

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
February 7, 2011
City Hall Conference Room
6:05 pm - Immediately following council meeting

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

ABSENT: None.

STAFF PRESENT: Public Works Director Jon Erichson, City Attorney David Hoversten, Administrative Services Director Tom Dankert, and City Administrator Jim Hurm.

ALSO PRESENT: Interim City Administrator Patrick McGarvey and Mayor Vern Rasmussen from the City of Albert Lea, Austin Post Bulletin and Austin Daily Herald.

Mayor Stiehm opened the meeting at 6:05 pm.

Item #1. – Discussion on shared services with Albert Lea: Mr. Mr. Hurm discussed a proposed shared services agreement between Austin and Albert Lea.

Albert Lea Mayor Vern Rasmussen addressed council noting that Albert Lea is looking at their options for a finance director for their city. This is an opportunity for the both of us to work together and help solve some budget shortfalls. Since both cities are heavily dependent on LGA, this is a prime time to look at a shared arrangement. Mr. Rasmussen noted that if the Austin City Council wants to go a different direction, then Albert Lea will go start a search again for another finance director.

Patrick McGarvey noted he has worked with Tom since he was hired in Austin back in 1996. Mr. McGarvey noted we have a proven commodity here, but we don't know about the time commitment that is needed for both parties.

Mr. Dankert noted that in order for this to work, certain duties need to be eliminated or shifted in order to reduce the workload. An important item here is the elimination of weekly payroll in our contracts, as this will free up some of my staff time. Additionally, taking minutes at work sessions and some other programs may need to be shifted to other departments. However, Mr. Dankert noted if the city council wants me to be involved in multiple meetings around the community to discuss the budget issues we are facing with state aid losses, then this arrangement will not work.

Council Member McAlister stated this is an interesting opportunity to experiment. Mr. Dankert does many things for the City and Port Authority, so other staff will also have to step in.

Council Member Enright noted they are similar cities with similar operations, so eventually if they are on a similar computer system things could also work easier.

Council Member Boughton clarified the travel time and cost reimbursement. Mr. Dankert and Mr. McGarvey noted the proposed deal would pay Mr. Dankert directly a \$60 per day car stipend for time traveled to and from Austin before 8:00 and after 5:00. Mr. Dankert would keep this check from the City of Albert Lea. Any other time he is traveling to and from Albert Lea, or working at Albert Lea would be billed by the City of Austin at \$65.00 per hour.

Council Member Clennon questioned if this is truly a partnership, then can the costs just be split 50/50. Mr. Dankert noted maybe eventually they could, but in the interim I may be spending more time in Albert Lea, and hence they would be willing to pay for that.

Mayor Stiehm noted he is not against this, but he does not want to see a drop off in productivity. Mayor Stiehm stated he would be willing to try this arrangement.

Mayor Rasmussen thanked council for looking at this opportunity. Additionally, we need to let our legislators know what unique things Greater Minnesota is doing, like this shared arrangement, to let them know we are looking out for the bottom dollar. Council Member Boughton agreed, noting this sends a wonderful message to all. Council Member King noted he had faith that if it is too over whelming that Mr. Dankert will let us know so that we can end the arrangement. Council Member Enright agreed, further noting that we are doing more with less, and this is a great idea to try something new.

Council Member Austin stated we would try this for four months, and if it works we can extend it out further. On another noted, Council Member Austin stated if we are going to be able to save some money on this venture I want to make sure that other departments are not taking advantage of the situation and spending frivolously.

Motion by Council Member Austin, seconded by Council Member Boughton, to recommend to Council the agreement on shared services with Albert Lea. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

Item #3. – League of Minnesota Cities’ community conversations. Mr. Hurm discussed some information he received from Council Member Clennon regarding the League’s Community Conversations program. The City of Austin can apply to be part of this program, and both Council Member’s Clennon and Anderson stated they would work on the application.

Council Member Clennon stated they are only going to pick ten cities to do this in. The League pays for the moderator and all of the other costs. This can also teach us how to moderate at a smaller event.

Council Member-at-Large Anderson stated that Riverland Community College, Austin Chamber of Commerce, KSMQ TV, and the Senior Center could be listed as partners for this event also, as they have to be listed on the application. Council Member Clennon stated this is due by February 11, so we need to move on it rather quickly.

