

MINUTES
COUNCIL WORK SESSION
NOVEMBER 3, 2003
6:10 PM

PRESENT: Mayor Rietz, Council Member-at-Large Goodnature, Council Members Nordin, Jorgenson, Pacholl, Chamberlain, Christopherson, and Koch

ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Jon Erichson, Jim Hurm, and Tom Dankert

ALSO PRESENT: George Brophy, Bruce Henricks, Austin Daily Herald, and Austin Post Bulletin

Mayor Rietz called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

Item #4 - City Engineer Jon Erichson discussed the history of handicapped parking requests that flow through his office. Mr. Erichson noted he occasionally gets these requests, but seldom do they get granted. City Councils of past have not granted these with the reasoning that if you do one, you will have many more requests coming forward. Mr. Erichson noted Dr. Nelson has now requested that Council look at allowing one handicapped parking stall on the street, however parking in this area is limited. Mr. Erichson noted new buildings have some federal disabilities requirements to be met, but existing structures do not require handicapped stalls.

Council Member Chamberlain agreed, noting we could have multiple requests for handicapped parking outside of businesses. Council Member Chamberlain stated he did not want to penalize the handicapped, but... This is probably why prior councils left it as is.

Council Member Pacholl questioned why the doctor's office could not put a handicapped stall on the east side of his building.

Council Member Koch noted he would not like to change the policy, but would like to review these requests on a case-by-case basis as there may be a good reason to grant some of them. Council Member-at-Large Goodnature noted his agreement.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member Jorgenson, seconded by Council Member Pacholl, to leave the handicapped parking policy as is. Carried 7-0. No further action needed.

Item #5 - Mr. Erichson discussed the judicial ditch assessment issue that is currently going on with Mower County. The County is going through to determine benefit of all of the ditches that run through Mower County. Mower County would like to send the city the bill for all of the parcels that benefit from the judicial ditch, as opposed to adding the bill to each individual taxpayer that benefits from the ditch. Austin residents comprise approximately 10% of the benefit, so the City of Austin would get a bill for 10% of any maintenance the County would do on the ditch. Conversely, the County assesses the benefit to County residents on a parcel-by-parcel basis. This could cost the City of Austin thousands of dollars per year, depending on the

scope of any construction projects. Mr. Erichson also noted new construction (for larger facilities) includes retainage ponds and other measures to limit the flow of water into the waterways.

Motion by Council Member Jorgenson, seconded by Council Member Nordin, to recommend to council that the County directly assess the benefited property owners as opposed to just sending one bill to the City of Austin for ditch costs. Carried 7-0. Item will be on the November 17, 2003 council agenda.

Other Item – Mr. Erichson noted the leaf site at the Cook Farm is very popular right now and there are still plenty of leaves on the trees. The Cook Farm site is set to close on November 9, but Mr. Erichson noted he would like to keep the site open until at least the next work session (November 18) and examine it again at that time.

Motion by Council Member Pacholl, seconded by Council Member Nordin to keep the leaf site open until November 18, and for the City Engineer to evaluate it again at that time. Carried 7-0. No further action will be taken.

Item #1 – City Administrator Jim Hurm discussed the current Mower County Transit program. The program is run by Mower County and the future with the Board of Commissioners at Mower County seems a bit uncertain. A federal grant in the amount of \$500,000 was secured two years ago to construct a new facility, but the deadline to do this project is fast approaching. George Brophy (DCA) and Bruce Henricks (Mower County Human Services) were at the state capitol last week to lobby MnDOT for more time to get the facility completed.

Mr. Hurm discussed the three things he believed needed to be studied on this project. A needs assessment needs to be completed to see how it currently functions, how it could function better, and to look at future funding issues. The second item is a governance question, i.e., who or what organization or joint powers board will run this program. The third item is the capital piece. Bruce Henricks noted the original grant was specific to the USEM's main facility on block 19, so if we change this location we need to get approval from the federal government.

George Brophy detailed on the whiteboard a proposal to build a new "pole shed" for storage (12,000 square feet) of the buses to be located across the street from our new Central Garage facility for an estimated \$300,000. The other money would be combined with a county contribution, an HRA contribution, and in-kind contributions from the City of Austin in order to purchase the block 15 land from USEM's. The body shop would be torn down, the former liquor store would be remodeled into an office/dispatch center and an attractive drop off and pickup area would be created on this site. The total estimated cost of everything, including the storage facility would be \$800,000 to be paid for via the following:

- \$500,00 federal grant
- \$125,000 County contribution
- \$125,000 HRA contribution
- \$50,000 City in-kind contribution (land and labor)

Mr. Brophy noted MNDOT stated they would support the proposal, but the following had to be done:

1. Resolution from Mower County supporting this.
2. Resolution from the City of Austin supporting this.
3. Letter or memorandum outlining the proposal and listing the creation of a joint powers board to govern this program, among other things.

