

**MINUTES**  
**COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION**  
**March 5, 2012**  
**City Hall Conference Room**

**PRESENT:** Mayor Stiehm, Council Member-at-Large Janet Anderson, Council Members Jeff Austin, Roger Boughton, Brian McAlister, Steve King, Judy Enright, and Marian Clennon.

**ABSENT:** None.

**STAFF PRESENT:** Public Works Director Jon Erichson, Fire Chief Mickey Healey, Police Chief Brian Krueger, Parks and Recreation Director Kim Underwood, Administrative Services Director Tom Dankert, and City Administrator Jim Hurm.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Lindy Crawford (intern), Eric Olson (KSMQ), Public, Austin Post Bulletin, and Austin Daily Herald.

Mayor Stiehm opened the meeting at 6:35 p.m.

**Item No. 1. Introduction of KSMQ Public Television CEO Eric Olson**– Council Member Boughton introduced Eric Olson, the new CEO of the KSMQ television station here in Austin. Council Member Boughton outlined Mr. Olson’s accomplishments including 20 years as a commercial television journalist and 12 years as a reporter and anchor at KARE 11.

Mr. Olson thanked Council for their past support of KSMQ, and noted he hoped to bring more community flavor to the station. Mr. Olson noted that KSMQ is in the middle of their annual pledge drive right now.

Mr. Hurm questioned Mr. Olson if he was concerned about funding from the state and federal level. Mr. Olson noted he was, and that KSMQ lost three positions in 2011 due to funding reductions. However, Mr. Olson stated that the Minnesota Legacy amendment has provided opportunities for public television to gain access to new state revenues.

This is for informational purposes only.

**Item No. 2. Riverside Arena boiler options**– Mr. Erichson noted that back in December of 2011 some emergency repairs had to be done to keep the boiler running at Riverside Arena. Now that the ice season is winding down, we are in need of additional repairs as was noted in December. Mr. Erichson stated he believes the option one outlined in the December 16, 2011 memo to just repair the boiler is the best option now that they have ripped into the boiler and figured out the problems (as opposed to a new heating system at Riverside Arena). Mr. Erichson stated he would like to use \$10,000 out of Contingency to cover this repair cost.

Council Member Enright questioned what type of boiler we had at Riverside Arena. Mr. Erichson stated it was hot water, and probably has been there since the 1980s.

Council Member Clennon questioned if we have put dollars aside to replace this in the future. Mr. Erichson stated it would probably cost around \$150,000 to replace this in the future, and that technology is changing so rapidly, that the \$10,000 fix now is a “good buy” and will get us along for multiple years.

Motion by Council Member Austin, seconded by Council Member King to recommend to Council the use of \$10,000 from Contingency to fix the boiler at Riverside Arena. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

**Item No. 3. Sidewalk removal policy**– Mr. Erichson updated council on reviewing a request from citizens to remove sidewalk. Mr. Erichson discussed his memo dated March 1, 2012 outlining criteria he thought would be important to consider before granting a resident the ability to remove sidewalk. Included in the criteria is:

- The sidewalk only serves the property that is being petitioned for removal.
- The sidewalk is not part of any comprehensive plan that would provide for sidewalk in the future.
- The sidewalk does not serve a public function such as a staging area for other means of transportation. An example would be a sidewalk used for a bus stop.

Mr. Erichson outlined a proposed procedure whereby owners would apply through the City Engineer’s office, a public hearing would be held by council, and a variance fee of \$275 or so would be paid by the applicant.

Mr. Erichson also noted that the property owner is responsible for the costs of removing the sidewalk and restoration costs.

Mayor Stiehm questioned if could just be removed if they need repair,. Mr. Erichson stated that if the sidewalk was part of a comprehensive plan, then we would send a notice out to repair the sidewalk (and they would not be allowed to remove it). Mr. Erichson stated if there is a deficiency on the sidewalk, we have to notify the owner that it needs to get fixed otherwise we then assume some liability.

Council Member Enright questioned if we require these people to shovel the sidewalks to nowhere. Mr. Erichson stated we only shovel a sidewalk if a complaint is received.

Council Member King asked if the homeowner could remove the sidewalk themselves or if the City does it. Mr. Erichson stated we could work with that either way.

Council Member Clennon questioned if instead of a variance, we allow them to just ask their neighbors if it would be okay to remove the sidewalk. Mr. Erichson stated that issue may only affect one neighbor, yet the sidewalk actually would affect the entire neighborhood, hence the idea of having a public hearing.

Council Member Enright stated if we do allow people to remove their sidewalk, then we should allow for all and not just these two parcels from the last hearing. Council Member King stated a variance also must be requested for these two parcels.

Council Member Austin stated he agrees on requiring the variance. Additionally, Council Member Austin stated that he has now heard from other neighbors that use the sidewalk by Southgate school, and they wish we would have installed the sidewalk instead of voting against it.

