

**MINUTES**  
**COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION**  
**December 1, 2008**  
**City Hall Conference Room**  
**5:45 p.m.**

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

**ABSENT:** None.

**STAFF PRESENT:** Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann, City Administrator Jim Hurm, and Administrative Services Director Tom Dankert.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Steve King, Janet Anderson, Marian Clennon, Doctor Tim Johnson of Austin Medical Center, Austin Post Bulletin, KAAL TV-6, and Austin Daily Herald.

Mayor Stiehm opened the meeting at 5:45 p.m.

**Item No. 3 – Employee appreciation policy.** Mr. Hurm noted some recent changes and clarifications have been made to the state laws regarding employee appreciation benefits, etc. In response to that, the League of Minnesota Cities is urging cities to pass policies documenting approval of such programs. The requested policy was drafted by Trish Wiechmann to cover us on the employee appreciation events. Mayor Stiehm noted this has come to light with his planned appreciation event for outgoing council members and departmental staff.

**Item No. 4 – Elected officials travel policy.** Mr. Hurm noted the state statutes have changed with regard to elected officials and their travel outside of Minnesota. With this in mind, we have drafted a policy to cover such events. It was noted this came to light after a council member attended a National League of Cities event out of state recently.

Motion by Council Member Hecimovich, seconded by Council Member Austin, to recommend to Council the approval of both the policy on employee appreciation events and elected officials travel. Before the voice vote could be taken Council Member McAlister stated he thought it would be appropriate to require anyone who wants to attend an out-of-state conference, to have first gone to two local/state events first. Mayor Stiehm stated he would prefer that the policy states that it is preferred that the elected official attend local events.

Council Member Dick Pacholl stated the national events are usually much more informative and interesting than the local events.

After further discussion, a voice vote/roll call was taken on the original motion. Carried 4-3 (Council Members McAlister, Austin, and Scott Pacholl – Nay).

**Item No. 1 – Feasibility study for wellness center.** Mr. Hurm noted this was on the last council agenda as we believed time was of the essence for this discussion for the feasibility

study. Dr. Tim Johnson noted the Austin Medical Center (AMC) and the Y.M.C.A. are in the early stages of a long range plan to create a wellness center concept for the community. There are some scary statistics regarding overweight citizens and what is projected into the future. Nutrition and stress management issues also contribute to illness and mortality. This then becomes very expensive. We need to address prevention with our programming. Dr. Johnson stated AMC is good at acute care, i.e. dealing with problems. The Y.M.C.A. is good at fitness (for those that are already fit). The Y.M.C.A. national agenda includes the goal of reaching out to more people. The wellness center concept is an attempt to bring both of our strengths together. This is not a commercial fitness center, as there is more medical oversight here, and would involve many high risk citizens. Practically speaking, AMC is in need of hiring up to 20 more doctors, plus their support staff. There are plenty of opportunities here, but there are also many unknowns. The feasibility study will address the unknowns before we commit any funding to a capital structure.

Dr. Johnson stated the feasibility study is estimated to cost \$50,000 plus out-of-pocket expenditures. Funding for \$53,000 has been approved, but that will likely need a total of \$60,000 to cover the total cost of the feasibility study.

Council Member Hecimovich asked if this facility would be partially for rehabilitation after surgery, etc. Dr. Johnson stated the facility has the potential for this. He noted, however, that the medical center wants reach all areas of the community.

Council Member Martin questioned if the Y.M.C.A. has something like this in place right now. Dr. Johnson and Council Member Hecimovich stated that they do not. Dr. Johnson stated the citizens need a “prescription for exercise” in some cases, and the Y.M.C.A. is not able to do this currently.

Council Member Martin stated that after you use your 10-12 appointments that are covered under medical assistance or Medicaid, then only those that can afford the memberships will continue to use the facility. Dr. Johnson stated that is what part of the feasibility study needs to determine.

Council Member Scott Pacholl stated a prescription for exercise would be a good thing. Council Member Scott Pacholl stated he gets a monthly allowance out of his health plan for exercise. Dr. Johnson stated many employers may start offering incentives for this. Council Member Hecimovich stated many health plans will reduce your monthly rates if you exercise regularly at the Y.M.C.A.

Council Member McAlister stated nothing here has helped him make a decision on the request for funding of the feasibility study, and what the feasibility study will answer. Dr. Johnson stated we need to come up with a specific vision for wellness. The feasibility study will look at demographics for example. Mower County is an aging community and marketplace. This feasibility study will address things such as whether this type of facility would work for citizens 80 years old or older, or five years old or younger. The feasibility study will also review cost estimates of operational budgets and capital costs. Funding for the capital piece would come from outside sources. Currently a large foundation and some insurance companies (Blue Cross Blue Shield) are looking at this.

Mayor Stiehm questioned who would own this facility. Dr. Johnson stated there are many possibilities, it could be one owner, co-owners, or condominiumized.

Mr. Hurm stated that jobs were an important issue, which is one reason he has brought this request forward for consideration. We have an economic development partnership in which funds are budgeted for each year for these sorts of projects. This looks like it could be in the range of 30-50 new jobs within our community.

Council Member Scott Pacholl questioned if after the facility was built, would they look at the city for continual operational funding. Dr. Johnson stated he is not interested in building a facility that cannot sustain itself long-term. It would not make sense to build the building if its own revenue sources cannot pay for the operations. Council Member Martin stated he did not think the community would support the city using tax dollars to operate this project now.

