

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION - BUDGET
July 28, 2025
Austin Public Library – Large Meeting Room

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

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert, Fire Chief Jim McCoy, Library Director Julie Clinefelter, and City Clerk Brianne Wolf

APPEARING IN PERSON: Library Board Members

Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert opened the meeting at 5:31 p.m. He stated the requested budget numbers came in at a 34% increase, and this would be an additional \$3.4 million. He noted the library is requesting three capital items. New lighting, new RFID material equipment, and an outdoor programming space. They would also like to request an additional staff member.

Item #1 Library Budget Discussion – Library Director Julie Clinefelter

Library Director Julie Clinefelter spoke about the library's capital projects. Ms. Clinefelter stated the lights in the library are making sizzling noises and need to be replaced. SELCO is requesting that libraries move to RFID-enabled materials handling equipment. This equipment can help reduce the time spent on monthly reports. The book drop would be RFID equipped and scan in books as they are placed into the bin. They would also upgrade the self-check machines, and this would help speed up the checkout process. This could potentially help with human error. Lastly, she stated they would like to make improvements to the outdoor reading space to utilize this. This is a want, not a need. Other than this, the only other cuts would be people and programs.

Council Member Helle asked if they would have to spend all of the \$50,000 requested for the RFID equipment, and Julie stated they would be able to reduce the amount to \$40,000 if needed.

Ms. Clinefelter stated since she has been working at the library, they have been looking at processes to make them as efficient as possible. Libraries are not only about books; they are about people, and she has been working on partnerships as well. She has been working on digital equity, as this is very important to the senior population in the community. If they are to cut hours, this hurts people in the community who can't afford it. They are constantly working on demonstrating their community involvement to prove their worth. They have a strategic plan. They have a way to track this throughout the year. They asked for \$80,000 in temporary salaries, and it has been tweaked to \$65,000. She is adjusting her plans for the upcoming year. They have kept their budget static for a long time. Their programming piece is what she would like to ensure they have funding for. The library is here to fill the gaps and teach classes. They obtain many grants to support their outreach programs.

Council Member Postma would like an org chart of their staffing.

Ms. Clinefelter stated when the library is open, they must have three people over the age of 18 running the building.

Council Member Baskin stated they are doing a great job of serving the community. He asked if other libraries are moving to a service fee model.

Ms. Clinefelter stated no, as this would not be what public libraries are modeled around. They are modeled around free access.

Council Member Postma asked about revenue and stated that most of it is coming from the City and County, and how these numbers come about.

Ms. Clinefelter stated that the surrounding libraries in the county collaborate to create a calculation, and they submit a group budget request to the county.

Council Member Postma is curious about who is using the library who is not a taxpayer in Mower County or Austin.

Council Member Helle asked if Ms. Clinefelter were to project out ten to 20 years, would the amount of books they were to need lessen due to digital?

Ms. Clinefelter stated it is tough to calculate as the environment is constantly changing. Their concerns are about who can't afford it and who can't access it.

Council Member Baskin stated he doesn't need a firm answer at this time, but would there be an option of creating a third-party system where we would staff employees and go to smaller libraries and assist with their operations?

Ms. Clinefelter stated she doesn't know of anything like that at this time, and she doesn't believe smaller libraries would be able to afford this.

Council Member Baskin asked what the library would look like in 2040 and what her vision or goal would be for the library.

Ms. Clinefelter stated that the library can help communicate many things to the greater community. She stated she doesn't have the time to get her staff out of the building to do this, as they do not have enough time. She would like to see more civic engagement. They would like to work more with the schools. They would be able to serve as a bridge builder for the community. She would like to create a safe space for people. She would like to be the beating pulse for the community.

Council Member Baskin asked what they can do next year.

Ms. Clinefelter stated they need one more person. They need to agree on a vision and communicate that vision.

Council Member Helle commended Ms. Clinefelter for her work in the community, and she believes they need to provide her with the necessary resources.

Council Member Postma stated that two librarians are tech-focused. Where do things stand with hot spots?

