

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
January 16, 2024
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, Police Chief David McKichan, Assistant City Engineer Mitch Wenum, Library Director Julie Clinefelter, Park and Rec Director Jason Sehon, City Attorney Craig Byram, Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace, and Human Resources Director Tricia Wiechmann

APPEARING IN PERSON: Elaine Hansen (Austin Chamber of Commerce), John Garry (DCA), and Val Sheedy (Mower County)

Mayor King opened the meeting at 6:05 p.m.

Item No. 1 – Ordinance Changes:

City Attorney Craig Byram noted a few changes are being proposed to some ordinances, as follows:

- **Massage Updates** – This would modify the massage therapist section to update our definition of a massage establishment so that a sole proprietor does not have to pay for a therapist license and an establishment fee. Section 6.40 would be combined in the applicable areas, and then a repeal of Section 6.40 because we also do not license saunas. Additionally, staff has proposed to add edible cannabinoids to the prohibited substances on the licensed premises.
- **Small Vehicle Passenger Service** – The Council adopted some changes to the small vehicle passenger ordinance in 2019 and it was erroneously placed in Section 6.60 instead of 6.61. This proposed ordinance would just transfer those changes to the correct section.

Council Member Baker noted since there is no real hurry on this, and he requested the proposed ordinance change for massage therapist be sent out to affected businesses to see if they have any comments. No objections noted.

Item No. 2 – Overview of Comprehensive Plan and Downtown Master Plan:

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace discussed the status of our Comprehensive Plan and Downtown Master plans. Ms. Wallace noted this is a collaborative effort with Mower

County, and is being jointly funded by multiple organizations including the City of Austin, Mower County, The Hormel Foundation, Hormel Foods Corporation, and the Mayo Clinic Foundation.

Ms. Wallace noted a selection committee will be established, including two City Council Members, two Mower County Commissioners, and three community representatives. The plan is to solicit proposals, with the following timeline:

- RFP to go out January 17, 2024
- Deadline for questions is January 31, 2024
- City responses by February 16, 2024
- Proposals due back on March 15, 2024
- Evaluation period and interviews March 18 thru April 5, 2024
- Selection of a consultant estimated to be by April 22, 2024
- Remaining schedule to be determined until project completion

Council Member Baker questioned what “Environmental Justice” was in the document backup. Ms. Wallace noted that there are higher areas of diversity and poverty within our community and these areas may have higher Brownsfield or industrial issues to deal with than higher income areas.

Council Member Baker questioned what the Comprehensive Plan proposes to solve. Ms. Wallace noted it is a process to find a consultant to recommend what we should do moving forward for the benefit of our community members.

Mayor King questioned what Mower County’s thoughts are on the process. Ms. Wallace stated they hoped this would be a collaborative effort between multiple partners to improve the entire county. The last city comprehensive Plan was from 2016, and these are recommended to be redone every 5-10 years. This is also being influenced by the recent Velocity report and efforts by Impact Austin and their recommendations.

Council Member Baker questioned what is our real benefit. Ms. Wallace noted the comprehensive planning is needed to be able to adapt to the future needs of our community. We will connect with citizens and have opportunities to resolve some quality-of-life issues.

Elaine Hansen, Executive Director of the Austin Chamber of Commerce, noted the Chamber is also doing some visioning for downtown Austin, including evaluating retail, housing, workforce development, and healthy living.

Council Member Baskin questioned how we use the Comprehensive Plan today. Ms. Wallace noted it is used in funding applications and decisions, rezoning plans, and policy/decision making.

Council Member Baskin questioned if in the end the new Comprehensive Plan would be structured such to have a list of the top ten actionable priorities. Ms. Wallace noted the comprehensive planning process has core basic issues we deal with all of the time, and the downtown planning is more specific issues related to Velocity report findings.

Val Sheedy, Assistant Mower County Public Works Director, stated Mower County supports the plan as a joint venture with the City of Austin. We are excited to be part of this process. This is a strategic plan for both entities, and we need to create realistic priorities and a realistic implementation plan.

Council Member Baker noted we spent significant dollars and time for the last Comprehensive Plan, and very little changed except some city zoning areas. Ms. Sheedy stated rezoning could be part of the plan, including restructuring zoning ordinances.

Council Member Baker noted we need to find a consultant to do some transformational ideas.

Ms. Wallace noted this was for information only at this point.

Item No. 3 – Proposed Annexations for 2024:

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace discussed five parcels that she is working on annexing into the City of Austin, as these parcels are now located within the city limits. The city may, by ordinance, annex these properties without petition by the property owners or consent of the township (except for the right-of-way acquisition #5 below):

1. Vossler property, 1417 28th Street NE, Red Rock Township
2. Mower County property, 2516 12th Avenue NW, Lansing Township
3. Cresthaven Development LLC, Lansing Township
4. Murphy Property, 1516 18th Avenue NW, Lansing Township
5. 218/190 Public Right of Way, Lansing Township (approval will be needed here by Lansing Township)

Council Member Baskin questioned what the benefit is to the property owner. Ms. Wallace noted usually the tax rate is the biggest difference.

After further discussion, moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Helle, recommending approval of the moving forward of these five annexations. Carried 7-0.

The item will be added to a future Council agenda as the parcels are ready for annexation.

Item No. 4 - Administrative Report

City Administrator Craig Clark noted he is evaluating two consultants on the employee survey status to bring in a consultant to take the next step. Additionally, the City had a wellness event last week with approximately 45 staff members attending. We are waiting for the results of the employee survey to take the next step.

Item No. 5 – Open Discussion

None.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adjourning the meeting at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tom Dankert
Director of Administrative Services