

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
December 19, 2005
City Hall Conference Room
4:45 p.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Rietz, Council Member-at-Large Christopherson (5:10 p.m.), Council Members Hecimovich, Nordin (5:05 p.m.), Dick Pacholl, Scott Pacholl, Baker, and McAlister

ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Police Officers Dave McKichan, Jeff McCormack, Joe Milli, Dave Schafer, Brian Krueger, and Paul Philipp. Kate Jordahl, Jim Hurm and Tom Dankert

ALSO PRESENT: KAAL TV-6, Austin Post Bulletin, and Austin Daily Herald

The Mayor called the work session to order at 4:45 pm.

Item #1 – Special Incident Response Vehicle – Mayor Rietz thanked everybody for allowing the Police Department to bring a presentation forward regarding the proposed Special Incident Response Team (SIRT) vehicle. Mayor Rietz noted Chief Philipp had planned on doing a presentation in January regarding the vehicle, but moved it up once Council had recommended against including the vehicle in the 2006 to 2010 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

Chief Philipp noted the SIRT vehicle has been in the CIP for three or four years now. The SIRT team was formed in 1986 during the Hormel strike by then Chief Hoffman. Today there are twelve officers comprised of nine city police officers, two county deputies, and one jailer/EMT. Chief Philipp stated these twelve individuals have specialized training and equipment to provide service for our community. As far as using the vehicle enough to justify the expenditure, Chief Philipp noted the vehicle would probably be called out five to seven times per year for dangerous conditions. Chief Philipp said we don't use fire trucks or our guns on a daily basis, but when we do we are sure glad we have them. He stated the vehicle would be used in three main areas:

1. Transport/Command Vehicle – This would allow all twelve members to travel together with all of their gear.
2. Backup Dispatch Center – This vehicle would allow for a temporary backup center in the event the L.E.C. went down.
3. Mobile Crime Scene Unit – Would be used in situations such as the incident we had near the Mill Pond Trail where we needed the Fire Department to come down to help light the area.

Chief Philipp noted this vehicle could also be used as a command center in the event of a natural disaster like the flooding Austin is prone to. Chief Philipp noted Mower County did not support the vehicle expenditure so we applied for other grants, all of which have been denied. Chief Philipp did note that if we do go ahead with this purchase, a rental rate will have to be set up with Mower County for them to rent it from us for their use.

Detective Brian Krueger, Police Officer Joe Milli, and Detective Dave Schafer gave brief presentations on the use of the vehicle, the cost, and the benefits. Officer Milli noted we have received a quote for a 16 foot long vehicle with an approximate cost of \$110,000. Detective Schafer noted we will not be coming back to the city council for additional funding beyond the \$78,000 that has been set aside in fund balance, plus the \$26,000 of forfeited vehicle monies that, by statute, can only be used for certain things, like this vehicle. Detective Schafer noted the extra funding would come from some other source, if the council will approve of this vehicle purchase.

Council Member Hecimovich stated that it is not wise to put all twelve men into one vehicle. Detective Schafer noted in the types of calls we usually get, this vehicle would not be the target. Chief Philipp also noted this vehicle would not be parked in harm's way. Council Member Hecimovich stated that he attended a funeral recently and many people questioned why such a vehicle would be needed. Council Member Hecimovich stated he agrees that the officers need to be safe, but still can't justify this much money on the vehicle.

Mayor Rietz noted if Council wants to amend the 5 Year Capital Improvement Plan, a motion would be needed for such to amend the plan.

Council Member Baker stated we need to take the professional word (from the Police Department) that this vehicle is needed. Council Member McAlister stated that he feels like we need to do something. There is more and more stuff needed to be brought to these situations.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Dick Pacholl, to adjourn the work session at 5:24 p.m. as the city council meeting will begin shortly.

After the city council meeting adjourned, the work session re-opened at 6:40 p.m.

Item #2 – Economic development for Main Street Project – Mr. Hurm discussed the bylaws of Austin Main Street, Inc. noting these are for informational purposes for the city council. Mr. Hurm noted the voting makeup of the Board of Austin Main Street, Inc. as follows:

- One Austin City Council member
- One Austin Port Authority member
- One Austin utilities member
- One Mower County Commissioner
- One youth representative
- Eight members that are committee co-chairs of the four standing committees

Discussion ensued regarding allowing somebody from Pacelli High School to be a youth representative. Mr. Hurm noted he would discuss that change with the Austin Main Street, Inc. committee.

Council Member Baker stated that the more he reviews this information, the more it bothers him. This appears to be just one more hurdle for businesses to have to go through. Council Member Baker stated that what government should do is to provide clear rules, and then get out of the way. Does this committee add value? Mr. Hurm stated this committee has done exactly that, it has been set up by the government so that now the government can get out of the way. This

entity is an advocate for downtown businesses and has been successful in other communities. Kate Jordahl, intern for the downtown program, noted this is the way the most successful entities have been set up for Main Street programs. Council Member Baker stated he was still not convinced about this. We need the City of Austin to be easier to work with for businesses. Further discussion ensued.

Mayor Rietz questioned what specifically is needed from Council tonight. Mr. Hurm stated the Agreement for Services would need approval by the council. This agreement outlines what would be provided by Austin Main Street, Inc., and that the City of Austin would contribute \$10,000 in 2006 for those activities. Mr. Hurm noted the Port Authority has already approved it, and the HRA and Austin Utilities will be taking the matter up in the very near future. This agreement is similar to that of the DCA, and would be funded by the City out of the \$23,000 budgeted for economic development.

Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated he wanted to un-budget the money. Council Member-at-Large Christopherson questioned how long would this entity be funded, and also agreed that this is adding another level of bureaucracy.

Council Member Scott Pacholl questioned why we would give them an additional \$10,000 when we just approved a \$250,000 transfer into the Port Authority for this. Mr. Hurm noted the \$250,000 is for capital related items, while this \$10,000 would be for operational expenses, including a director's salary.

Council Member Hecimovich questioned if this would be an employee of the City of Austin. Mr. Hurm noted they would be employed by Austin Main Street, Inc. not the City of Austin.

Ms. Jordahl stated that this organization could continue on for many years. Even if all of the store fronts are full, these businesses still need help. Ms. Jordahl agreed that she couldn't see the City funding this forever, but she guaranteed that within two to three years everybody will see a difference in downtown Austin.

Mayor Rietz requested that this be evaluated on an annual basis.

Council Member Scott Pacholl questioned how this organization could become self-sufficient, i.e. not reliant on the City of Austin for operational costs. Mr. Hurm noted grants through the State of Minnesota or downtown fundraising may be options.

Council Member Dick Pacholl discussed the role of the Austin Chamber of Commerce in helping out the downtown businesses. Ms. Jordahl stated that the Chamber of Commerce focuses on the entire community, not just downtown. The Chamber of Commerce is a partner in this organization, but not all downtown merchants are also members of the Chamber of Commerce.

Council Member McAlister noted he looks at Albert Lea which has added hundreds of jobs under JOBZ. Albert Lea and Owatonna's downtowns seem to have plenty of people on their streets, but Austin has close to zero JOBZ employees, downtown Austin is not bustling with people, and the Oak Park Mall is suffering. Council Member McAlister stated we have been doing nothing and getting nothing in return. Council Member McAlister voiced his support for economic development ventures in the downtown area.

Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated that when the government gets involved, we do not allow for the cyclical events to happen. We haven't done anything to help bring Wal-Mart into Austin, yet they are still coming.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member Nordin, seconded by Council Member McAlister, to forward this item onto Council for their approval. Carried 5-2 (Council Member Baker and Council Member-at-Large Christopherson – Nay). Council Member Dick Pacholl stated he was approving bringing this to council to get an official council vote at the council meeting level.

Item #3a Senior Center lease – Mr. Dankert discussed the proposed lease agreement between the City of Austin and Mower County Seniors, Inc. for the lease of the current Mower County Senior Center. Mr. Dankert noted he is working with Viril Layton of the Facilities Committee from Mower County Seniors Inc. to get the proposed lease. Mr. Dankert noted the lease is for one year, with annual renewals available. The City of Austin will make all operational expense payments, and will collect the funds from Mower County (\$30,000 in 2006) in order to operate the facility. All programming costs would be paid for by Mower County Seniors, Inc. out of lease revenues from subletting the facility.

Council Member Hecimovich questioned if the \$60,000 was enough for a year of operations. Mr. Dankert noted it would still be difficult as over \$26,000 of that budget goes directly to pay for utility costs. Mr. Dankert noted a recently completed energy audit by the Austin Utilities indicates some capital changes that could have four year paybacks. We may need to use some of our designated capital project money in order to correct some facility flaws. Otherwise, Mr. Dankert noted he could not guarantee that he would not be back in the future requesting Council for other capital contributions.

Council Member McAlister stated we are paying for operational costs for a social event. The funds are going into this building so that seniors can get together someplace. This does not seem like a good use of dollars for such few people that use the facility. Council Member Hecimovich noted our charge as Council is to cover for youth through senior citizens. Council Member Scott Pacholl voiced his support for a teenage center.

Motion by Council Member Hecimovich, seconded by Council Member Nordin, to recommend to council the approval of the proposed lease with Mower County Seniors, Inc. Carried 6-1 (Council Member McAlister – Nay). Item will be forwarded onto the next council agenda.

Item #3b Senior Center resolution – Mr. Dankert discussed the proposed resolution that would also be requested to be reviewed by Mower County to allow for the operations of the facility. This resolution allows us to create the Senior Center Department, and any unused dollars would be reserved for future operational/capital costs. Mr. Dankert noted, for example, if at the end of 2006 there was \$60,000 in revenue and only \$55,000 of expense, the City would reserve the remaining \$5,000 for future operations. If however, we take in \$60,000 in 2006 and spend \$65,000 we will need to adjust our annual request to both the City and Mower County.

Motion by Council Member Hecimovich, seconded by Council Member Dick Pacholl, to recommend to Council the approval of the proposed resolution for operations of the Senior Center. Carried 7-0. Item will be forwarded onto the next council agenda.

Item #4 – Closed session to update on contract negotiations – Motion by Council Member McAlister, seconded by Council Member Nordin, to close the meeting at 7:31 p.m. for an update on contract negotiations under M.S. 13D.03. Carried 7-0.

See tape of closed meeting.

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

There being no further business, Council Member Nordin moved to adjourn the work session, seconded by Council Member Dick Pacholl. Motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 7:38 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Dankert
Director of Administrative Services