

M I N U T E S
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
March 23, 2009
City Hall Council Chambers
7:00 p.m.

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

ABSENT: None.

STAFF PRESENT: Larry Dolphin, Jon Erichson, Tom Dankert and Kim Underwood.

ALSO PRESENT: Sarah Douty, Public, Austin Post Bulletin and Austin Daily Herald. Public.

Mayor Stiehm opened the meeting at 7:00 pm.

Item #1a. - Discussion on response to LGA budget cuts: Mr. Dankert noted tonight we are proposing to review the Public Works and Parks and Recreation. Public Works Director Jon Erichson discussed items #47-52 regarding some capital outlay items in the Public Works Department. Mr. Erichson is proposing to reduce the 2009 budget by the \$47,000 listed which includes the elimination of the following:

- Software upgrades, \$5,000
- Chairs – Engineering, \$4,500
- Mosquito spraying, \$25,000
- Bike racks, \$2,500
- LED street light demo, \$5,000
- Airport sign, \$5,000

Council Member-at-Large Anderson questioned the back racks. Mr. Erichson noted there are still some in the downtown area and this would just be to further enhance the bike racks in the downtown area, sort of a “go green” initiative to get people to ride their bikes and not drive.

Council Member King stated he has received a lot of calls regarding the mosquito spraying and would like to see this program continue. After further discussion, consensus was to spray twice (hopefully for \$12,500), once around the time of the 4th of July and once around the time of the fair.

Council Member Martin questioned the LED lights, and if the city would have a problem meeting the Governor’s energy reduction plan. Mr. Erichson stated the Governor has proposed that there should be a 20% reduction in our energy usage by 2020, but Austin should not be affected by this. Additionally, in our review of the current technology, manufacturers are still years away from providing anything that would meet our needs. Council Member Martin questioned if other cities have done this yet. Mr. Erichson noted Rochester has experimented with LED lights at two parking ramps, as has St. Paul and either Brooklyn Park or Brooklyn Center. Currently most of the LED lights put out a blue light that does not work very well.

Mr. Erichson also discussed the proposal to create a street light utility fee of approximately \$20 per year (\$1.67 per month) that could be added to your utility bill. This would cover the approximate \$183,000 of annual costs we pay to the Austin Utilities for electricity to power all of the street lights within the community. Using LED lights may reduce this cost once the technology is there.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member Pacholl, seconded by Council Member King, to recommend approval of the reduction in items #47 through #52 except cutting only half of the mosquito spraying budget (#49). Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

On items #53-#68, Mr. Erichson briefly discussed the different line items proposed to be reduced/eliminated as follows:

- #53 – Reduce overtime budget – Engineering, \$2,000
- #54 - Reduce overtime budget – Streets, \$5,000
- #55 - Eliminate overtime budget – Sign Shop, \$1,500
- #56 - Reduce office supplies – Engineering, \$500
- #57 – Reduce general supplies – Engineering, \$500
- #58 – Reduce travel-conference-school – Engineering, \$500
- #59 – Reduce travel-conference-school – Streets, \$2,500
- #60 – Reduce Christmas lights repairs 50% – \$1,000
- #61 – Close downtown mall, \$6,500
- #62 – Create highway lighting district – \$183,000 revenue for 2010
- #63 – Reduce utilities at airport – \$6,000
- #64 – Eliminate additional Engineering position – \$53,813
- #65 – Use L.O.S.T. to reimburse for flood staff time – \$50,000
- #66 – Reduce sidewalk maintenance by 20% – \$4,000
- #67 – Increase airport land rental rates – \$2,080
- #68 – Increase hangar rental rate – \$1,700

Council Member Pacholl stated he would like to see item #64 not be eliminated, but be put on hold for a few years. Council Member King stated however that this is a new position that never existed before.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member King, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Anderson to recommend items #53-#68, *excluding* #62 (Street Light Utility fee) for reductions for 2009 and 2010. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda. The Committee-of-the-Whole agreed to have further discussion was noted.

Mr. Erichson and Ms. Underwood jointly discussed some of the challenges for the two arenas noting our proposal would be to raise some fees and also close Packer Arena down. Council Member-at-Large Anderson noted we should get input from the users of the facilities at a separate work session. Council Member King stated he would hate to take things away from the youth, and we need two sheets of ice to meet the scheduled needs. Council Member Martin noted Riverside Arena is already in disrepair, and we should look at adding more outdoor arenas (only Galloway and Kaufman Parks are open now). Mr. Erichson noted we can contact the right people to set up this meeting in the future.