Council Member Enright stated Riverland Community College could probably host this in one of their rooms, and this is a good opportunity to do something that does not cost us anything.

Motion by Council Member Enright, seconded by Council Member Boughton to proceed with the application. Carried 7-0. This will not be added to a future council agenda as the deadline will have passed by then. (*Deadline has since been extended to February 25.*)

Item #2. – Request from Paramount Theatre for City to vacate easement.: Mr. Erichson has received a letter from the Austin Area Commission for the Arts, Inc. (AACA) for an easement to the east of their building for a future building expansion. The City will need to vacate this area for them, and relocate some infrastructure. Mr. Erichson outlined the costs as follows:

1. 4th Avenue street and sidewalk removal and replacement - \$5,000.
2. Trail removal and replacement - \$8,500.
3. Storm Sewer Replacement – no cost as we were going to do this anyway as part of the Phase 2 flood mitigation work.
4. Sanitary Sewer Relocation – this would also be no cost due to a planned project to re-route the sanitary sewer.
5. Costs associated with Austin Utilities infrastructure – unknown at this time.

Mr. Erichson noted he would recommend working with the AACA to get a developers agreement drafted. Council Member-at-Large Anderson noted this would finally make the Paramount Theatre ADA-compliant once the project is completed.

Council Member Clennon questioned if this is the normal way we would have approved any similar request, such as not making the AACA pay for the sanitary and storm sewer relocation. Mr. Erichson stated that was correct.

Council Member McAlister questioned what costs there are for the Austin Utilities. Mr. Erichson noted there is a need to relocate the water and some electrical in this area. Council Member-at-Large Anderson stated the AACA is willing to pay for all of these costs as part of their phased project.

After further review, motion by Council Member Boughton, seconded by Council Member Enright to recommend to council their support and approval to vacate the easement for the Paramount Theatre expansion. Carried 6-0 (Council Member-at-Large Anderson – abstained). Item will be added to the next council agenda.

Item #4. – Removing ‘Review of City Code Section 10.14 junk ordinance’ from Matters in Hand.: Mr. Hurm noted this is the informal work session Matters In Hand list, and the process we use was just outlined by staff at a previous meeting.

Motion by Council Member Austin, seconded by Council Member McAlister to remove the ‘Review of City Code Section 10.14 junk ordinance’ from matters in hand of the work session. Carried 7-0. No further council action needed.

Item #5. – City Administrators Report.: None.

Item #6. Open discussion – LGA and City Services: Council Member Boughton read from a prepared statement (attached) noting the council should devote time to prioritizing services that are delivered here in Austin. Council Member Boughton requested that the various departments list the services they provide, and even place a dollar value on those services. Mr. Hurm noted this discussion will be part of the council retreat.

Council Member Austin stated employees brought forward many ideas at the library staff meeting, but questioned the feasibility of doing most of those suggestions. Council Member Boughton noted this would also help council understand what each department does.

Council Member Austin noted that what ever decision is made, we as council need to make that decision ourselves.

Item #6. Open discussion – Jeff Austin: Council Member Austin discussed a recent article in the Minneapolis Tribune (2/6/11) in which Senator Bakk challenged a speaker on taxing accountants. The reason this article was brought up is that the article spoke about the process that was used to prioritize services. LGA will change, and we need to plan for that stated Council Member Austin. Mr. Hurm noted the DCA is also sponsoring a discussion on this.

Item #6. Open discussion – Open Boards to fill: Council Member King noted there were two committees that needed to be filled from the council meeting earlier this evening. After further discussion, Council Member Boughton stated he would accept the Cable TV Board position, and Council Member McAlister stated he would accept the Blazing Star Trail Board position.

No further discussion noted.

Item #6. Open discussion – Council Retreat: Council Member-at-Large Anderson questioned who from the Government Affairs Committee of the Austin Chamber of Commerce will be attending the retreat. Mr. Hurm stated he believed it would be Sandy Forstner, and the past and current Presidents.

Council Member Boughton reiterated his stance that the Chamber is trying to apply some pressure to get the flood project done.

Item #7. Matters In Hand: None.

Adjournment: Motion by Council Member Austin, seconded by Council Member King, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 7:22 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Dankert