Motion by Council Member Enright, seconded by Council Member King to recommend to Council the sidewalk elimination policy as proposed by Mr. Erichson. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

**Item No. 4. Increasing fees for automobile forfeiture and towing** – Chief Krueger discussed Lieutenant Mueller’s memo on increasing the storage fees for impounded vehicles. Chief Krueger stated the City cannot release the vehicle unless ordered by the court. If it is not sold at an auction, staff will be required to spend at least two hours per vehicle. If the vehicle does go to auction, it will take staff at least three hours to sell the vehicle. Many vehicles are in our impound lot for several months. The current fee of \$100 for an administration fee plus a storage fee of \$10 per day is low. Chief Krueger stated Midtown Towing and Nichols Towing charge \$30-\$35 per day for storage. Chief Krueger stated the Police Department would like to propose an administration fee of \$150 and a storage fee of \$20 per day storage.

Further discussion ensued including discussion on when the vehicles are impounded by the Police Department.

Motion by Council Member King, seconded by Council Member Boughton to recommend to Council the increase in the vehicle forfeiture fee as proposed. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

**Item No. 5. – Discussion on the future of the Fire Committee** – Mayor Stiehm stated this committee was not considered to be a permanent committee. Council Members King and Enright noted their agreement with Mayor Stiehm. Council Member Enright stated the chain of command has been identified tonight.

Council Member Austin questioned why Council Member Clennon wanted to discuss this in the first place. Council Member Clennon stated that it is time to move on and maybe we should talk about disbanding the Fire Committee.

Motion by Council Member King, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Anderson to disband the Fire Committee. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

**Item No. 6. – Monthly budget discussion: Fire and Police** – Mr. Dankert discussed the General Fund budget of the Fire Department reviewing the revenues and expenditures. Council Member-at-Large Anderson asked if the fire hydrants were flushed annually. Chief Healey stated one quadrant is done annually. Additionally, the Fire Department flushes the college’s hydrants with their permission. Chief Healey stated we will now start flushing about 20 hydrants in Lansing Area as part of their rural fire fee that is paid for us to service the Lansing and Austin Township areas.

Council Member-at-Large Anderson asked if we charge other entities for putting out fires in their service area. Chief Healey stated under mutual aid agreements we do not charge for such, and conversely they do not charge us when they come to help us.

Mr. Dankert and Chief Krueger discussed the budgets of the Police Department. Chief Krueger stated we currently pay around \$600,000 for our share of the LEC operations (including dispatch), and this cost could increase if we obtain more square footage as part of the remodel process.

Mr. Dankert noted these budgets do not include the Fire or Police PERA funds, or the Fire Fleet Replacement Fund. Mr. Dankert also noted later that the items that have not been colored on the discussion work sheet tonight represent only 2.5% of the entire budget of these two departments. Mr. Dankert indicated this shows Council how few expenditures we actually have control over outside of the labor costs.

**Item No. 7. – Administrative Report** – Mr. Hurm stated we now have a Facebook page, and the goal of our intern Lindy Crawford is to make this as informative as possible. Discussion ensued about allowing posts to our Facebook page. Ms. Crawford stated she set the Facebook page up as a profile, not as a page.

Council Member Clennon requested that city meetings be posted on Facebook under the calendar.

After further discussion motion by Council Member Clennon, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Anderson to recommend to council the policy to allow staff to remove objective posts to our Facebook page. Carried 7-0. Item will be added to the next council agenda.

**Item No. 8. – Open Discussion – Council proclamations** – Mayor Stiehm stated we can do a proclamation to honor citizens like Pastor Barnett as proposed by Mr. Repinski this evening. Council Member McAlister questioned on what basis somebody would be approved or denied? Mayor Stiehm stated he will have staff do some research on this.

**Item No. 8. – Open Discussion – Emails** - Council Member Enright noted we are addressing the flurry of emails that happened this morning regarding the Police Department. Mayor Stiehm stated we handled this already tonight at the council meeting. Council Member Enright stated the City Administrator will work in tandem with the Mayor on supervisory questions at the Police Department.

Council Member King suggested that Sheriff Amazi bring dispatch in to a future work session to discuss the protocol of the department, and how other dispatch centers operate.

**Item No. 8. – Open Discussion – Employee negotiations**- Council Member-at-Large Anderson questioned the time frame for discussing step increases for new employees, etc. in an effort to reduce people costs. Council Member-at-Large Anderson stated we need to address this.

**Item No. 8. – Open Discussion – Cleaning snow and Kyle Keenan**- Council Member-at-Large Anderson questioned the snow removal policies as Kyle Keenan sent an email on why the street was in such bad shape after the last snow storm. Council Member King stated Mr.

Erichson already responded to that, noting that the street was cleared as usual, and then all of the downtown businesses shoveled their snow into the street.

**Item No. 9. Matters In Hand** –No discussion.

Motion by Council Member Austin, seconded by Council Member King to adjourn the meeting at 7:50 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

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Tom Dankert