The following items are then put on hold for discussion at a future meeting:

- #71 – Eliminate new skates at Riverside Arena – \$4,000
- #72 – Eliminate floor scrubber at Riverside Arena – \$15,000
- #73 – Eliminate roof deck painting at Packer Arena – \$10,000
- #96 – Close down Packer Arena in 2010 – \$90,000
- #97 – Increase rental rates at Riverside Arena – \$6,250
- #98 – Increase rental rates at Packer Arena – \$6,250

Ms. Underwood discussed the remaining capital items as follows:

- #69 – Eliminate tile and equipment at the pool – \$20,000
- #70 – Replace pool vacuum – \$4,000

Ms. Underwood stated she really would like the pool vacuum back at some point as it is getting harder to get people certified to clean the pool adequately, but there is someone certified for 2009.

Ms. Underwood discussed the following budget reductions:

- #74 – Using temporary staffing at office – \$30,000
- #75 – Eliminate replacement street flag budget – \$1,000
- #76 – Reduce office supplies, Parks Administration – \$500
- #77 – Eliminate Winter Programs by 2010, \$3,200 in 2009 and \$6,403 in 2010
- #78 – Reduce pool season by two weeks, change hours – \$15,674
- #79 – Increase pool fees, private rentals – \$4,850
- #80 – Reduce temporary salaries for Parks Maintenance – \$52,109
- #81 – Reduce road materials at Parks – \$4,000
- #82 – Reduce Todd Park Soccer field budget – \$2,200
- #83 – Eliminate tree plantings in boulevard – \$7,000
- #84 – Reduce flowers funded by City – \$10,000
- #85 – Eliminate temporary salaries in Forestry, \$4,521
- #86 – Eliminate Mill Pond Boat, net of revenues – \$1,100
- #87 – Reduce Nature Center operational budget – \$500
- #88 – Request additional funding from Friends of Nature Center – \$6,798
- #89 – Reduce hours/days at Y.A.C. – \$3,065
- #90 – Reduce general supplies at Riverland Ball Park – \$1,000
- #91 – Reduce temporary salaries at Riverland Ball Park – \$400
- #92 – Reduce repairs structure at Riverland Ball Park – \$600
- #93 – Reduce general supplies at 5-Diamond Complex – \$700
- #94 – Reduce temporary salaries at School Diamond Use – \$200
- #95 – Reduce temporary salaries at Izaak Walton cabin – \$725

Mr. Erichson noted the SWCD has trees for sale for the public that can be viewed on their website.

Dick Nordin spoke to Council regarding the Mill Pond Boat and the many volunteers that work on this. Additionally, this is an economic development tool that has brought 1000 riders to the boat during last summer's shortened season. Mr. Nordin stated this and things like the

Symphony Orchestra are quality of life things that shouldn't be eliminated without deep and thorough discussion. Council Member-at-Large Anderson questioned how many riders there were last season. Mr. Nordin stated the boat can carry up to 20 passengers at any one time, and in 2008 we had 1,000 riders even though we only ran from August to September (as they were repairing the boat with a new steel bottom).

Mayor Stiehm noted an issue Council will have to take a look at is how do you fund flowers and boats versus having to lay off personnel. Council Member Austin stated this is a neat vessel and a unique item for our city.

Larry Dolphin, naturalist at the Nature Center spoke regarding some proposed changes at the Nature Center. Mr. Dolphin noted the Friends of the Nature Center have responded and will give an extra nearly \$7,000 to cover the cost of the intern at the facility. Some discussion has taken place regarding the long-term future of the Nature Center, and the Friends have discussed this and have no interest. The Friends of the Nature Center are a hard working group of volunteers, plus the Nature Center has three full-time employees. Dolphin said they are looking at being proactive to lighten the load onto the taxpayers (e.g., there are private donors who will be paying for kids' ski rentals for 2009, he said). We are working on a plan, but the Friends of the Nature Center do not want to be the owner of this facility. Our programming is also tied closely to the school district and their curriculum. This Nature Center has been here for 40+ years and is a positive place in Austin.

Mayor Stiehm stated we are a long way from pulling funding from the Nature Center.

