

**M I N U T E S**  
**COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION**  
**June 7, 2010**  
**City Hall Conference Room**  
**6:30 Regular Meeting (Immediately following council meeting)**

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

**ABSENT:** None.

**STAFF PRESENT:** Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann, Parks and Recreation Director Kim Underwood, Public Works Director Jon Erichson, Administrative Services Director Tom Dankert and City Administrator Jim Hurm.

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

Mayor Stiehm opened the meeting at 6:30 pm.

**Item #1. – Report on Engineering secretary position:** Ms. Wiechmann/Mr. Erichson noted that recently 40 year employee Carol Tuchek retired from the City of Austin's Public Works Department. This has created a vacancy that would like to be filled. Currently April Grabau is a 24 hour per week secretary in this department, and the proposal would be to move her into the 40 hour position without advertising or posting the job, and then going out to hire a new part-time position. Ms. Grabau has expressed interest in this position.

Mayor Stiehm questioned if this position has to be posted. Ms. Wiechmann stated it did not as this is an exempt, non-union position.

Council Member Clennon questioned if the Public Works Department was requesting both items to be approved. Ms. Wiechmann stated yes, the request is to move the part-time person (Grabau) into the full-time position, and then go out and hire for the part-time position.

Council Member King questioned the benefits given to a part-time employee. Ms. Wiechmann stated they earn pro-rata benefits based on the hours worked.

Council Member McAlister noted we could move the part-time person into the full-time position, and then there may be at least one current part-time person that may want to apply for this newly opened part-time position, making them full-time, with full benefits. Ms. Wiechmann stated this could happen, but the hours needed in the Public Works Department are from 10:00 to 2:00 to cover breaks and lunches, and these hours are not flexible. If another part-time person where to apply, these hours would have to work into their other position.

Council Member Clennon stated we have budget issues and questioned what cuts or rearranging of personnel is being looked at. Mr. Erichson stated it is hard to rearrange as the extra help is needed only from 10:00 to 2:00. This cost is part of the service charge being paid for by the citizens for building permits. Mr. Erichson stated the Public Works Department is pretty efficient from this standpoint. Ms. Wiechmann added that if the building were arranged

structurally different, staff could be shared, but it is currently not set up correctly for cross training.

Council Member Martin questioned the availability of interns around the area to utilize for free labor. Ms. Wiechmann stated this had not been looked into for this position. Mr. Hurm stated this position may be difficult to hire an intern for due to the technical questions the position gets daily.

Council Member King stated we have busy departments and we need consistency and expertise in order to serve the citizens. Council Member Austin agreed.

Motion by Council Member King, seconded by Council Member McAlister to recommend to council to move this request forward to council (moving the part-time secretary to full time, and hiring a new part-time assistant secretary). Carried 5-2 (Council Members Clennon and Martin – Nay).

**Item #2. – Update on the assessment process for sanitary sewer project:** Mr. Erichson updated council that the final hearing on this assessment issue is scheduled for the June 21 council meeting. The cost (per residential equivalent unit) is \$15,590.17. Mr. Erichson stated as part of his presentation, he will outline the following additional information:

1. Cost comparisons associated with private systems
2. Mower County Zoning Standards requiring minimum lot sizes
3. MPCA enforcement actions
4. Compliance Inventory Study by Mower County

Mr. Erichson stated they will provide some copies of the MPCA enforcement agreements (with names removed) showing the fines that are being levied if the action is not corrected by December 31, 2010. Mr. Erichson noted these fines are \$500 per month.

Council Member-at-Large Anderson noted she saw a recent article indicating the Cedar River is the 5<sup>th</sup> most contaminated river in the nation.

This is for informational purposes only.

**Item #3. – Review ordinance on use of public parks:** Ms. Underwood noted recently the Park and Recreation Board discussed camping at Sterling Park next to the fairgrounds. Ms. Underwood stated currently it is unlawful to camp in parks, but we would like to change this ordinance to allow camping on certain occasions with approval. Events such as Relay for Life, boy scout camping and others have happened over the years, so we would like to change the ordinance such that we are in compliance with it.

After further discussion, motion by Council Member Austin, seconded by Council Member King to recommend to council the amendment to the ordinance, allowing camping in parks with approval given by Parks and Recreation. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council meeting.

**Other Item. – Tree project on First Street NE:** Ms. Underwood noted they have been working with Mower County on removing trees along first street NE as birds are making quite a mess of things. The proposal is to remove the current trees and add some concrete, a trellis, and

to add some ornamental trees and vines that birds are not expected to roost in. Mower County will pay for the \$10,000 needed to do this project.

Council Member Clennon questioned how tall the new trees are going to be. Ms. Underwood stated they may reach only 30 feet in height (current trees could hit 50 feet). Council Member Clennon questioned if there were excess dollars remaining from this project, if we could use them to plant additional trees to make up for the loss in height. Ms. Underwood stated there is not expected to be any funds remaining, and Mower County probably would not increase their offer any more.

This is for informational purposes only as the Parks and Recreation Board has approved it, contingent upon Mower County authorizing the payment at their upcoming Board session.

