

M I N U T E S
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION (RETREAT)
February 15, 2006
Town Center Conference Room
5:30 p.m.

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

ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Jim Hurm, Paul Philipp (5:30 to 6:30), Trish Wiechmann (5:30 to 6:30), Denny Maschka (6:30 to 7:30), and Tom Dankert

ALSO PRESENT: Park and Recreation Board Members Gretchen Ramlo, Dick Lee's, Dan Ball, and Jeff Austin, Austin Post Bulletin, and Austin Daily Herald

The Mayor called the work session (retreat) to order at 5:30 pm.

Item #1 – 5:30 to 6:30 Police Civil Service Commission – Council Member McAlister started out the discussion by stating nothing he has read has changed his position on this issue, the Police Civil Service Commission should be eliminated.

Police Chief Paul Philipp discussed briefly the history of the Police Civil Service Commission, by noting it was important in its day, but that day has long since passed. Additionally the rules create conflicts with state statutes, as state statutes have progressed and been refined while the rules have not been changed much. There is a lack of flexibility in the Police Civil Service rules, and Chief Philipp noted his request to have the Police Civil Service Commission eliminated. Both St. Louis Park and Minnetonka have eliminated their civil service commissions in the past few years, and both of their police chiefs do not regret the move. This issue came up in the past and we requested a position by L.E.L.S., but none was ever received. Chief Philipp noted we would ask again for their position on this elimination.

Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann noted we need to ensure that we have clear policies in place and a clear understanding of those policies if the Police Civil Service Commission is eliminated. City Administrator Jim Hurm noted one of the original purposes of the Police Civil Service Commission was to create a buffer between the council and the Police Department.

Council Member Hecimovich questioned what would happen in an arbitration issue. Chief Philipp stated when we terminate an employee they have the right to choose between the following:

1. Civil Service hearing (open to the public)
2. Private Arbitration

3. Veteran's hearing

Chief Philipp noted most employees don't want to have a civil service hearing as it is public. Additionally, if the employee does not like the result of the civil service decision, the employee could then choose to go through private arbitration. Council Member McAlister stated the final step could then be through the court system.

Chief Philipp stated that if the commission is terminated, we would use roughly the same process that we use now for hiring of employees. Council will still be involved in approving any positions, plus they would need to approve a conditional job offer to any prospective candidate. Mayor Rietz noted the commission rules make it harder for you to hire the employee you want.

Council Member Dick Pacholl stated he could see some disadvantages as far as discipline, but there are too many disadvantageous in the hiring process to keep the commission around. Chief Philipp stated that in 99% of the cases, the discipline he recommends, the Police Civil Service Commission upholds. Chief Philipp stated under a new system, only the Police Chief would be administering discipline.

Council Member Baker stated that if we did have bad leadership at the Police Department in the future, would the Police Civil Service Commission create a nice barrier for the officers? Chief Philipp stated the barrier also protects the Police Chief also. Council Member Baker questioned if we are making the hiring process less rigorous by eliminating the Police Civil Service Commission? Chief Philipp stated we were not, as we would have the ability to have more written or verbal skills test in the process if so desired. Chief Philipp did state we would need to create some format as to how we would hire people.

Mayor Rietz questioned if anybody was against having the Police Civil Service Commission being eliminated. No objections were noted.

Council Member Baker stated we have bigger issues with human resources than just the Police Civil Service Commission, such as comparable worth. Mayor Rietz stated we need a more diverse workforce. Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated he is not a believer in affirmative action. We need to hire the best person for the job, regardless of race or gender. Ms. Wiechmann stated that is always our goal, to hire the best person.

Issue #1a – Police Department location – Mr. Hurm noted in a recent discussion with County Coordinator Craig Oscarson, a letter should be coming fairly soon regarding the proposed Justice Center, and whether or not the Police Department wants to be part of the project in some green field location. Mr. Dankert noted early estimates pegged the total city cost (Police Department and 50% of dispatch) at between \$3 and \$4 million. Chief Philipp stated we would still have the operating cost (50%) of the dispatchers no matter where we go.

Chief Philipp stated we need to assess splitting up with Mower County. Record keeping could be an issue, and the detectives and Sheriff's office work directly together on a daily basis. For the officers, this would not change their daily activity. Administration wise, there would not be many changes either.

Council Member Baker stated the consensus seems to be for the Police Department to stay downtown, but we should get some cost estimates for both capital and operating on this issue.

Council Member-at-Large Christopherson questioned if a substation could be created downtown instead. Chief Philipp stated the intent is wherever we are at and the County is at, we would each have some space in each other's facility to work in.

Council Member McAlister stated that the Sheriff's Department could also stay downtown with the Police Department if the Judicial Center is built. Only the jailers need to be on the same site as the jail. Chief Philipp stated the recommendation of the committee was a Justice Center that was combined for all of their operations.

Issue #2 – Park and Recreation Matters In Hand – Parks and Recreation Director Denny Maschka discussed usage at both Packer and Riverside Arenas. Mr. Dankert noted that based on the current known events, we have approximately 177 days (50%) being used at Packer Arena, and 171 days (47%) being used at Riverside Arena. Mr. Maschka noted Austin Youth Hockey is proposing to rent ice in March and April for \$4,000 per month, which could add another 30 to 61 days of usage at the facility. Mr. Maschka noted that for summer ice, we would need a dehumidification system to take the “fog” off of the ice. This could cost between \$80,000 and \$90,000. However, we still would probably not be able to recoup the true cost of the ice through rentals.

