

**MINUTES**  
**COUNCIL WORK SESSION**  
**March 22, 2005**  
**5:30 p.m. City Hall Conference Room**

**PRESENT:** Mayor Rietz, Council Member-at-Large Christopherson, Council Members Dick Pacholl, Scott Pacholl, Jorgenson, Nordin, McAlister, and Hecimovich

**ABSENT:** None

**STAFF PRESENT:** Curt Rude, Ted Gilbertson, Jon Erichson, David Hoversten (7:00 p.m.), Trish Wiechmann (6:15 p.m.), Jim Hurm, and Tom Dankert

**ALSO PRESENT:** Austin Daily Herald, and Austin Post Bulletin

Mayor Rietz opened the meeting at 5:30 p.m. by noting that Item #1 Pawn Shop ordinance will be reviewed at the April 5, 2005 council work session as one pawn shop owner could not make it to the meeting tonight.

**Item #2a** – Public Works Director Jon Erichson noted there is a request by the Tri-Parish Council to close the 500 block of Third Avenue NW during the school year as the students will be utilizing both Pacelli and St. Augustine's buildings for classes this year. With the increased amount of students going back and forth, it would be a safer environment if the street were barricaded during the school day. Mr. Erichson noted this street used to be closed, along with the street in front of the high school, but significant traffic issues occurred. However, just blocking the 500 block of Third Avenue NW would not be perceived by the Public Works Department as being an issue. Mr. Erichson noted the school would be responsible for putting the barricades up and taking them down on a daily basis.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member Nordin, seconded by Council Member Jorgenson to recommend to Council the closing of the street during the school year. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

**Item #2b** – Mr. Erichson discussed the request by the Austin Public Schools to change the 12<sup>th</sup> Street NW (Oakland Avenue to 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW) street to a one-way street. The proposed route would have traffic running north to south. This would allow for busses to park along the west side of 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue to unload kids for events. Also, this would add additional parking (maybe 78 diagonal stalls) for the public to use. Mr. Erichson noted he sent a survey out to the area, and noted the Muffler Center and Dairy Queen are opposed to such a traffic change. We also received mixed messages from the residents that live in the area.

After some discussion Mr. Erichson noted he would get a hold of the Austin Public Schools to see if they could do some discussions with the public to see if there was more support for the request. No objections noted. Council Member McAlister noted he would check with the two businesses to see if they had any solutions to the request.

**Item #2c** – Mr. Erichson discussed the request by the Austin Eye Clinic to increase the 2-hour parking adjacent to their building to 12-hour parking. This would allow for the employees to park out on the street and allow the patients to use the existing lot. Mayor Rietz questioned if the clinic wants both sides of the street changed. Mr. Erichson said they did. Mr. Erichson noted people need to be careful what they ask for as we could change this parking and next thing you know students would be parking in the area, or somebody else is parking in the spot now.

Mr. Erichson noted we could do the following with the request:

1. Leave at 2-hour parking
2. Change to 12-hour parking
3. Change from 2-hour parking to maybe a 4-hour parking

Council Member McAlister questioned if we could send this to the Austin Chamber of Commerce to see how important this issue is to business owners. No objections were noted. Mr. Erichson noted he would copy the letter for the individual that has been asking for this change.

**Item #2d** – Mr. Erichson discussed the request by Hormel Foods Corporation to close North Main Street in front of the Corporate South headquarters on June 17 and 18<sup>th</sup> for the Spamily Reunion. Mr. Erichson noted we have approved these requests in the past, and the business owners along the area really appreciate the activity in the area. Hormel will meet with the affected businesses to discuss the closing from 8<sup>th</sup> Street to 11<sup>th</sup> Street.

No objections were noted. Item will be added to a future council meeting.

**Item #3** – Mr. Erichson discussed the grant agreement to fill in the underpass and get rid of the old railroad bridges on Oakland Avenue. The grant is scheduled for 2005 with a federal cost of \$1,680,000 and a local share of \$520,000. The local share will be covered with our State Aid Street Account (Fund 42). Part of the grant requires a number of reviews before it will be awarded. The cost of the report is \$65,227.48 with the city responsible for \$13,045.50.