This all needs to be completed in seven to ten days (from last week).

Council Member Koch questioned why block 19 is no longer part of the deal. Mr. Brophy noted Mower County Transit may be biting off more than they can chew with that facility. Council Member Koch also questioned how the future jail facility impacted this decision. Council Member-at-Large Goodnature noted the jail recommendation will be the Greenfield option, as there is not enough room in downtown to make this work.

Mr. Erichson noted this facility with storage in the Northeast Industrial Park makes better sense than having the storage facility downtown. Council Member Chamberlain also noted it made sense to put the storage facility near our new Central Garage.

Council Member-at-Large Goodnature noted having this proposal changes his mind on the HRA's purchase of block 15, and he would now support the purchase as it meets a public purpose expenditure test.

Council Member Christopherson noted he would still vote 'no' on this proposal. Council Member Pacholl noted that \$225,000 was still too much money for the block 15 land and buildings. Other issues were discussed, including Council Member-at-Large Goodnature stating that the purchase of block 15 would be contingent upon the proposal for the Mower County Transit's new facility to be constructed, as outlined above, on this site.

Council Member Koch agreed with the proposal, but noted he did not think we needed to spend money on an outside consultant to review the transit system as we have capable department heads within city hall that could do that.

Mr. Henricks also noted that the federal government will require us to pay back a portion of the \$500,000 grant if the transit system shuts down, but they may only require us to do this over a ten-year schedule.

Motion by Council Member Koch, seconded by Council Member Chamberlain, to recommend to Council the approval of a joint resolution and a letter outlining our commitment to the program. Carried 7-0. A special council meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 10, 2003 at 5:00 in the council chambers.

Item #6 – The federal mileage reimbursement rate is increase from 36.0 cents per mile to 37.5 cents per mile effective January 1, 2004. The City of Austin has approved whatever rate the federal government has approved to reimburse employees for travel.

Motion by Council Member Koch, seconded by Council Member Nordin to recommend to council the increase in the mileage reimbursement rate to 37.5 cents per mile effective January 1, 2004. Carried 7-0. Item will be on the November 17, 2003 council meeting.

Item #2 – Mr. Dankert discussed the proposed increase in the parking fines from \$5.00 to \$10.00 (a higher rate if a late notice or complaint is sent). Chief Philipp proposed this increase back in July of 2003. The current rate of \$5.00 has been in place for a number of years and has not increased. Mr. Dankert did outline one change from what Chief Philipp's memo stated, and that was at this point in time the city is not required to remit \$3.00 from each parking ticket to the State of Minnesota as originally thought.

Motion by Council Member Chamberlain, seconded by Council Member Koch to increase the fines as proposed. Council Member-at-Large Goodnature disagreed, noting we don't enforce the issue very well and it will be spotty. Council Member Koch disagreed, noting the issue is the dollar of the fine, not the enforcement. With the motion being on the table, it was approved 6-1 (Nay – Goodnature). Item will be added to the November 17, 2003 council agenda.

Item #7 – Mr. Dankert discussed the status of the 2004 budget and tax levy, noting he is proposing to bring a brief two to three page cover letter outlining the additional items council needs to discuss. If council would like more, Mr. Dankert requested that decision be made. Mr. Dankert briefly discussed the issues that are still outstanding. After brief discussion, it was decided that the cover letter would be sufficient for council to finalize the 2004 budget and tax levy. No further action required.

Item #3 – Mr. Hurm briefly discussed the city goals and an action timeline he has proposed. Mr. Hurm this will allow staff to proceed with some guidance as to the issues we have to work on in the near future.

Other Items – Council Member Chamberlain discussed the list of pending items on the council agenda. Council Member Chamberlain noted the list seems to grow, with dates that just keep getting extended. We need to do something about these issues, and not keep extending them.

Council Member-at-Large Goodnature and Mayor Rietz agreed.

Motion by Council Member Jorgenson, seconded by Council Member Nordin to adjourn the meeting at 7:56 p.m. Carried 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Director of Administrative Services