

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
October 15, 2012
City Hall Conference Room

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

ABSENT: None.

STAFF PRESENT: Assistant City Engineer Steven Lang, Assistant City Attorney Craig Byram, Fire Chief Mickey Healey, Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert, and City Administrator Jim Hurm.

ALSO PRESENT: Malcolm McDonald, Austin Post Bulletin, and Austin Daily Herald.

Mayor Stiehm opened the meeting at 6:29 p.m.

Item No. 1. Controlled burn of Mower County Fairgrounds grandstand – Mr. Hurm gave some background noting Mower County is checking into the health risks, etc. of burning down the facility. Mr. Hurm questioned if the City had any authority to affect the County's decision and if the City even wants to do anything with this facility and their request.

Chief Healey stated this facility was condemned this summer. County Coordinator Craig Oscarson questioned if we could burn the facility down to save them some money and to use as a training exercise. Chief Healey stated that if all of the regulations could be met, the Austin Fire Department could use this burn as a training activity and other mutual aid fire departments could also come in for training exercises. Chief Healey stated this was not yet to be public information as the County is still doing the investigation into the feasibility and permitting required to do a controlled burn. Chief Healey reiterated that no decisions have been made as the regulations have not been fully explored by Mower County. If we did do a training exercise here, we would likely do it in December when most people would have their windows closed.

Mr. Byram stated 10.30 of the City Code allows for open fires as long as the necessary state permits have been obtained. If Mower County wants to burn this structure down they can do this without the City's permission. Mr. Byram stated the city council cannot stop this, but you can determine if you want the Austin Fire Department involved with it or not. Mr. Byram agreed that it is premature to discuss this further at this point.

Council Member Boughton questioned what if people ended up having their houses smell or got sick. Mr. Byram stated we are never protected from a complaint. However, if the proper channels and permitting had been obtained and you followed the rules, there would be a minimal basis for a claim against the City. The City may still get sued, but the likely recovery is minimal if any.

Council Member McAlister stated there is nothing unusual about doing controlled burns, and we have done them in the past around the community. There were no objections from those neighbors on any of the three controlled burns that Council Member McAlister could remember.

Chief Healey stated the grandstand is a large structure, but it is relatively hollow and there is not much mass to it.

Council Member-at-Large Anderson questioned how many other fire departments could participate. Chief Healey stated there are nine in the area that fall under our current mutual aid agreement. Additionally, these departments could use our trucks and would not have to bring their own vehicles.

Mr. Hurm asked Council if they would want structure to be burned down if the report comes back positive. Council Member Enright stated if Mower County meets the requirements, then we cannot stop them.

Chief Healey stated they will come back with a full report once Mower County has received the decisions from the State of Minnesota. Chief Healey stated even if it is approved by the state regulators now, we are required to re-check their approval ten days prior to the actual structure burn date.

Mr. Hurm stated Chief Healey will keep everybody informed and will report back to us.

Item No. 2. Sale of Austin Utilities properties – Mr. Lang discussed the request by the Austin Utilities to get Council support for selling four properties where substations used to exist, as follows:

- 500 block of 7th Avenue NW
- 600 block of 18th Avenue NW
- 100 block of 4th Street SW
- 1300 block of 4th Avenue NW

Mr. Lang noted all of the infrastructure has been removed from these areas. Mr. Lang noted this was for FYI only and will eventually come back to the council agenda once the Austin Utilities board approves the actual bid amounts.

Item No. 3. – Budget discussion (No topics have been requested in advance) – Mayor Stiehm questioned if anybody had any other budget questions to bring up for 2013. Mr. Dankert had a prepared memo in the agenda outlining the changes that have been made to date.

Council Member McAlister questioned what the travel/conference budget was for council for 2013. Mr. Dankert noted it has increased from \$2,500 for 2012 to \$8,000 for 2013. Part of this increase is due to the city having two new council members, but others may also want to attend the League's new council member orientation. Additionally, this year Council Member Clennon sits on a few committees for the League that have required reimbursement on, so we have overspent the 2012 budget.

No other questions noted. Mr. Dankert noted he will start to draft the 2013 budget documents then for the December 4 Truth In Taxation hearing.

Item No. 4. – Administrative Report – None.

Item No. 5. Open Discussion – Committee discussion – Council Member Clennon asked if Council Member Austin and she were the only ones attending other committee meetings, as nobody else ever reports to council on the activities of the committees they are on. For example, the Chamber of Commerce and the Senior Center have monthly meetings yet we never hear of what is going on at these entities. Mayor Stiehm stated it may just be the normal course of business and there is nothing that is needed to be brought back. Mayor Stiehm questioned if Council Member Clennon ever called these people for an update on the committees. Council Member Clennon stated no, these should not be private discussions, but discussions at the public meeting. Council Member McAlister apologized for not giving reports on the committees he is involved in.

Council Member King stated that you can look around this table and we are all professional people here. If committee members are not giving a report, it may just be that there is nothing newsworthy to report. Council Member King stated he will pass on information from the committee meetings if he deems it important, not to just take up time.

Council Member Clennon stated she has had to learn about the CVB from calling their office, not from our committee member.

Council Member Austin stated the pertinent information is already being made public by the affected organization.

Item No. 5. Open Discussion – Website – Discussion ensued on getting work session videos on the website, as had been discussed at the retreat. Mr. Dankert noted he was not in attendance during all of the 2012 retreat, but he said we could put the work sessions on the web; however, we may need to eliminate some of the other meetings due to some space issues. Mayor Stiehm recommended we wait on this until we see if the Hormel Foundation will grant our request for funds to redo the website.

Item No. 6. Matters In Hand – Mayor Stiehm stated he spoke with Jon Erichson regarding the floodwall and the recognition plaques. Mayor Stiehm agreed that we are still a long ways off on getting this project completed and that we should wait until the project is closer to completion. It was requested that the Flood Wall of Recognition be added to the Council Retreat agenda for 2013.

As far as the flood wall goes, Council Member Enright questioned the status of the Sinclair gas station. Mr. Lang stated he expects something to happen in November.

Council Member Clennon questioned who would pay for the plaques for recognition. Mayor Stiehm stated Anderson Memorials would like to donate at least part of the cost of these. Council Member Clennon stated maybe the public could donate for these and then the City would not have to pay for anything.

Speaking of the retreat agenda, Council Member-at-Large Anderson asked that the Northeast Industrial sign and having it reconstructed should be also put on the Council Retreat agenda for 2013.

Motion by Council Member Austin seconded by Council Member King to adjourn the meeting at 7:07 pm. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Dankert