Council Member Hecimovich discussed the drainage issue in the bridge area. Mr. Erichson noted we have a lift station that pumps the water out. After further discussion, no objections were noted.

Motion by Council Member McAlister, seconded by Council Member Jorgenson to recommend to council the approval of the \$65,227.48 agreement. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to a future council agenda.

**Item #4** – Ted Gilbertson, Fire Commander, discussed the purchase of the new truck for the Fire Department that was approved in the 2005 budget. Mr. Gilbertson noted we now have an offer to sell our old truck to the Rose Creek Fire Department. This truck would need some massive repairs in the future, and selling it to Rose Creek for the \$6,000 they have offered will allow us to still use the truck in the event we need mutual aid.

Motion by Council Member Nordin, seconded by Council Member Hecimovich, to recommend to Council the sale of the old fire truck to Rose Creek for \$6,000. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to a future council agenda.

**Item #5** – City Administrator Jim Hurm discussed his proposal to have Council authorize a study of the Fire Department to review scheduling and other options. Mr. Hurm noted now may be an ideal opportunity with the vacancy in the department. Mr. Hurm proposed a committee of three people, one of which would be a council person; to study and make recommendations to the council as to what changes could be made. We may need \$5,000 to \$10,000 to help pay for a consultant to study the situation.

Council Member Hecimovich questioned if we have replaced the vacant commander position? Mr. Gilbertson noted we have promoted an existing employee temporarily to a commander position, but we are still down one employee in the Fire Department.

Council Member McAlister stated that it would be good to have an unbiased person study the department. The Fire Department should have looked at taking over the ambulance service years ago when the opportunity arose. Council Member Nordin agreed. Mr. Dankert noted the funding would come from the Contingency line item for the study.

Mr. Gilbertson stated he believed we need to determine what we want to do. Council Member Christopherson agreed, noting we can get a report, but we ultimately need to make the decision as to what we would like to do. What is the long-term goal? We are just wasting money if we don't know what we want to do with the department. Mayor Rietz noted we would expect a consultant to give recommendations to the council at the completion of the study. Council Member Christopherson reiterated himself in that what do we want them to do? Should we be involved in the auto launch as earlier proposed? Should we do ambulance service also?

Council Member Hecimovich stated we need to set the priorities of the public safety of our community. What do we want the Fire Department to do?

After further discussion, motion by Council Member Jorgenson, seconded by Council Member Nordin to authorize the Mayor and City Administrator to pursue getting a committee together to review the operations of the Fire Department. Mr. Hurm will also bring back some options for the 3-member committee. This will all be discussed again at the next work session with some recommendations. Carried 7-0.

Council Member Scott Pacholl questioned if we were also going to study the Police Department now that we have a vacancy there? Mr. Hurm noted it was not his intent, but if council wanted to we certainly could.

Council Member Christopherson questioned if we were going to replace the vacancy in the Fire Department, as we are in the Police Department? Mayor Rietz noted the study would help to determine the staffing needs. Council Member Scott Pacholl noted it could take six months to study the Fire Department. Council Member Christopherson stated he sees this as one more way to cut the staffing of the Fire Department.

Motion by Council Member Christopherson, seconded by Council Member Dick Pacholl, to approve the replacement for the Fire Department vacancy. Carried 4-3 (Nay – McAlister, Jorgenson, and Nordin). City Attorney Hoversten noted that it is appropriate for Council Member Christopherson to vote on this issue as there is no personal benefit to him here. The Conflict of Interest Statute also specifically allows members of part-time firefighter relief

associations to be council members and vote on certain issues that do not benefit them. Mr. Hoversten stated that staff would not need to take this preliminary approval to council until the candidates' names are ready for full council approval.

**Item #7 – Closed Session** – Motion by Council Member Nordin, seconded by Council Member McAlister to close the meeting under Minnesota Statute 13D.03 for labor negotiation discussions. Carried 7-0. Meeting closed at 7:04 p.m.

See tape of closed session.

Motion by Council Member Jorgenson, seconded by Council Member Hecimovich, to reopen the meeting. Carried 7-0. Meeting reopened at 7:36 p.m.

Moved by Council Member Nordin, seconded by Council Member Hecimovich, to adjourn the meeting at 7:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Tom Dankert  
Director of Administrative Services