

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE (RETREAT)
February 17, 2011
J.C Hormel Nature Center
5:00 p.m.

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

ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Jim Hurm, Jeanne Howatt, Jon Erichson (5:00 to 6:00), Craig Hoium (5:00 to 6:00), John Garry (6:00 to 6:30), Kevin Frazell, LMC (6:00 to 7:00), Mickey Healey (6:00 to 7:15) Ann Hokanson (6:30 to 7:30)

ALSO PRESENT: Austin Daily Herald.

The Mayor called the work retreat to order at 5:00 pm.

Planning & Zoning, Building, Community Development – Craig Hoium addressed Council and referred to his department’s activities in relation to the 2010 council goals. He spoke on the Google initiative for high-speed internet. Out of 1077 communities, Austin is now #5 in the running for Google to provide a test exercise, free high-speed internet. The internet service would be 100 times faster than what we have now. If received, it would provide a huge economic impact to Austin. The initiative began last February. Mr. Hoium discussed the building report. Construction value for 2010 was \$21,963,433. His department has had continuing talks with Austin Packaging regarding expansion. In response to the discussion with the Chamber of Commerce during the first session of the retreat, Mr. Hoium noted that economic development is a responsibility of the City, whether it’s finding available land or putting together a financial package. As for the “one-stop shop” concept, he already successfully works with John Garry. The Google initiative is one such example. Mr. Hoium pointed out the Dubuque example (whose city officials recently met with our City representatives) and noted it was a joint effort and not just their EDA. Council Member Boughton stated that the perception is important. Council Member King said DCA’s John Garry brings credibility from the private sector. The current arrangement works well; co-location is a bad idea. Council Member-at-Large Anderson suggested Mr. Hoium give his perspective to the Chamber Board. John Garry reiterated that Dubuque clearly did not want their effort to be solely a government effort. They wanted it to be from the community.

John Garry, DCA – John Garry reviewed goals of the DCA from 2010 and 2011 priorities in relation to the council goals. Mr. Garry noted that the DCA is now in partnership with the HRA with funding coming from them rather than the Port Authority.

He has been in the initial planning of a community vision (Vision 2020), especially with the Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Garry noted that DCA has changed their membership requirement to include annual dues rather than \$5000 over five years. This is helping the DCA financially. The DCA continues to work with the Hormel Institute on their expansion project. He continues to market Austin and the Cook Farm Industrial Park. The DCA and the Chamber visits 20 to 30 local companies each year to find out how the company is doing and also identify ways the DCA, Chamber or other local business support entities

Kevin Frazell from the League of Minnesota Cities – Mr. Frazell spoke on engaging citizens in local government. He said today citizens are more involved and want to be included in budget discussions. He said the City should be clear about what you want people to tell you and how you will use it. There needs to be a game plan; it can't be sloppy. You will need to have a process for recruitment and possibly an online component. He gave examples of receiving feedback on the macro level as well as a more focused, task force approach.

Fire Chief Mickey Healey – Mr. Healey presented a Powerpoint on the Fire Department. He has organized the trucks, repaired the 308 ladder and other equipment and is pursuing a 3-year purchase plan for new, OSHA-recommended uniforms. He has also purchased a machine to clean the uniforms and has upgraded the reflectivity on the uniforms. He has added names on the backs to provide for more command and accountability. Laptops have been bought for on-site work. Mr. Healey said he is looking at replacing the two current trucks with just one, more efficient truck.

Library Director Ann Hokanson – Ms. Hokanson said the library has become much more of a community outreach center. A number of patrons do distance education at the library, and a number of them just are having fun. The library is currently open 60 hours per week; there is no real slow time. Staff is about as lean as it can be. The professional librarian's position has not been filled due to the present budget situation, but no more staff can be cut without cutting services. The library's budget is about \$1M per year, and 75% of that funding comes from the City. The vast majority of this budget goes to staffing – people and hours. A Smithsonian exhibit is coming to the library this spring with funding from a Legacy grant. Ms. Hokanson noted that the conference rooms' bookings, offered to the public at a very low rate, bring in some additional cash. Fines bring in \$27,000, but she said she would love to be able to drop charging the fines. The Friends of the Library support the Summer Reading program, some book purchases, and special programs. The gifts to the library are used for extra things.

Vision Statement review – Council reviewed the Vision Statement and suggested some changes. The recommended statement is as follows:

PLANNING FOR AND INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE BY:

- Providing a safe, high quality community to raise children, which will encourage generations to remain in (or return to) Austin

- Coordinating and focusing efforts to create and maintain quality jobs
- Respecting, understanding and promoting the values and cultures of all our citizens
- Encouraging a healthy, diverse economy and a vibrant, attractive business community
- Creating a high level of recreational and quality of life opportunities for all ages
- Partnering with other elected entities and the private sector to “grow our community together”

2010 goals review and setting goals for 2011 –

Council Member Austin suggested Council should set “priorities”. These would be specific tasks to accomplish on a yearly basis. A goal, he said, is a bigger picture concept, such as being non-reliant on LGA.

Mayor Stiehm noted the Dubuque model, recently presented to Austin representatives. Issues such as the green initiative should be a group of citizens. They would be the ones to find funding, not the City.

Council Member Boughton stated the importance of setting the priorities high and not keeping their sights low in light of the budget.

Council identified the following issues as potential priorities:

- Flood mitigation
- Active support for Vision 2020
- Establish a rental housing code
- Housing improvement program (focused)
- Green: Support a citizen action committee
- Citizen education program on city departments/programs, a citizen academy
- Work with the County and other cities to determine possible opportunities to collaborate

Council members discussed employee recognition. Council Member Enright suggested something like the MnSCU system; they nominate an employee for recognition. The employee must meet criteria. It is administered through the departments using a point system. Mayor Stiehm thought this should be discussed at a work session.

Council Member McAlister noted that he liked the idea of collaboration with the County to research other collaborations: Do both entities need an HRA? A finance department? Engineering?

Council Member Clennon said Hopkins has a successful citizen academy for their departments.

The work session adjourned at 9:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Howatt