

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
MAY 8, 2007
City Hall Conference Room
5:30 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: Ann Hokanson, Craig Hoium, Jon Erichson, Denny Maschka (6:35), Jim Hurm and Tom Dankert.

ALSO PRESENT: Dick Nordin, George Brophy, Public, Austin Post Bulletin, and Austin Daily Herald.

Mayor Stiehm opened the meeting at 5:30 pm.

Item No. 1: Spamtown Belle. Dick Nordin discussed the request for the city to have the Spamtown Belle in the water again this year. 2006 was considered a successful year with over 1,600 passengers. The boat was originally donated to the city by Bill and Betty Regner, and would cost over \$50,000 to replace. This endeavor is not self-supporting, much like the ball fields, arenas and parks are. We are asking for public support from the city in the amount of \$3,500, and this is a bargain. The captains again will be donating their time to this endeavor.

Council Member Hecimovich questioned if the boat is in good shape. Mr. Nordin stated yes it is in good shape and seaworthy. The leak we had last year has been fixed.

Council Member Martin questioned if the downtown merchants had been requested to fully fund the \$3,500 themselves since this ties in with the downtown area. Mr. Nordin noted he had not. Mr. Brophy stated the downtown merchants are not able to financially support this endeavor, and the rides will probably never be enough to offset the cost either.

Council Member Dick Pacholl questioned who puts the boat in and out of the water. Mr. Nordin noted the Park and Rec. staff do. Mr. Pacholl stated this was an additional cost. Council Member Dick Pacholl questioned if the boat could be self-supporting. Mr. Nordin stated it is unrealistic to expect the boat to be self supporting.

Council Member McAlister stated this is the city's boat, not Mr. Nordin's. The citizens donate their time, and most other Park and Rec. programs are not self-supporting. Council Member McAlister noted he was impressed that these citizens would do this for us.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member McAlister, seconded by Council Member Hecimovich, to recommend to Council the approval of \$3,500 of funding from Contingency.

Before the vote was taken, Council Member Austin noted he was disappointed that we only give this a one year commitment. Council Member Austin asked some financial questions regarding the projections of revenues.

Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated that the Main Street Project, Inc. has received plenty of funding from the City, and if this helps the downtown area as they say then maybe they should be paying for the continued support.

Council Member Scott Pacholl stated that we supported this in 2006 because of the sesquicentennial, but the boat was not even in the water for this celebration.

Roll call taken on the original motion. Carried 5-2 (Council Member Scott Pacholl and Council Member-at-Large Christopherson – Nay). Item will be added to the May 21 city council agenda.

Item No. 2: Lansing Township annexation. Mr. Erichson discussed the history of the Lansing Township project, which started in August of 2006. The City has stated they were willing to extend the sanitary sewer to a portion of Lansing Township, but only if the property was annexed into the City of Austin. An ad-hoc committee was formed and the final vote ended up twelve votes for the City of Austin proposal and four votes for the Lansing Township proposal. The ad-hoc committee then held a public meeting and took a survey that resulted in 167 of 209 ballots being returned. Of these 167 ballots that were returned, 115.5 wanted sewer, and 90% of these 115.5 wanted sewer with the City of Austin. Mr. Erichson further explained that if we annex only a portion of the ultimate area, then the cost per parcel increases significantly as there would be fewer parcels to allocate the fixed cost over.

Mr. Erichson stated there are primarily three options for us to pursue now. Those options are as follows:

1. City to drop the project.
2. City to take formal action on orderly annexation agreement and submit to Lansing Township for consideration.
3. City to work with interested property owners in the area to annex by petition or ordinance.

Mr. Erichson stated staff have reviewed the options and recommendations that option #2 be pursued. This would show that we have acted in good faith on the request of some of the residents to install sanitary sewer, among other things. This choice is for the ultimate area (orange and yellow area on map).

Council Member-at-Large Christopherson questioned what the next step would be if the orderly annexation is not approved by Lansing Township. Mr. Hoium stated we could annex by ordinance by following the state rules. The land needs to be contiguous to the city and there are acreage limitations as to what could be annexed. Mr. Erichson stated if the Lansing Township board does not approve the orderly annexation agreement, then the citizens in the affected area need to organize and petition in.

