

M I N U T E S
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
August 8, 2006
City Hall Conference Room
5:30 p.m.

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

ABSENT: Council Member Baker

STAFF PRESENT: Craig Hoium, Jim Hurm, and Tom Dankert

ALSO PRESENT: George Brophy, Bill Snyder, and Jeff Thatcher from the DCA, Public, Austin Post Bulletin and Austin Daily Herald

Item #1 – DCA report on strategic plan – Bill Snyder, Jeff Thatcher and George Brophy discussed the strategic plan of the DCA for the future. Mr. Snyder noted the focus areas included the following:

- Organizational Structure
- Develop and Assist Existing Businesses
- Marketing the DCA and Austin
- Developing Cook Farm

The objectives included succession planning and increased memberships as well as other things. Mr. Snyder noted the DCA wants to expand the board to 30 members, and to get a more cross section of representation. Mr. Thatcher added that by gaining membership, we have a broader base of expertise. Mayor Rietz noted she appreciated the diversity on the board.

Council Member McAlister stated he has been at these meetings, and these folks know plenty about our business community. We are on the edge of something good happening in this community, and Council Member McAlister stated he is excited about the things that are going on.

Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated Council had identified that we want a “one-stop shop” for economic development here in Austin. We currently have the HRA, DCA, and our own Community Development Department. He asked how this new structure would help us centralize these functions. Mr. Snyder stated that with the broader board membership of the DCA, we would have a better expertise in the cross section to gain expertise from. Mr. Thatcher stated we need to build an easier “one-stop shop”, and we need to continue to work together.

Mr. Thatcher stated that without the DCA, Austin Packaging Company would not be located in this town. Both the City and DCA worked together to get the job done. Mayor Rietz stated it is important for the entire Mower County area to be succeeding. We want all small cities as well as the City of Austin to succeed in this venture. Council Member Hecimovich stated it was important to see all of the area successes and a coordinated effort to centralize the efforts of economic development.

Council Member Dick Pacholl stated that it bothers him – what are we doing wrong in that we cannot get businesses to build here in Austin. Mr. Thatcher stated if we are to market and sell lots at the Cook Farm, then we need to figure out what we are doing wrong.

Mayor Rietz thanked the members of the DCA for their presentation.

Item #2 – Smoking Ban Update – Mayor Rietz handed out a letter that was received from the Noon Kiwanis Club in support of a smoking ban.

Kathy Stutzman addressed Council and noted some points of highlight from the last time she spoke in front of the council. She noted a general consensus among council members about the risks associated with smoking. This proposed ordinance would not ban smoking; it would just limit where people would be allowed to smoke. No employees should have to choose between a good paying job and their health noted Ms. Stutzman. She noted this is an ordinance whose time has come for passage.

Larry and Carol Cox, owners of Curves for Women, noted they have received over 139 signatures in support of the ban over the last two weeks. Mr. Cox noted they offer a smoke free environment. She said we need to pass this ordinance to improve air quality. A prepared statement and some bumper stickers were given to the Mayor.

Sarah Story noted that cigarettes kill more people than drunk drivers do on an annual basis. This ordinance is a way for kids to try to influence their parents to not smoke. Two thousand kids per day under the age of 18 start smoking noted Ms. Story. Three thousand people die from lung cancer each year. She noted her parents smoke and some day they might not be here because of their smoking. There would be a better environment for families if we had a smoke free ordinance.

Mr. Terry Leas stated that he spends most of his hours here in Austin. Mr. Leas noted he has allergies and can't go into places where smoking is allowed. Mr. Leas also gave his statement to the Mayor.

Margene Gunderson noted eliminating the exposure to smoke would be a great standard for us. Nobody should have to choose between their job and their health. Ms. Gunderson noted we need to eliminate secondhand smoke in the work place.

Steve King noted that state prisons went smoke-free a few years ago. Austin can be progressive on this issue, and this is an opportunity to do the right thing.

Craig Jones noted the health risks are undisputable. The government's role in society is to protect the people, and you would be doing that by governing. Additionally, we have individual rights.

Malcom McDonald noted he was representing the Noon Kiwanis Club. He said 20-30% of our population is children. Recently, Mr. McDonald noted he was at a grocery store and saw a mom and a grandma buckle a baby into the back car seat and then promptly lit up their cigarettes as they drove away.

Sandy Forstner noted he has a contradictory point of view on the issue. The Chamber of Commerce opposes a smoking ban in the City of Austin. This should be each individual

business owner's choice, as these are private establishments. This ordinance will still not protect kids, as people will still be smoking in their cars and in their homes. Mr. Forstner gave statistics including 35 bars in Minneapolis which closed within six months of their ordinance being adopted. Mr. Forstner noted smoking is currently a legal activity, and this would target a handful of businesses.