Ms. Clinefelter stated they have 160 hot spots, which can be checked out for three weeks at a time. They recently lost the Austin Aspires grant that helped pay for these services. There is currently a one to two-week wait list. She believes people who are utilizing these are the people who can't afford it or are moving a lot. The technical services person is keeping track of them, and they are reducing the staff hours they spend on this process.

Mr. Dankert stated that the Hormel Foundation is funding this project. They would obtain these for 10 months.

Council Member Postma would like to know how many hours a week they are spending on hot spots.

Ms. Clinefelter stated approximately 10 hours.

Mayor King asked if the automated upgrades reduced staff time.

Ms. Clinefelter stated no.

Council Member Helle would like a study done to track the time spent on hot spots. She would like this done for one month.

Council Member Oballa thanked Ms. Clinefelter for her work with the library. He has used the library's services in the past, and he is grateful they are here.

Item #2 – Fire Department Budget Discussion – Fire Chief Jim McCoy

Mr. Dankert presented the fire department budget. He stated they have requested three capital items. An ADA-compliant bathroom, three new full-time Firefighters, an increase to the part-time Firefighters' pension, and a mezzanine exhaust fan.

Chief McCoy stated that a few years back, they had a gentleman tour the fire station. He was disabled and couldn't access the bathrooms. He would like to update the bathrooms to make this more accessible. He stated the mezzanine exhaust system is outdated, and he would like to have a system that can remove carcinogens from the building.

Chief McCoy stated truck #302 needs to be repainted due to corrosion. He is looking into the warranty to see if this would be covered, as it was recently painted, or if they would need to cover the cost.

Chief McCoy is also requesting three new firefighters.

Council Member Helle asked what the issue is with volunteer/on-call, why won't they come in? Are they having commitment issues?

Chief McCoy stated it depends on their family life. They don't have any younger members signing up for these positions. He stated they have raised the part-time rate to \$20.00 per hour.

Council Member Postma asked for more clarification on the increase of an additional \$250.00 for each part-time firefighter into their pension.

Chief McCoy stated they are requesting an additional \$250.00 per person, which would equate to approximately \$4,500.

Council Member Oballa asked if they have reached out to Riverland Community College to obtain students.

Chief McCoy stated that Law Enforcement students are already carrying a full load, and the fire school would place an additional seven credits on top of their class schedule. This isn't feasible for most students.

Council Member-at-Large Austin asked if they were to authorize the three new employees, how hard would it be to fill those positions?

Chief McCoy stated they have a waiting list of candidates. They would most likely promote a part-time firefighter, which would cause them to lose a part-time staff member, but they don't pay a lot if they were granted a fourth person on each shift. They would have that person be a firefighter instead of an engineer.

Council Member Baskin asked if they would be able to hire one or would they have to hire three.

Chief McCoy stated they would be ok with one but would like three. They would pull up call times and see what time was the busiest, and work to place that one person on that shift time.

Council Member Postma asked if they could use the city employees for inspections outside of their regular hours.

Chief McCoy stated he would rather see the money put towards repairs than see a business burn down. He would also like to use a new person to do community outreach. He stated he could see the fire station charging for fire extinguisher training, as they currently do this training for free.

Council Member Helle stated the real issue is all the medical calls the fire station gets pulled out on. The taxpayers need to understand that Medicare does not cover this. All this is being taken out of property taxes.

Chief McCoy stated 63.6% of calls are medical. In 2024, there were 22 billable fire calls.

Mayor King stated he appreciates all the fire department does and their ability to take on medical calls. Whether they are in favor of staffing one person on the fire department or three, the Police Department is more of a priority than the fire right now, but he would fully endorse the upkeep of the fire department and the requested renovations.

Mr. Dankert asked how the City can promote to citizens that the library and the fire department are providing all of these services to the citizens of Austin.

Council Member Postma asked if the hydrant user fee can be increased to create enough revenue for another FTE for a firefighter?

Council Member Baskin asked if there anything that could decrease structural costs?

Chief McCoy stated they do have robots, and they send them into large warehouses with hoses. They do have drones they use to help with control burns, but they do not perform these.

Item #5 Open Discussion

None

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Postma to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 PM. Carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brianne D. Wolf, City Clerk