Council Member Martin questioned if the ball parks bring in money, as a recent presentation by the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau discussed all the groups that visited Austin. Ms. Underwood stated there are large amounts of money circulated through the community via hotels and restaurants when tournaments and games are held on our ball fields.

Council Member King stated the volunteers that support the boat make a \$1,100 expenditure well worth it. Council Member Martin stated, however, that a few years ago we tried to lay the groundwork that this needs to come into self-sufficiency. Council Member McAlister stated this is OUR boat and we have a lot of volunteers that operate this, as the citizens have stepped up to the plate. Council Member Pacholl noted his agreement with Council Member Martin, self sufficiency has been discussed many times for this.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member King, seconded by Council Member McAlister, to recommend items #69, #70, #74-#95, *excluding* #86 (Mill Pond Boat elimination) for reductions for 2009 and 2010. Carried 5-2. (Council Members Pacholl and Martin – Nay). Item will be added to the next council agenda. The Mill Pond Boat will remain as is in the 2009 budget.

Mr. Dankert noted when typing up the minutes to the last meeting that the DCA should have been listed along with other economic development items discussed. Mr. Dankert noted they could be brought up at the March 30 meeting regarding Public Safety or at the April 6 meeting when we discuss global changes. Council Member Martin stated the April 6 meeting would be fine for the DCA discussion. No objections noted.

Item #1b – Main Street Project, Inc.: Sarah Douty, Executive Director, discussed the current \$250,000 that has been allocated to Main Street Inc. for 2009 out of the Building Fund. Ms. Douty noted that she has two projects that are coming to the Port Authority Board on Wednesday for approval, plus she has four other projects for which “general commitments” have been made. These general commitment projects should come to fruition in the next few weeks.

Council Member-at-Large Anderson stated the work done to date has been very impressive.

Mayor Stiehm stated based on the commitments, if the City only gave \$200,000 for 2009 the Main Street, Inc. would be okay. Ms. Douty stated they would survive.

Mr. Dankert noted the Building Fund is actually paying for the Main Street, Inc. allocation out of the interest earnings of the city. With interest rates in a general downtown, and with the other major project being the Justice Center, we may need to re-look at some things in the Building Fund.

Council Member Martin questioned how the Granle’s project eventually turned out financially. Ms. Douty stated since they sold the building before the full five years was up, Granles had to reimburse the Port Authority \$9,000 of the \$15,000 in forgivable loan. Mr. Dankert noted the Port Authority also “owns” the exterior easement on the building.

Council Member McAlister stated he did not want to cut funding for this project now.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member Austin, seconded by Council Member McAlister to recommend to council the budgeted transfer of \$250,000 from the Building Fund to the Port Authority. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

Other Item: Council Member Austin noted he was interviewing somebody recently and that their previous employer had over 90% participation in a furlough program where everybody was to take 12 days off per year. Council Member-at-Large Anderson noted US Bank has done something similar to this also.

Other Item: Council Member Martin noted at one of the past meetings a Council Member had noted that we had given the City Administrator a new three year contract. While Council Member Martin has not yet found the minutes to this meeting, a Post Bulletin article on the matter from mid-September outlined that this was only a salary adjustment, not a contract extension. The City should still take a look at this stated Council Member Martin.

Council Member-at-Large Anderson questioned how this article relates to what had been said. Council Member Martin stated this is to clarify the contract with the City Administrator.

Other Item: Ray Kolb, 209 12th Avenue SW spoke regarding three items:

1. The city intersection down by the municipal plant has too many city vehicles that are not stopping. This creates a traffic hazard.
2. There are little kids living in this area, and some young people are using this as a drag strip. They are going too fast and need to be slowed down by the Police Department.
3. The City Engineer has been called regarding the cracks in the street and curb on the recently completed street project. Mr. Kolb also noted a portion of his sidewalk was

removed and he wants it back, plus there are some drainage issues with the curb and gutter.

Mayor Stiehm stated he would talk to the Police Department regarding the speeding in the area to see if they can patrol the area a little more.

Mr. Kolb also stated he is having a problem with dogs and people not cleaning up after the animals. Mayor Stiehm stated the dog park is a non-issue for some time now until the budget gets resolved.

Mr. Erichson noted the street crew will start the crack sealing program soon, and see that it is taken care of.

Motion by Council Member Martin, seconded by Council Member King, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 8:41 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Dankert