Council Member Nordin noted the State of Colorado is smoke free effective July 1, 2006. This is a health issue that is very important.

Council Member Scott Pacholl stated this is the property rights of the business owner. The customers have implicitly implied they will follow the rules of the owners.

Council Member Dick Pacholl stated he is not opposed to a ban to a certain degree, but this should be the choice of each business owner.

Mayor Rietz noted her strong support for the proposed smoking ban. Council Member Baker noted he believed we should move the proposed ordinance forward, but that a compromise may be needed.

Council Member McAlister stated he cannot find one good reason to not have a smoking ban, although something "gnaws" at him about this whole issue.

Motion by Council Member McAlister, seconded by Council Member Nordin, to recommend staff review a non-smoking ordinance and to bring a suggested draft back to a council work session for further review. Mr. Hurm noted optional language may also be suggested in the proposed ordinance. Carried, with Council Member Scott Pacholl voting nay. Council Member Hecimovich noted we could move it forward, but business owners have rights.

Item #3 – Location of Police Department – Mr. Hurm noted staff is analyzing different locations and reviewing both capital and operational costs. Our three options include going with Mower County to the new facility, separating off for everything, or separating off for the Police Department only. We need to review land acquisition costs and construction costs and compare these to the Mower County proposal to get a better understanding of the costs. Mr. Hurm noted the plan is to report back at a work session on August 22 the results of our study. Council could then consider all options and then give direction to Mower County.

Council Member Scott Pacholl noted if the City is not going to own the building or the land, why should we be expected to pay for them? Council Member-at-Large Christopherson agreed, further stating that it would be the owner's responsibility for maintenance of the facility. Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated that if we are to pay for 12% of the building, then we should own it.

Council Member Dick Pacholl stated that if we go with Mower County, the taxpayers will already be paying 40 to 50% of the costs through the County tax levy. We could then see a loss of downtown options. Mayor Rietz suggested a meeting on August 21 after the council meeting, on August 22 for the regular work session, or on August 28 for a special council meeting.

Council Member McAlister stated he hopes the County backs off on this. This will be devastating to the School, City, and County in the future if this project is done. Council Member

McAlister stated that we did not work hand in glove on this project. Mayor Rietz agreed, noting the tax levy increase will affect the taxpayers big time with this.

Sandy Forstner agreed, noting the Chamber of Commerce is in the same boat as the City; this is too big and costly.

Council Member McAlister stated that the principal and interest on a \$40 million facility is over \$3 million per year. This will increase the county levy, plus there will be additional operational costs that will have to be levied. What happens to the current courthouse is another question. Council Member McAlister stated this affects everybody, but that he also did not want to criticize the County on this project. Mr. Forstner stated there seems to be no comprehensive plan for the entire development.

Council Member Scott Pacholl questioned the September 1 deadline for an answer. Mr. Hurm noted this could be negotiable. Council Member Hecimovich stated maybe the City and the County are not ready to make the jump into this yet. Council Member-at-Large Christopherson again questioned why the deadline. Mr. Dankert noted the County wants to get moving on this project, and they need our decision to properly plan the facility.

After further discussion, staff noted we would bring back the results of the study at the August 22 council work session.

Item #4 – Hormel Foundation requests – Mr. Hurm drew a grid on the whiteboard as Council further discussed the requests of the Hormel Foundation. Additionally, the staff looked at a long-term project, such as a downtown water park, but this request has not yet been reviewed by Main Street Inc. The following are the results of the review (only the top five were chosen for each council member/mayor, with 5 being the highest priority):

		Council Members							
		BR	PC	BM	DP	SP	NH	GN	Total
a.	Downtown Christmas lights	5	2	2	1	2	4	4	20
b.	Downtown Project funds	4	1	5	5	3	5	5	28
c.	Mill Pond fountains			3		1	3		7
d.	Nature Center snowmobile				3			1	4
e.	Nature Center prehistoric exhibit		4						4
f.	Nature Center tractor/loader	3		4	4	4	1		16
g.	AMCAT bus funding					5		3	8
h.	Fire department smoke detectors	1	5		2		2	2	12
i.	Library digital sign								0
j.	Library Smithsonian exhibit		3						3
k.	Library computer privacy screens	2		1					3
l.	Dialysis Route funding	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The Dialysis Route is included for informational purposes only, but will be requested out of a separate pool of funds.

Council Member Baker's votes will be added to the totals when he returns back next week. This will then be brought forward to Council for their approval.

Item #5 – Administrator’s Report – Mr. Hurm updated Council with a report on the budget and ridership of the Spamtown Belle.

With no other items, motion by Council Member Hecimovich, seconded by Council Member Nordin, to adjourn the meeting at 7:35 p.m. Carried 6-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Dankert
Director of Administrative Services