Council Member Austin stated the bottom line is a \$2,000 commitment towards a feasibility study. What justification do we give our citizens for approving this? Dr. Johnson stated that wellness is significant to any community. This would be another asset to the community to encourage people to come here and stay. It helps make the community more attractive. Council Member Hecimovich stated this also involves jobs, i.e. economic development.

Council Member Martin stated it would be a huge challenge for the hospital to fill these jobs these days. The existing doctors he has talked to left because “Mother Mayo” required the doctors to work more and more hours. Dr. Johnson agreed it was incredibly difficult to recruit doctors. Council Member Martin stated the Port Authority has already approved \$2,000, the HRA is considering this, and so is the City. If all parties agree to it, it would cost the taxpayers \$6,000 for this feasibility study.

Motion by Council Member Scott Pacholl, seconded by Council Member Hecimovich to recommend to Council the approval of the \$2,000 towards the feasibility study.

Before the vote could be taken, Council Member-at-Large Christopherson, stated this was just a back door to get the government in to operate the facility. Council Member Scott Pacholl disagreed, noting this was just to help fund a feasibility study.

Dr. Johnson stated this has been presented to the Hormel Foundation, and they have funded part of the feasibility study. One board member also talked about the need for a Success Center to address childhood obesity, and there may be some space for this in the wellness center. Council Member-at-Large Christopherson stated on some prior backup material, a Success Center was also mentioned. Council Member-at-Large Christopherson objected to the concept, stating he has find his own childcare and pay for it.

After further discussion a voice vote on the original motion was done. Carried 5-2. (Council Member-at-Large Christopherson, Council Member Martin – Nay). Item will be added to the next council agenda.

**Item No. 2 – Discussion of pay equity adjustments.** Ms. Wiechmann discussed the required reporting by the City of Austin for the three year period ending December 31, 2008. We are required to report to Department of Employee Relations regarding our compliance with pay

equity. Ms. Wiechmann stated she ran the report early and sent it to a consultant to review, noting we were not in compliance with the 80% passing rate. With this in mind, if we move two people (Fire Department Secretary and Library Assistant II) a total of \$0.93 per hour per person, we would then be in compliance. This appears to be the cheapest alternative to become compliant with state law.

Mayor Stiehm questioned the penalty for being non-compliant. Ms. Wiechmann stated it was a flat penalty plus a penalty per day for being out of compliance.

Council Member Martin questioned when the last organization was penalized over this. Ms. Wiechmann stated every year there are non-compliant entities that get fined because they don't run the report until the year is over.

Motion by Council Member Hecimovich, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Christopherson, to recommend to Council the two changes in the compensation for the Fire Department Secretary and the Library Assistant II. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

**Item No. 5 – Closed work session on December 15.** Mr. Hurm noted the need for a closed work session on December 15 to discuss the status of the I.A.F.F. negotiations/arbitrations, plus the potential for pending litigation. Mr. Hurm urged the existing council to invite the three new council members to attend the closed session, which is allowed by law.

No objections noted.

**Item No. 6 – Discuss council retreat for 2009.** Mr. Hurm stated that based on prior council comments, there is no need to have a guest speaker or departmental reports at the upcoming retreat. Mr. Hurm requested that Council send any ideas back to him for retreat topics. Mayor Stiehm stated the last hour of the 2008 retreat was the most beneficial, as Council really got down to the topics that we wanted as goals. Mayor Stiehm stated we need to set the agenda ahead of time and get some backup for what is to be discussed.

**Item No. 7 – Review Matters In Hand.** Mayor Stiehm noted the sign ordinance would be discussed more in January with hopefully a committee being set up to review the issue. Mayor Stiehm stated Ms. Wiechmann is doing some comparisons of other attorney contracts with some comparative cities (Winona, Albert Lea, Owatonna, and Faribault). Mr. Hurm discussed the issue decreasing paper for Council (Matters in Hand). Mr. Dankert noted this issue came up in the past and when we reviewed it, we noted an estimated cost of \$30,000+. Mr. Dankert noted laptops would be needed for all of the Mayor and Council Member work stations. Staff would also need them based on the concept that we would no longer print out any paper. Staff time would be utilized bundling different items together, and then Ms. Howatt would also be involved in the scanning and separating of documents for the files that would then be emailed out. To top things off, some council members stated they would just get the email, and then print all of the information out anyway, and then send us the bill for the ink and paper. So, at the current time, it does not seem to be very cost effective to go into this program without some detailed study and analysis on whether or not it would actually cost us more going this route.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member McAlister, seconded by Council Member Austin to remove “Decreasing paper for Council” from the Matters In Hand. Carried 7-0.

Council Member-at-Large Christopherson questioned an item that was not in Matters In Hand, but was still outstanding – the dog park public meeting. Mayor Stiehm stated he would work with Council to set a hearing date in January for an informational discussion with the public.

Council Member Martin requested the status of the new Engineering position that was originally budgeted for 2009. Mr. Dankert stated the vote to remove him (and the associated tax levy with the position) was not approved (failed on a 3-3 tie vote) at the last budget discussion. With that in mind, the position stayed in the 2009 budget. However, we will not hire the position until the legislative session gives us some better answers as to what our Local Government Aid (LGA) amount will be for 2009, as they may reduce the amount that was originally certified to us. No objections noted.

Mr. Dankert further stated that the increase in five hours for the Fire Department Secretary and the increase from 20 hours to 40 hours per week for a Community Service Officer is planned on happening effective the first of January, 2009. No objections noted.

There being no further business, motion by Council Member Hecimovich, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Christopherson, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 7:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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Tom Dankert  
Director of Administrative Services