

**MINUTES**  
**COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION**  
**March 16, 2009**  
**City Hall Council Chambers**  
**Immediately following council meeting**

**PRESENT:** Mayor Stiehm, Council Member-at-Large Anderson, Council Members McAlister, King, Martin, Clennon, and Pacholl.

**ABSENT:** Council Member Austin.

**STAFF PRESENT:** Craig Hoium, Tom Dankert, Ann Hokanson, and Kim Underwood.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Austin Post Bulletin and Austin Daily Herald. Public.

Mayor Stiehm opened the meeting at 7:08 pm.

**1. Report from Council Member-at-Large Anderson on Newly Elected Officials**

**Conference:** Council Member-at-Large Anderson briefly discussed the conference she went to that was sponsored by the League of Minnesota Cities in February. The Newly Elected Officials Conference is put on every year as a primer course for elected officials to learn about their roles as elected officials.

**2. Building permit fee schedule:** Community Development Director Craig Hoium discussed how Austin's permit schedule compares to other localities if you do not include Faribault (as was directed at the February 2, 2009 work session). Upon further review of the fee structure Austin appears to be right in the middle in comparison to Albert Lea, Owatonna, and Winona. Based on this no changes are proposed to our building permit fee schedule.

No objections noted. No further action is necessary on this item.

**3. Outdoor wood-burning furnaces:** As was noted on the agenda, this item will be moved to the April 20 work session agenda. No objections noted.

**4. Update on native grass project for Wildwood Park and Todd Park:** Parks and Recreation Director Kim Underwood briefed Council on a grant from the SWCD to plant native grass on six acres in the Wildwood Park area. Additionally, another eight acres has been identified at Todd Park just east of the Izaak Walton Cabin. The total cost of the project is \$5,740, and of this our in-kind labor cost of \$1,568 will be the local match.

Council Member McAlister questioned how many acres the Park and Recreation Department mows now. Ms. Underwood noted there are over 600 acres to maintain plus frontage near sidewalks. Council Member McAlister stated if this program works, then we could potentially put more of our acreage in native grasses and save the mowing costs.

Council Member Martin questioned if the planting could be done later in the season. Ms. Underwood stated they have to kill the existing grass first, which is why they decided to start in the springtime. This also could be a project for the fall.

No objections noted. Item will be added to the next council agenda for approval of the grant.

**5. Videotaping work sessions:** Mr. Dankert discussed a proposal he has received to set up a camera and microphone in the conference room so that work sessions, and potentially other meetings, could be videotaped for future reference. Mr. Dankert noted this request actually came from discussions with Mayor Stiehm, and the proposed equipment and installation is estimated at \$6,534 plus tax. Mr. Dankert noted there would be one stationary camera and two microphones embedded in the ceiling. No one would control the camera as it would be stationary, and this system would be capable of being aired live over the cable access channel. Funding for this project could come out of the cable access PEG fees we collect. Mr. Dankert noted if Council would like to do this, then we could add it to the next council agenda.

Council Member King stated we could have used this equipment already in one of the meetings we had to provide conclusive evidence as to what happened.

Council Member McAlister stated he was in favor of this proposal and thought it was an excellent idea. This could even be the backup for our closed meetings instead of a tape recording.

Council Member Martin questioned why we did not just have the work sessions in the council chambers. It is already wired, and the conference room is just too small and gets hot. Mr. Dankert stated that could be an option, but we would need to have somebody running the video and audio equipment as the Council Chambers is much bigger and the cameras are meant to only focus in on certain areas, not the entire area.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member-at-Large Anderson, seconded by Council Member King, to recommend to Council the expenditure, not to exceed \$7,500, for some audio and video equipment in the lower level conference room. Carried 6-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

**6. Discussion on response to LGA budget cuts:** Mr. Dankert noted that he and City Administrator Hurm met with Mayor Stiehm regarding the process needed to review the proposed budget reductions for 2009 and 2010. Based on this meeting we have scheduled this Monday, plus the next three Mondays to review the different areas of the budget, specifically in reference to the 100 items listed on the last work session plus other items that may come up during the review of those specific departments. This allows each department head to be present during their time for discussions on their budget.

Mr. Dankert noted tonight we are proposing to review the Library and Administration. Library Director Ann Hokanson discussed the action her board has taken in response to the impending LGA reductions. Ms. Hokanson stated they have received notice of a retirement of their children's librarian and they are proposing to temporarily not fill the position for the rest of 2009 and for all of 2010 with the hope that the position will be funded again in 2011. We will still have children's programming at the library as Ms. Steenblock has created a great program that many of our staff has helped out with over the years. Additionally, we had proposed to do some lighting enhancements and a slight remodel to make the workspace more efficient, but we are proposing to put that on hold as well. In order to accommodate the lower staff levels, we are proposing to open the library later during the week. In total, we would have six less hours available each week