**Item #4. – Consider parameters for 2011 budget considerations:** Mr. Dankert discussed a memo dated June 7 regarding the 2011 budget and how council wanted to handle the process. Mr. Dankert outlined a proposed timeline in order to meet requirements set forth by state law in setting tax levies. Mr. Dankert reiterated that the tax levy may not be reduced after September 15 under current law, and that levy limits are in place. Mr. Hurm discussed the council's goals, and how the budget process will tie into some of those.

Mr. Dankert noted five issues that council should be prepared to give direction on. This direction may be changed as we go forward once new information is received, but we need to start with some baseline or parameters with which council is willing to start the process.

Some general discussion ensued including Council Member King noting staffing levels should be static. Council Member Clennon noted she would like to go through each line item. Council Member Austin stated we need to trust our department heads and council should look at the overall figure only and set parameters, not line by line. Council Member McAlister stated he agrees with Council Member King on staffing, and that capital projects should not include any new buildings. Council Member McAlister stated he was not in favor of reviewing line by line, as the only significant savings will have to come through employee reductions. Council Member-at-Large Anderson stated that the zero percent wage increases are a must. Council Member Clennon stated if we do not go through a line by line budget review, what are we going to know what to cut? Council Member Austin responded that we have gone through everything and have made cuts that the majority favored, and it will be tough to cut major expenditures by going through each line item. Council Member McAlister stated we should look at all overtime as this is a material amount.

After further discussion, the following was decided by majority:

- Agencies – Request those desiring 2011 funds to come in and make a 5 minute pitch for why the city should fund them. Council Members Clennon and Austin disagreed noting a letter from each would be acceptable.
- Staffing – Mr. Dankert noted back in 2009 the Library lost a full-time librarian with a retirement. The Library noted they would live without the position for two years, but would request the position back for 2011. The actual net increase would only be a .5 FTE due to a phased retirement that is happening at the Library. After further discussion it was decided that the Library position would not be approved in 2010 for the 2011 budget, however once the state aid is finalized we would revisit the issue. Council

Members King, Austin, and Council Member-at-Large Anderson disagreed, noting we should include the Library position now.

- Tax Levy – With the historic 3% growth factor (new homes, buildings and remodeled facilities), council noted for the 2011 budget planning process they were comfortable with using 6% (3% growth plus 3% inflationary increase) for now, however this may be reduced. Council Member Pacholl noted the city should have tried to capture growth during the 8 years no tax levy increases were done.
- Capital Requests – Major discussion on the construction of a new dog pound was mentioned. The current pound is in major disrepair and needs to be replaced. Council Member-at-Large Anderson questioned our priorities if we want to build a dog pound but not fill a librarian position. Mr. Dankert urged council to not reduce capital outlay to cover operating costs, as you are only putting off the inevitable. We need to continue to fund capital and repairs in order to ensure adequate facilities and vehicles for the departments.

Mr. Hurm questioned if council was satisfied with the direction we are taking to move annual payments for the DCA and Main Street Inc. (downtown revitalization) from the City to the HRA through their tax levy. Council Member Clennon questioned if one of the other entities can do this, like the existing HRA staff perform these activities. Mr. Hurm stated the private sector is needed here to communicate with us versus the private sector just coming to the government. Mr. Hurm noted the success of Main Street Inc. is because these businesses could talk to somebody else besides the government. If the program is being poorly utilized, then maybe our existing staff could take charge to save some salary costs.

- Budget Review Process – Mr. Dankert stated that if council has a goal of getting more citizens involved and wants to change the process we use, this needs to be set forth. Council Member Clennon stated the League of Minnesota Cities and the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities have some tools on their website to get people involved. Also, the City of Winona had informational meetings for the public to participate in. Mr. Hurm noted he would get the information/DVD's from the League and Coalition and get them, out to council. No decision was made as to how, if any, our budgeting process will be done.

**Item #5a. – Open discussion:** Council Member McAlister stated he stood on the sidelines with the recent hiring of the Fire Chief. However, on the hiring of the Police Chief the original process was to have the Police Civil Service Commission interview several candidates and narrow it down to three candidates. The Mayor, as head of the Police Department by Charter, would then interview the final three candidates and make a recommendation to council. Council Member McAlister stated he is NOT comfortable with leaving this decision up to one person, and would like the council to be involved such that there is some transparency here.

Council Member King noted he liked how the hiring process for the Fire Chief went, and we should have at least three elected officials involved with this process, including the Mayor. Mayor Stiehm noted people will be mad no matter what. The Fire Chief hiring went well, and if you would like the Police Civil Service Commission and the Mayor to make this recommendation jointly we could do that. Council Member King suggested setting up a different committee. Council Member Austin agreed, noting maybe two council members and the Mayor should be involved.

After further discussion, Mayor Stiehm noted he would work with council to create a committee to work with him on the Police Chief hiring.

**Item #5b. – Open discussion:** Mayor Stiehm noted he has been called by many people regarding former Austin boxer Jackie Graves, and that we should consider naming a park or something after the boxing great. Mayor Stiehm noted he has received some calls against such because of an alcoholism issue. Council Member King requested that Mayor Stiehm come back to a future work session with some proposals/options.

**Item #6. – Matters In Hand:** Mr. Hurm noted the Police Department is working on some grants for defibrillators.

**Item #7. – Administrative Report:** None.

**Adjournment:** Motion by Council Member Austin, seconded by Council Member King, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 8:21 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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Tom Dankert