Mr. Skov stated that these can be better configured. Mr. Wenum stated that he would contact the business and other property owners about driveways that have conflict points.

Mayor King appreciated all questions and answers throughout the presentations and thanked Mr. Skov. The mayor asked Assistant City Engineer Mitch Wenum what the timeline would be for revisiting this for a more finalized project.

Mr. Skov responded that they would want a direction within the next month. Mr. Skov stated that we could possibly have a decision at the first council meeting in April. Council Member Baker stated that they should talk to the impacted businesses and be willing to compromise with them. Mr. Baker appreciated the thoughtfulness.

The mayor asked the council how they were standing on the design at this time. The mayor did not have any issues with the design. The mayor asked the council if they needed a couple more weeks to review it. Council Member-at-Large Austin stated that other than hearing from the businesses, it doesn't seem that bad. Council Member Baker said he needed more time to think about this.

Item No. 3 – Grow Austin Fund Standout Incentives Program

City Administrator Craig Clark stated that the Grow Austin Fund Standout Incentives Program distinguishes Austin from other communities that companies may be looking at.

Mr. Clark stated that they would like to propose some tweaks. He stated that they generally increase the wage requirements. For the poverty level, the city was always 140% for the minimum threshold. Mr. Clark stated that we would eliminate this and index up.

Mr. Clark also stated that previously, they allowed any non-mandated benefits to be calculated and added to the wages and stated that this would be proposed to be eliminated.

Mr. Clark is looking for approval, as the DCA and Utilities already have it on their agendas. Council Member Baker stated that if you want to make Austin unique from an economic standpoint, we should get rid of this program. Council Member Baker stated that we are hurting ourselves by focusing on this.

The mayor asked Mr. Clark if it was possible to eliminate the job numbers. Mr. Clark stated that we can and that there are several different levers that we can use to incentivize.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Postma, to adopt the new structure of the Grow Austin Fund Standout Incentives Program. Carried 4-2 (Nay, Council Member Baker, Council Member-at-Large Austin) The item will be placed on the March 18, 2024 City Council Agenda.

City Administrator Craig Clark gave an update on employee engagement efforts. The working group will be meeting with two different groups tomorrow. The working group has received a proposal from Culture Partners. Group Dynamic and Robert Sicora will be giving presentations on their offerings. We tentatively will meet with the Bailey Group. We are going back to them to see if they are interested in working with us and they are going to meet with the working group on the 13th. The Wellness Committee has scheduled several events and has seen positive engagement.

Open Discussion

Council Member-at-Large Austin stated that he was contacted by a citizen about the lack of Christmas Decorations. He stated that through budget constraints, we have changed things over the years. He wanted to bring this up and see where we were at with our Christmas decorations and improving them. Mr. Lang stated that within the last three years, we have updated all of our lighted snowflakes on Main Street, all of our garlands, and our candles. The only thing put on hold was the intersection trees because they were waiting for a decision on the intersections. These intersections are moving to four-way stops from signal lights. Once this change is made, we can bring options to the council on the overhead trees.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adjourning the meeting at 7:13 p.m. Carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brianne D. Wolf, City Clerk