Mr. Dankert discussed the financial performance of our arenas, compared to Albert Lea and Steele County noting we are about in the middle of the pack when it comes to a net loss. Mr. Maschka stated Albert Lea currently charges \$125 per hour for ice, Steele County charges \$138 per hour, while Austin charges \$130 per hour.

Council Member Baker stated we should work hard on minimizing the loss at the arenas. We need to sell more ice during the season, as not all of the ice is being used every night. If Austin Youth Hockey is willing to take a bigger bite then we should look at this. Council Member Baker reiterated that we need to use the existing ice schedule better. Mayor Rietz questioned if all of the “good time ice” (not late at night) is being used. Mr. Maschka noted absolutely.

Council Member Hecimovich stated that all ice arena's are white elephants. Council Member McAlister stated that he takes no pleasure in the arenas. In fact, when Riverside Arena was first built it was to be self-supporting. Council Member McAlister stated we need to generate something in the non-winter months in these two facilities.

Mayor Rietz questioned those in attendance if they would like to try letting Austin Youth Hockey rent the additional ice time for this year. Council Member Hecimovich stated he was not in favor at this point.

Issue 2a – Park and Recreation offices – Mr. Maschka noted his office has moved several times in his history, but they enjoy being part of downtown. Mayor Rietz noted this request is being discussed as the Paramount Theatre would like the current facilities of the Park and

Recreation office. Council Member McAlister questioned if the Paramount Theatre wants to buy the building, or are looking for a gift? Council Member Nordin stated they have told her they will buy it. Gretchen Ramlo stated the Austin Area Arts Center at the Oak Park mall may also be a partner with the Paramount Theatre in this project.

Council Member Hecimovich stated if we sell the existing facility for \$100,000 and it costs us \$400,000 to build a new facility, then we have just cost the taxpayers \$300,000.

Mayor Rietz noted some of the grants the Paramount Theatre receives discuss A.D.A. requirements. Part of this involves a plan as to what will be the resolution to their handicapped bathroom accessibility issue.

Council Member Dick Pacholl stated that if council does move in the direction of a downtown rec. center, then the Park and Rec. offices should be attached to that.

Item 2b – Community Recreation Center – Mr. Maschka stated he has thought for many years that we could use a recreation center in this community. We currently do not have anything to use, and we could go after more tournaments if such a facility existed. Mr. Maschka noted he liked the USEM's block for this project.

Council Member Scott Pacholl questioned what would be in the proposed rec. center. Mr. Maschka stated that gymnasiums, indoor play apparatus, community rooms, Park and Rec. and Police offices, and even the youth activity center could be moved into one location. Mr. Maschka noted his Park and Recreation Board has discussed this proposal also. Mayor Rietz stated there is also a need for a centralized place for services for children.

Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated that he struggles with this one. We have two white elephants now with the arenas. We need to prove that we can make things work with the existing arena's before we build another facility. Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated he is okay with the offices, but the Paramount Theatre can make us an offer on the building first.

Mr. Maschka noted at one point, Packer Arena had some proposed expansion for offices. Ms. Ramlo stated that we may be taking business away from other entities (YMCA, etc.) if we build a rec. center. Council Member Scott Pacholl stated he believed this would be a great asset to the community, and it is our obligation to provide opportunities to our citizens. Council Member Dick Pacholl stated we need to get the arena usage up first. Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated he agreed with Mrs. Ramlo in that we may be competing with other entities that do this.

After further discussion, Mr. Maschka stated he would form a subcommittee of his board to further study the issue.

Item 2c – Park Area in Green Space – Mr. Maschka stated we are now mowing more land in the South Main Street area with further flood acquisition. We have received a Shoreland Restoration grant that will provide funding to plant prairie grass, shrubs, and trees in the Whittier

Park neighborhood. We are also looking at more soccer fields for the youth to play on. Mr. Hurm reiterated that even more land on the east side will be coming forward after the Jim's Super Value project is completed.

Council Member McAlister stated he has absolutely no interest in building a fieldhouse. We should talk to the Paramount Theatre to see what resources they have available, and also see what the building is worth.

Item #3 – Goals for 2007 (7:45 p.m.) – Mr. Hurm handed out stickers to the Mayor and Council. Each sticker was numbered 1 through 5. The Mayor and Council Members were to put a sticker by each item that they thought should be a goal, with the #5 being their most important. When all of the stickers were added up, the goal with the most points would be the number one priority, etc. The results are as follows:

	<u>Total Points</u>
Flood Mitigation comprehensive plan	19
Main Street Project	14
Centralization of Economic Development	14
City Police Department office	14
Cook Farm promoting	12
More useful arenas	12
Assist with Hormel Institute project	11
Reuse of flood properties	7
Help with KSMQ location	5
Paramount Theatre/Park and Rec. offices	4
Interactive government/use of KSMQ	3
AMCAT bus location	2
Succession planning	2
Wireless Internet	1
Attract retail development	0
Splash Park at the swimming pool	0
Assistance with early childhood	0

Results will be presented to council at the next meeting.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8:16 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Dankert
Director of Administrative Services