Council Member Martin questioned the timeframe for all of this. Mr. Erichson stated if council approves the concept this evening, we could have it ready for a council meeting in mid-June. There is virtually no chance of us getting this project done in 2007.

Motion by Council Member Hecimovich, seconded by Council Member McAlister to recommend to Council the approval of option #2, orderly annexation. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to a future council agenda.

Item #4: Railroad Crossings. Mr. Erichson stated he is working with the railroad to get better crossings throughout the community. The timber and rubber crossings are not working, and we would like them replaced with concrete crossings. This is for informational purposes only and no decisions need to be made this evening.

Item #3: Success Center. Mr. Hurm introduced the concept of a downtown center for childcare, parks and recreation offices, and other child related issues. If council would like to support such a concept, then a request needs to be drafted up for part of the upcoming bonding bill session.

Library Director Ann Hokanson stated she is also on the board of Apple Lane Childcare. This organization is in need of additional space to accommodate the waiting list of over 50 families looking for childcare. The current building may not be our long-term home as the church is heavily subsidizing the operations now. Ms. Hokanson noted this Success Center could be a one-stop shop solution for families. There would be better visibility and a cost savings through coordination of one central building. All of the partnering agencies are now in a position to commit to the project. The state has also identified early childhood initiatives as a high priority. The deadline for the bonding bill is mid June, and we may get 50% funding from the State for this project.

Mr. Hurm added that if the building, for example, would cost \$6 million, we could apply for \$3 million from the State through the bonding bill. The Hormel Foundation or Hormel Company may also be financial supporters of this endeavor. City offices for Parks and Recreation, or even offices for the Police Department, would be our cost. Mr. Hoium questioned if council wanted staff to proceed with budgets, drawings, etc. for the project. Mr. Maschka noted he was interested in finding a permanent home also.

Council Member Hecimovich questioned if there is any available federal funding. Ms. Hokanson stated that there is state support, but she was unsure of any federal grants for such a project. There are, however, many potential partners for this. The School District is not interested at this time, although they do see the need.

Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated this is nothing more than a city paid for daycare facility. Ms. Hokanson and Mr. Hurm disagreed, noting that we can get state bonding dollars to pay for much of the facility. Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated we are also taxpayers to the state, and questioned if this issue is really our problem to solve.

Council Member Austin disagreed, noting this is an investment in our future and our downtown. Council Member Martin stated we need to get our state and federal officials on board with this, as this could get people off of welfare.

Ms. Hokanson stated we have a lot of “working poor” people in our community. Mr. Hurm stated that unless we get 2/3 or ¾ of the funding from outside sources (grants), we cannot do the project.

Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated we are going to be making the capital investment in this building and we will probably be making the operational investment also.

Council Member McAlister stated he is for the project, but another gymnasium is a tough sell for him as it will be another “arena”.

Council Member Hecimovich stated that if the Police Department issue does not work out with the County, we need to have room for our police officers downtown also. Health and Human Services could also be part of this project.

Council Member Scott Pacholl stated he has two kids in daycare and is very familiar with the issues being faced.

Motion by Council Member Scott Pacholl, seconded by Council Member Hecimovich, to recommend bringing to Council for further review. Carried 4-3 (Council Members Martin, Dick Pacholl and Council Member-at-Large Christopherson – Nay). Item will be added to a future council agenda.

Item #5: Welcome Center Board report. Liliana Silvestry, Executive Director of the Welcome Center gave some history of herself and the Welcome Center. Ms. Silvestry was hired to come to Austin to run the new program and to help integrate newcomers into the community. Ms. Silvestry went through a PowerPoint presentation which highlights include the following:

- We don’t want to duplicate services
- We help our clients find the right people (lawyers, insurance, etc.)
- We help with the Cultural Heritage Festival
- We served 4,468 newcomers in 2006
- 46% of the Woodson kindergartners are a minorities
- In 2006 we had a \$211,000 budget
- In 2007 our expenditure budget is \$256,000
- 70% of the expenses are for programs, while the other 30% is for administration

Further discussion ensued. Mayor Stiehm also noted that at the last Mayor’s conference many cities have the same issues as Austin. In fact some cities are competing for the immigration labor to fill needed jobs within the city.

There being no further business, motion by Council Member Hecimovich, seconded by Council Member Dick Pacholl, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 7:59 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Dankert
Director of Administrative Services