

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
April 6, 2009
City Hall Council Chambers
7:30 p.m.

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

ABSENT: None.

STAFF PRESENT: Craig Hoium, Jon Erichson, Kim Underwood, Paul Philipp, Trish Wiechmann, Tom Dankert and Jim Hurm.

ALSO PRESENT: John Garry of the DCA, Austin Post Bulletin and Austin Daily Herald. Public.

Mayor Stiehm opened the meeting at 7:30 pm.

Item #1. – Closed session pursuant to M.S. 13D.05, Subd. ©(3) for the purpose of considering an offer for the sale of real property (city owned industrial land): See tape of closed meeting.

Item #2. – A joint powers agreement with LOGIS for computer software: Mr. Dankert noted staff have been reviewing and researching financial software for the last two to three years as we are going to need to make some changes in the near future. Currently there are only a few cities that still run our current software, as it was created by a private company originally back in the 1980's. We have re-tooled it a few times such that it is adequate to get the daily business done. However, our AS/400 (which cost around \$30,000 back in early 2000) has had two of the four drives fail. We were able to replace them, but it created nearly a full day of problems with entering payroll. Our MIS Administrator, Don Tomlinson has stated that if we lose the other two drives, it will be significantly longer than a few hours before the system would be up and running. Mr. Dankert noted there have been occasions that he debated whether or not payroll would even get done because of some problems. Nowadays when we have a problem, we have to call our programmer and if he is around he drives in to fix our problem. We do not know how much longer he will be doing this as he has been at it a long time. Additionally, IBM does not support our current operating system on the AS/400, so if that ever fails we will have much larger issues.

Mr. Dankert he has watched some of the other municipalities bid out for new software over the last few years. Another entity that has used our current software recently approved new software in the \$300,000 up front range. Additionally that system requires \$30,000 or so annually in licensing and maintenance fees. Bidding out has not been done for the system we have proposed as the LOGIS system requires you to become one of the members of the joint powers arrangement. You become a Board member and get a vote as to the operations of the facility. However, the annual maintenance fees' are higher, in the \$70,000 range. With this, you also get off-site backup and programmers and staff that actually are a phone call away and can see your problem without ever leaving their facility.

Council Member Martin questioned some of the pros and cons. Mr. Dankert noted the service and backup capabilities would be much greater than we have now, but you will pay for it.

Other questions arose regarding costs. Mr. Dankert noted additional costs for some security in our computer room (whether it be a locked server cabinet or a locked door) would be needed, plus there will be some up front conversion costs that we will have to pay for. Our goal is to do as much as we possibly can setting up the system with our staff, hence cutting our costs, but there will be time and cost needed to pull our old data off of the current system, and to get the data uploaded into LOGIS, along with some programming they will need to do that is custom for Austin. Mr. Dankert noted we need to start this process several months in advance to going live, which is why we are here now talking about it.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member Austin, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Anderson to recommend to council the signing of the Joint and Cooperative Agreement with LOGIS. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

Item #3. – Request for City of Austin’s support for a statewide rail plan (high speed rail through Rochester): Mr. Hurm discussed his cover memo stating that the SE Minnesota Rail Alliance and the City of Rochester have met with staff in a request to get our city to support a measure advocating for high speed rail to go through Rochester. The Rochester representatives believe that if a full objective analysis is done, that the route along I90 from Madison and north through Rochester would prevail. Rochester officials are looking for our support in this endeavor.

Mr. Hurm noted staff’s only concern was that would additional coal traffic be shifted towards Austin then if the high speed rail went through Rochester. MnDOT officials have noted they did not believe the high speed rail proposal would bring more coal through Austin, since this is new trackage that would need to be created. However, Mr. Hurm stated he recommends amending the proposed resolution to incorporate language that shows our support as long as it will not increase coal train traffic in Austin. Mr. Hoiium stated long-term this may even help create commuter rail from Austin.

Council Member Clennon questioned if this could ever replace AMTRAK, which she is a user of three or four times per year. Mr. Hurm stated he did not think so, as all new track is needed for this endeavor.

Council Member Martin stated there are more benefits to this plan than drawbacks. High speed rail gets people to employment faster and opens up other employment opportunities.

Council Member King noted there is no financial backing at this point, so what harm would it do endorsing the proposal.

Motion by Council Member King, seconded by Council Member Martin to recommend to council our support for the high speed rail link through Rochester. Carried 6-1 (Council Member Clennon – Nay). Item will be added to the next council agenda.

Item #4. – Discussion of format for council input in department head evaluation process: Mr. Hurm handed out proposed evaluation forms for council to complete for the different department heads, as follows:

1. Ann Hokanson, Library Director
2. Dan Wilson, Fire Chief
3. Jon Erichson, Public Works Director
4. Kim Underwood, Parks and Recreation Director
5. Paul Philipp, Police Chief
6. Tom Dankert, Director of Administrative Services
7. Craig Hoium, Community Development Director

Mr. Hurm questioned the City Attorney since he is contracted. Council Member Austin stated Mr. Hoversten is a contractual employee and can be terminated at anytime if we don't like the service. No objections noted.

