

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
APRIL 16, 2007
City Hall Conference Room
6:28 p.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Stiehm, Council Member-at-Large Christopherson, Council Members McAlister, Hecimovich, Austin, Dick Pacholl, Scott Pacholl, and Martin.

ABSENT: None.

STAFF PRESENT: Jim Hurm and Tom Dankert

ALSO PRESENT: Sandy Forstner, Jerry McCarthy, and Tom Sherman of the Austin Chamber of Commerce, Dr. Candace Raskin (School Superintendent), Craig Oscarson, Dave Hiller and Terese Amazi of Mower County, KAUS Radio, Austin Post Bulletin, and Austin Daily Herald

Mayor Stiehm opened the meeting at 6:28 pm.

Item No. 1: City Credit Card. Mr. Dankert discussed the request by Mayor Stiehm to get a city credit card. This card would come in handy when making hotel reservations for any staff, as now people are putting it on their personal credit card. Mr. Dankert noted he has worked with Wells Fargo Bank to acquire a corporate credit card with no fees associated with it, but for now access would only be granted to Mr. Dankert and Jeanne Howatt. Mr. Dankert noted we need to start small to see how things work and to ensure that the bill gets paid on a timely basis.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member Hecimovich, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Christopherson to recommend to Council the approval of a corporate credit card with Mr. Dankert and Ms. Howatt as authorized signatories. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the May 7 city council agenda.

Item No. 2: Police Department location, participation in County jail/judicial center project. Mr. Hurm opened the discussion by briefly going through his exhibits (#1 through #11) and by posing three questions to the city council. Mr. Hurm discussed some of the exhibits, noting in Exhibit 2 that County Commissioner Dave Tollefson believes the jail and Human Services building could be built downtown for about \$22.5 million. Mr. Hurm noted that based on this, would Council want to authorize funding (maybe up to \$20,000) to hire an architect to review the plan and see if it is feasible. Mr. Dankert noted that according to Exhibit 8, it would cost the city more to split the Police Department up with Mower County than to stay together, unless the Police Department was able to utilize a joint building with other city departments.

Austin Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Sandy Forstner noted that originally this building started out at a \$20 million jail facility, and now it has turned into a \$35-\$45 million justice center. This is simply more than the public can afford.

Chamber Member Tom Sherman stated that Mower County has spent a lot of time and money getting to this point. They should look at the budget restrictions that the community can afford, and not just what the employees and commissioners desire. The massive amount of a tax levy to pay for this would restrict the availability of funds for other projects within the city of Austin.

Council Members discussed their opinions on moving the Police Department, as follows:

- Council Member Dick Pacholl – do not split the forces up as they should be in the same building.
- Council Member Hecimovich – Keep the forces together, but we need to listen to the community and reduce the cost.
- Council Member Scott Pacholl – Agree that the forces should stay together if possible, but if the greenfield site is Mower County's choice, then our Police Department should stay downtown.
- Council Member-at-Large Christopherson – don't divide the forces. If something cannot be worked downtown, maybe we could create a substation for the Police Department at the Fire Station. I am willing to spend money on this second opinion by an architect, but only if Mower County is willing to listen to it.
- Council Member Martin – Keep the departments together, downtown and we need the second opinion.
- Council Member Austin – keep the Police Department downtown and Tolly's option should be explored.

Council Member Scott Pacholl stated part of this study could also explore the availability of a stand-alone Police Department in downtown Austin.

Council Member McAlister questioned if Mower County even cares if we do a study, are they going to accept it or would we be just wasting our money.

Mayor Stiehm questioned if anybody objected to spending the money on the study, none noted.

Mr. Hurm noted that in summary, four council members want the Police Department to stay downtown.

County Coordinator Craig Oscarson noted the Chamber of Commerce has a mission of keeping property taxes low for their business members. This is disrespectful to say that Mower County is not concerned with taxes. Mower County is lower than all other counties in our area in Minnesota. It is up to the County Board if they would like to explore Tolly's idea. Mr. Oscarson noted the County is already getting a second opinion by hiring a construction manager to review needs and desires of their departments. This is an effort to reduce the costs of the facility. Mr. Hurm noted that after a tax levy for the debt service on this new building, plus operational cost tax levy increases, plus Human Service building cost tax levy increases, Mower County will not be lower than our counterparts. Mr. Oscarson noted the cost and size has already been reduced by eliminating one courtroom and reducing the size of the jail.

County Commissioner Dave Hillier stated that the people he is talking to say that Mower County should build in the greenfield site. We have explored downtown options and we are listening to our staff, and these seem to be different than what the city council is hearing. Mayor Stiehm noted that he has had almost everybody that has spoken on the subject come to him in support of a downtown location. Commissioner Hillier questioned the legality of the city spending dollars on a plan that is not the city's project. Council Member Austin stated the expenditure would be done in conjunction with cooperation from Mower County.

Commissioner Hillier stated that the Cook Farm has been taken off of the options as it needs to be saved for industrial development. Discussion has been made regarding the failure of the jail here in Mower County. Commissioner Hillier stated we are not letting the criminals out.

Mr. Sherman again noted that \$40 million is more than this community can afford. Mr. Forstner stated that nobody has yet been able to explain why our jail/judicial center costs are so much more than other similar facilities that have been built. Dr. Raskin stated that Albert Lea had to lay off nineteen teachers as they cannot get an operating levy referendum passed in their community as the justice center, among other things, is taxing their residents so much. Dr. Raskin noted she does not want this to happen in Austin.

Council Member Hecimovich stated that we could do this study, but the County has to agree to take a good hard look and review it and be part of the process. We cannot just spend the money if Mower County wants nothing to do with the review or its process.

Mayor Stiehm stated if Mower County votes 3-2 not to accept our study, then we should not do it. Mr. Oscarson stated that if Mower County were to accept the study proposal, then they would like some city staff to be involved in the review also.

Motion by Council Member Hecimovich, seconded by Council Member-at-large Christopherson to recommend to Council the hiring of an architect to review Commissioner Tollefson's \$22.5 million proposal, contingent upon Mower County accepting the plan and contingent upon the decision being made in a timely manner. Carried 4-3 (Council Members Dick Pacholl, McAlister, Scott Pacholl – Nay). Item will be discussed with Mower County at the 4/18/07 joint city/county meeting.

Council Member Scott Pacholl question if council is willing to answer the letter B question of "Is the City willing to spend city resources to work with the County in planning for and building joint facilities downtown including Health and Human Services, Park and Rec, and parking?" No objections noted.

Item #3a.: Discussion of leak of the cooling tower. Mr. Dankert noted the loud banging noise at this evening's council meeting may have been a result of the cooling tower freezing and leaking water all over Trish's office. Mr. Dankert noted there was a large amount of water on the roof, some of which trickled down into the Human Resources office. Mr. Dankert noted we will probably spend around \$1,000 replacing the carpet, and we are moving some storage cabinets into her office from the Clerk's office. No objections noted.

There being no further business, motion by Council Member Dick Pacholl, seconded by Council Member Hecimovich, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 7:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Dankert
Director of Administrative Services