

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
July 21, 2025
City Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King. Council Members Paul Fischer, Rebecca Waller, Laura Helle, Oballa Oballa, Michael Postma and Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Jason Baskin

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Police Chief David McKichan, Public Works Director Steven Lang, Park and Rec Director Jason Sehon, Library Director Julie Clinefelter, Director of Human Resources Trish Wiechmann, and City Clerk Brianne Wolf

APPEARING IN PERSON: Austin Daily Herald

Mayor Steve King opened the meeting at 6:04 p.m.

Item #1 Milly the Monster & Book Walk Update – Julie Clinefelter

Library Director Julie Clinefelter stated they have a project coming to the library in the upcoming months. They have been working on placing a “Mill Pond” monster called Milly in the area North of the library and in the vicinity of Mill Pond. She has been working with the welding teacher to create something. She is working on a SELCO collaboration grant and a Freeborn Mower Operation Round Up grant to assist in creating and installing this. She stated during Welcoming Week in September they will have Milly on display, they will have a mammoth tooth on display that was found in Mower County, they will have a book walk created around Mill Pond with Milly’s Story, and lastly they will have a song created about Milly.

Item #2 – Food Truck Premises Expansion Update – Brianne Wolf/Jason Sehon

City Clerk Brianne Wolf stated the Clerk’s office has received many requests to allow food trucks in parks across Austin. In response, the Clerk's office, in collaboration with the Parks, Recreation and Forestry Office, has developed a more proactive and supportive approach to food trucks. This joint effort has created greater opportunities for licensed mobile businesses to operate, reflecting the needs and desires of our community.

The Clerk's office has researched the rules and regulations implemented by other communities and created an agreement for mobile businesses to follow if they wish to operate in the City parks. We are currently rolling out these updated guidelines to mobile vendors. Please note that if the regulations are not followed or issues arise, these permissions may be revoked.

The Clerk’s Office is pleased to report that mobile business vendors have expressed their support for the new agreement and guidelines.

Item #3 Pool Facility Assessment Discussion– Jason Sehon

Parks, Recreation & Forestry Director Jason Sehon gave Council an update on the Austin Municipal Pool assessment that was recently conducted. Mr. Sehon stated it took over a year to conduct this assessment.

The report details various categories for improvement options ranging from recommended immediate improvements to long-term renovation with enhancements. The magnitude of cost options for the improvement categories include:

Immediate Improvements: \$90,000

Mid-Term Improvement Option: ~ \$3.0M (15-year project lifespan)

Long-Term Improvement Option: ~ \$9.0M (20-to-30-year lifespan)

Enhancements: (typically a few hundred thousand to several million dollars)

Pool Replacement \$20M to \$22M +/- for equivalent sized facility

\$16M to \$18M for reduced size/ meeting community needs

City Administrator Craig Clark stated the fiscal obligations are real on this project. It is less than 1% of our population attending the pool daily. They could look towards the Hormel Foundation grants for this cycle for this project.

Council Member-at-Large Austin stated if they are going to invest money in this type of facility they need to have the pool open from Memorial Day to Labor Day. They need to drive attendance and look at staffing.

Council Member Helle agrees, she thanked Mr. Sehon for all the work it took to get to this point. The status quo is not the facility the public wants and not something the City can staff. They may need to consider if they can facilitate having a pool open in 2026 as it is not serving our community. She understands change is hard, but they need to find something that will serve the community.

Council Member Fischer stated a City of this size needs a pool and the lifeguards need to be paid properly.

Mr. Sehon stated he understands the concern about closing early but they do not have the staff once they go back to school. He stated they did increase wages this year. After going through this assessment, he was able to learn about the ability to have less staff if the pool was changed to a different layout.

Council Member Oballa thanked Mr. Sehon for his work. After looking at the numbers and hearing the comments from the community, he feels it would be great to see something different with different amenities.

Council Member Postma stated he loves pools, but he struggles with the cost of what they are to build and operate vs the amount of people that utilize them. He would like to have a pool that would be built with less lifeguards or no lifeguards. He would also like to have public input and also alert them of the costs that would incur if they were to build a new pool.

Council Member Waller would like to know what this looks like down the road and what would be the best solution for Austin.

Mr. Clark stated the City funds would come from a joint effort with the Hormel foundation.

Mr. Sehon stated he would look at what other communities have done.

Mayor King stated the Council is in favor of the \$16 - \$18 million dollar path.

Item #4 Administrative Report

City Administrator Craig Clark stated Budget Meetings will begin next week at the library.

Item #5 Open Discussion

None

Item #6 Closed Session

M I N U T E S
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION – CLOSED MEETING
July 21, 2025
7:11 PM
Conference Room A

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Steve King. Council Members Paul Fischer, Michael Postma, Laura Helle, Rebecca Waller, Oballa Oballa, and Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Jason Baskin

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann, Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert, City Attorney Craig Byram and Attorney Brandon Fitzsimmons (Flaherty & Hood, P.A.)

Motion by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Oballa to close the meeting pursuant to Minnesota Statute 13D.03 subdivision 1 (b) – Labor Negotiations at 7:11 PM. Roll call conducted with six elected officials in attendance and voting Aye.

See Recording of closed meeting.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, to open the meeting at 8:00 PM. Carried.

The meeting had not finished and was reconvened into closed session at 8:05 p.m.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Postma to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 PM. Carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brianne D. Wolf, City Clerk