Mr. Hurm questioned if the council was okay with the plan as provided. Council Member Clennon asked if job descriptions for all of these employees could be sent out. Mr. Hurm noted that Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann would get that information out to council.

Council Member McAlister stated that if these are the same processes we will be having department heads evaluate staff on, then they should get some sort of training on it. Mr. Hurm noted the next step will be for department heads to evaluate those underneath them.

Council Member Martin stated it was sad that this has never been done for city employees before. Mr. Hurm stated we need to start somewhere.

No objections noted to the evaluation process as outlined.

Item #5. – Discussion on response to LGA budget cuts: Mr. Hurm discussed some of the “global” changes staff had taken a look at for council, as follows:

- Public Safety Director – Mr. Hurm stated we have two chiefs (Police and Fire) that may be retiring soon, so now may be an ideal time to review a structural change. Council Member Martin questioned if the state law has requirements as to what a Public Safety Director does. Mr. Hurm stated he was not aware of such, but could check into it. Mayor Stiehm noted Chief Philipp has some information he has gathered and they will look through this in the near future. Chief Philipp noted that New Brighton and Woodbury are good examples. Some entities that it has not gone so well with include Red Wing and Mankato as it appears the Fire Department has “lost its identity” and this has created some staff issues. Council Member McAlister stated he did not like this as there will be a potential strain between the Public Safety Director and the Police Chief and the Fire Chief.
- Fire Station changes – Programs at RCC could include a training program that could allow more people to sleep in the fire station at night. Additionally housing and building inspections could be done from the fire station. Council Member Martin stated the citizens have spoken and they are willing to pay for fire safety, at least my constituents in the third ward have said that. Council Member Clennon noted her concern with having people sleep at the fire station that are not fully trained. Council Member King stated this should be set aside until the contract issues, and other issues, with the Fire Department are worked out. No objections noted.
- Nature Center – A reduction from the current \$300,000 expense to zero in three years was discussed. Ms. Underwood stated the Friends of the Nature Center could not financially support the operations of the Nature Center, but they could do more. Council

Member-at-Large Anderson stated it was too drastic to support such a measure. Council Member Austin stated it was a unique asset that is good for our quality of life and has always been part of the City of Austin. Council Member-at-Large Anderson stated the Friends of the Nature Center should come back to us with some ideas on cutting the operational costs of the facility. Council Member Martin stated they should be set up to run independently from the city. Council Member King stated it is a quality of life issue that we would then be missing. Council Member Clennon stated we are lucky to have an asset like this, as coming from an urban area there were not many of these assets around. Mr. Hurm noted he would work with the Friends of the Nature Center to reduce their operational costs.

- Nob Hill sledding hill was discussed for sale. Mr. Hurm noted it was not utilized a lot, but we could sell this, or other property that is not used much. After further discussion, motion by Council Member Martin, seconded by Council Member Pacholl to explore the sale of the property. Failed 5-1 as a sale of property under the current charter requires a unanimous vote (Council Member King – Nay).

At this point (9:15) Council Member Martin left the meeting.

- Tree trimming with Austin Utilities – Ms. Underwood stated they tried this several years ago and just fell further behind in their own work. Mr. Dankert noted he has seen the bids that the Utilities received for the trimming work, and we could not even touch the hourly rate they get for tree trimming from outside. No further discussion.
- Human resource functions could be combined with other entities, like what used to happen with the Austin Utilities to save some dollars. Mayor Stiehm questioned how we would save any dollars here. It was noted this issue may be premature.

Several other issues (#1, #3, #4, and #5) under the General comments were left for a later discussion due to timing.

Regarding the Development Corporation of Austin (DCA), John Garry gave a quick presentation as to what the DCA has been up to lately. Mr. Garry noted in 2008 they received some grants and built a building. In 2009 we are looking at scouting out local entrepreneurs and have them do some presentations within the community. Mr. Garry noted the DCA is here to serve the city council.

Council Member King stated the DCA is a leader of other entities also. You are the middleman noted Council Member King, the middleman to the City, County, Main Street project, DCA Board, and Chamber of Commerce. We need a more cohesiveness amongst all of these entities. Mayor Stiehm stated it is more cohesive now than it has ever been.

Council Member McAlister stated it seems the DCA and the City are working hand in glove now more than ever. Also, people on the DCA Board are donating their time away from their business to help others out.

Council Member-at-Large Anderson stated the DCA needs to create more visibility for their successes.

Council Member Pacholl stated he appreciates the timely reports and that more is being communicated to him now than ever before.

Other Item: Council Member-at-Large Anderson questioned the status of removing the fire damaged buildings in downtown, as they are getting a lot of phone calls. Mayor Stiehm stated there will be a report at the next meeting.

Other Item: Council Member-at-Large Anderson questioned the status of Charter Commission. Mr. Hurm noted he would check and get back to council as to the status.

Motion by Council Member Pacholl, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Anderson, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 9:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Dankert