Questions arose about meeting minimum maintenance of effort. Ms. Hokanson stated we would more than likely not meet the minimum maintenance of effort if the LGA cuts do come down and the tax support for our Library is reduced; however, that determination would not come for two years and then one of two things would likely happen. The first would be we would have to retroactively make up the shortfall, or secondly we would no longer be eligible for the statewide SELCO system (and this would not be a good option). However, there is currently legislation being debated at the state level to eliminate this minimum maintenance of effort requirement because so many cities are in the same boat in regards to tax funding.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member King, seconded by Council Member Martin to recommend approval of the reduction in items #1 (library lighting and remodel) and #31 (temporarily not fill the vacancy the professional librarian until 2011). Carried 6-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

Regarding Administration, Mr. Dankert discussed items #2-#30 noting other items are included within the respective budgets that could also be discussed.

Items #2-#4 are capital outlay items that we would like to eventually do, but they certainly can wait another year or so. Mr. Dankert briefly discussed issues related to each of the following:

- #2 – Texture walls and paint bathrooms – city hall, \$10,000
- #3 – Senior Center bathroom remodel, \$15,000
- #4 – Trunk Highway 218 entrance sign, \$2,000

After further discussion, motion by Council Member King, seconded by Council Member McAlister, to recommend approval of the reduction in items #2 (Texture walls and paint bathrooms – City Hall), #3 (Senior Center bathroom remodel), and #4 (Trunk Highway 218 entrance sign). Carried 6-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

On items #5-#15, agency allocations, Mr. Dankert noted these “Quality of Life” issues are best discussed by Council, as you are the ones that will hear the public’s comments most on these. After lengthy discussion, it was decided to put these agencies on notice that their 2010 funding might be tough for the City of Austin. Carried 5-1 (Council Member Dick Pacholl voted nay as he believes that agencies like the Austin Symphony Orchestra should not get any funding from the City).

Mr. Dankert briefly discussed items #16-30 noting it may require changes to some employee contracts in order to pull this one off, as follows:

- #16 – City administrator salary reduction for 2009, \$3,000 – this has already been done.
- #17 – Eliminate overtime budget for 2009/2010 – Administration, \$2,000 – The City Administrator will have to require any overtime to be taken off by year-end (subject to the current council imposed maximums).
- #18 – Eliminate temporary salaries for 2009/2010 – Clerk, \$400.
- #19 – Eliminate overtime budget for 2009 – Clerk, \$600 (this may require a contract amendment).
- #20 – Eliminate temporary salaries for 2009/2010 – Finance, \$3,000.
- #21 – Eliminate overtime budget for 2009/2010, Finance, \$2,000 (this may require a contract amendment).
- #22 - Reduce payroll costs by going bi-weekly and move to direct deposit requirement for 2010, \$7,000 (this *will* require contract amendment(s)).

- #23 – Renegotiate Assessor’s agreement, no cost savings noted here.
- #24 – Eliminate temporary salaries for 2009/2010 – HR, \$500.
- #25 – Eliminate engineering fees for 2009/2010 – Community Development, \$500.
- #26 – Eliminate KSMQ funding for 2010, \$25,000.
- #27 – Reduce economic development partnerships for 2009/2010, \$10,000.
- #28 – Eliminate agreement with CVB for extra 3% lodging tax for special projects for 2010, \$7,000.
- #29 – Opt out health insurance savings, retain half of this savings in General Fund for use as Contingency for 2010, \$115,000.
- #30 – Eliminate Contingency line item for 2010, use opt out savings noted above for 2010, \$140,000.

Mr. Dankert noted Council may get phone calls from unhappy employees over having to go to direct deposit or bi-weekly payroll.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member King, seconded by Council Member McAlister to recommend items #16-#30, *excluding* #26 (KSMQ funding) for reductions for 2009 and 2010. Carried 4-2. (Council Members Clennon and Martin – Nay). Item will be added to the next council agenda.

Mr. Dankert further addressed a comment made at the last budget meeting regarding car allowances. Mr. Dankert noted two members from AFSCME have the car allowance as does Mr. Hurm and Mr. Dankert based on a council resolution and an employment agreement. Additionally, we have certain supervisory employees that have vehicles they take home at night due to their responsibilities in responding at different hours of the day. Council Member King noted he thought many employees had this, but with only those noted he has no problem then with the arrangement.

**7. Matters In Hand:** Council Member Martin questioned the status of the evaluations on all city employees. Mr. Dankert noted he did not know the answer to this, but he would check with Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann to get the status update. An email will be sent out to all council as to what is happening here.

Council Member-at-Large Anderson requested a letter from Margaret Graff be copied.

Additionally, Council Member-at-Large Anderson requested that a notice from the U.S. Department of Justice be forwarded to Chief Philipp outlining some grant opportunities.

Council Member Clennon asked if anyone was going to the rally day at the Capitol on March 26, 2009. It also encouraged city employees that are not on duty to come up and support the cause.

Motion by Council Member Martin, seconded by Council Member Pacholl, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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Tom Dankert