

M I N U T E S
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
July 3, 2006
City Hall Conference Room
6:20 p.m.

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

ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Paul Philipp, Jim Hurm, and Tom Dankert

ALSO PRESENT: Garry Ellingson and Dave Hillier (Mower County Commissioners), Austin Post Bulletin and Austin Daily Herald

The Mayor called the work session to order at 6:24 pm.

Item #1 – Location of Police Department – Police Chief Paul Philipp started off the discussion of the proposed location of the Police Department by stating that he agrees with the Mower County Commissioners that a new detention facility is needed in our community. Chief Philipp noted he does support the proposed Justice Center idea, but he cannot support moving the Austin Police Department out of the downtown area. Chief Philipp noted he was not going to read his memo or the backup, but that council can certainly ask questions on his backup if they have any. Mayor Rietz noted according to Chief Philipp's memo, many communities are now starting to split the two functions (Police and Sheriff) back into two separate and distinct units.

City Administrator Jim Hurm handed out a copy of a March 2, 2006 email from Tom Dankert to officials at Mower County requesting specific information on the city's proposed costs if we were to enter into a joint agreement on the Justice Center. Mr. Hurm noted we had a follow up meeting with County staff to further discuss the information we had requested so that Council could make an educated decision on the matter. Mr. Hurm noted it may not be until August that we get back to the County on this issue, as it will take some time after we get the information for us to make a decision. Also, the County is requesting preliminary information from their architects as to a proposed city cost for joint dispatch and for the Police Department. Mr. Hurm noted he would like council to direct the City Administrator to write a letter to Mower County requesting an extension from the August 1, 2006 deadline to 30 days after we receive the information that we have requested.

Council Member Hecimovich noted he has attended many meetings, and the public agrees with Chief Philipp that the Police Department should be downtown Austin. The downtown revitalization also needs this facility downtown.

Council Member McAlister noted that one sheriff deputy is not happy to separate the two functions. Council Member McAlister questioned what the rank and file at the Police Department thought about separating. Chief Philipp stated the investigators do not want to separate. The supervisors do not appear to have a great concern for separating.

Mayor Rietz questioned why some of these entities are separating. Chief Philipp stated one issue is the desire for more control and identity of the Police Department. With the better technology, we do not have to be housed together to get access to critical information.

Council Member Baker noted this issue is the entire cornerstone of the 2007 budget. Some great organizational points have been made tonight, but either way this project is going to cost us. All options will come from the tax payers. Mayor Rietz noted we do have a financing plan to handle this proposed cost.

Council Member McAlister read from a prepared letter. Council Member McAlister questioned where are all the funds going to come from to handle a sales tax for flooding, a new watershed tax, a tax to pay for the Justice Center, and a revenue stream to pay for the Police Department. All of these costs will add up to the taxpayer in Austin, Minnesota. We are already one of the poorest communities in the State of Minnesota, how can our taxpayers afford all of these things. Mayor Rietz responded by noting that we are working on a financing plan for the flood issues. The Justice Center we do not have a lot to say about as this is a County project. The Police Department location is why we are here tonight.

Council Member Dick Pacholl noted he thought we could save money for a long time by combining. Council Member Dick Pacholl noted he still feels that keeping the two departments together would save the tax payers money. If we decide to eventually build a new government center to house all of the city departments, where is all of this money going to come from? Council Member Dick Pacholl reiterated that if the County wants to look at part of the Cook Farm site, we should be interested in using this land as we already own it and the land could be part of our payment for this new facility.

Council Member Scott Pacholl stated that we are going to pay for it either way, so if the Police Department can stay downtown, we should keep it there.

Council Member-at-Large Christopherson questioned where the location of the Police Department would be if it remained downtown. Mayor Rietz noted we are working on proposed locations and cost estimates.

Council Member Baker questioned what we had to do and when in order to make the decision. Mayor Rietz noted Mower County expects a decision by August 1, 2006. Mr. Hurm noted he wanted Council to request an extension of this deadline.

Motion by Council Member Hecimovich, seconded by Council Member Nordin to request an extension of one month from the date we get answers to our questions.

Before the voice vote could be taken, County Commissioner Dave Hillier noted that yes the email was received in March, but that they didn't know the land cost until just recently so they could not respond to the request. Mayor Rietz noted we asked several times for the information. Mr. Hillier noted the construction cost will be approximately the same no matter if it is in our facility or on your own location. Mr. Hillier noted the County staff would be responding to our request.

County Commissioner Garry Ellingson noted we are currently boarding out 15 prisoners at a cost of \$24,000 per month to Mitchell Iowa. What happens to that cost if the Department of Corrections shuts us down?

The voice vote was taken on the original motion. Carried 7-0.

Item 3 – Other Item – Council Member-at-Large Christopherson questioned what the large chunks of concrete were doing on the former railroad site. Mr. Hurm noted they are checking past construction contracts to ensure that all of the concrete was removed as had been agreed upon.

Item #2a – Budget dates – Mr. Hurm wanted to ensure all Council had the proposed dates to meet regarding the 2007 budget and the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP for 2007-2011). The proposed dates are as follows:

June 30	Budget and 5-Year CIP documents to department heads.
July 10 at 5:30 pm	First work session with Council to review some revenue and expense estimates for 2007
July 27	Budget and 5-Year CIP documents back from department heads
August 21 – following council meeting	Another work session to review the results of the department head requests, and a review of a preliminarily balanced budget from City Administration
August 28	If needed, a council work session, review any tweaking to the preliminary budget and tax levy, and recommend to Council a proposed tax levy and budget for 2007
September 5	Council adopts Proposed Tax Levy and Budget for 2007 via resolutions
September 15	Due date by state law for Proposed Tax Budget

No objections were noted regarding the above timeline.

With no other items, motion by Council Member Nordin, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Christopherson to adjourn the meeting. Carried 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Dankert
Director of Administrative Services