

CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

March 22, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ABILENE, TEXAS ABILENE CONVENTION CENTER – 2ND FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM

The City Council of the City of Abilene, Texas met in a Special Called Work Session Meeting (Retreat) on March 22, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. at the Abilene Convention Center, 2nd Floor Conference Room, 1100 N 6th Street, Abilene. Mayor Anthony Williams was present and presiding with Mayor Pro-tem Shane Price, Deputy Mayor Pro-tem Jack Rentz, Councilmembers Weldon Hurt, Donna Albus, Kyle McAlister and Travis Craver. Also present were City Manager Robert Hanna, City Attorney Stanley Smith, City Secretary Shawna Atkinson, and various members of the City staff.

Councilmember Kyle McAlister delivered the invocation and led the pledges to the United States Flag and the Texas Flag.

The special called meeting was held for the purpose of holding the annual city council retreat to provide the city manager the opportunity to present certain issues and obtain input from the city council on the direction desired in specific service areas as well as any new areas members of the city council felt needed to be reviewed/included for staff follow up, research, strategy development, and/or project analysis.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mayor Williams opened the public comment period. The following addressed the city council:

- David Swart – stated that generators for the water treatment plants will be cost prohibitive and will require a lot of wattage to power. He thinks the City was not at fault in the winter storm situation, but ERCOT was. Mr. Swart thinks that the downtown area is stretched thin on fire stations, and would like the City to consider a penny tax like they do for the convention center to go towards a new fire station downtown. He also thinks that the City should look into a public-private partnership for the animal shelter and that the EOC should stay at City Hall.

With no other speakers coming forward, the public comment period was closed.

AGENDA ITEMS

B. Review of Council Priorities

City Manager Robert Hanna reviewed the City's core values and mission statement, then did a brief review of the Council's priorities. Mr. Hanna stated that solid waste recently went through a management competition study and we believe we are providing the most affordable services to the City. There will also be a RFP finalized soon for mowing services, to allow the private sector to see if they can provide a more cost effective service for us. This information will be provided during the July workshops.

C. Water Utilities – Utility Winterization

Scott Hibbs from Enprotec, Hibbs & Todd, spoke about the winter storm event. He gave a timeline of what happened during the event and how it was an issue with the entire State of Texas, not just Abilene.

Mr. Hibbs went over the City's current resilience plans – multiple supply sources, multiple water treatment plants, and redundant substation (power) sources. He also went over the history of Abilene's water production since the 1940s, and how our reliability rating over the last 50 years equals to 99.99% reliable. He presented different options for future reliability – standby power generators, engine driven pumps, reliability of electric

providers, and power micro-grids, which would be contracting with a company to put in generators and maintain them.

Council questioned how other mid size communities handle events like this, if there is an estimate on how much of an investment the above options would cost, and if the City can look into partnering with a local electric company like Taylor Electric to not be solely reliant on AEP. Council also discussed the possibility of something like this happening again in the heat of the summer instead, and if it would be possible to get onto a “do not cut” list with the electricity providers.

Mr. Hibbs presented the questions of if 100% reliability is even possible, what would it cost to raise our 99.99% reliability rate to 100%, and if that price would be worth it.

D. Parks & Recreation

1. Walking Trails at Redbud & Sears Parks:

Lesli Andrews, Director of Community Services, presented this segment. Last July in the budget workshops, the trails at Stevenson Park were discussed. Ms. Andrews stated that Redbud and Sears park’s trails are also in dire need of replacement, as they are over 20 years old. The total cost of replacement for Redbud is \$727,192, and for Sears \$197,125. It would be a concrete trail system that would be more durable than asphalt.

2. Repairing/Replacing Park Restroom Facilities:

Ms. Andrews stated that with the winter storm, a lot of the restroom facilities took a hard hit with the freezing temperatures. There are a lot of restrooms in 26 parks that need replacing or modernizing. Cal Young, Cobb, Will Hair, Nelson, Rose and Redbud would all need to be looked at, with the average cost for each one at around \$200,000.

3. Resurface the Zoo Parking Lot:

Ms. Andrews presented the new Grover Nelson Park master plan, in which they’ve worked with a designer to include the animal shelter. This new plan would put the animal shelter on the East side with a “storefront” off of Loop 322. The plan would be around \$32 million to complete.

There is also a need for flat fields in the City. Including 10 new flat fields in the plan would be \$12,802,116.25.

In this plan, Festival Gardens would be shifted further South, next to AYSA. The cost of moving Festival Gardens and improving it would be \$2,535,755.75.

Zoo parking improvements, including adding lighting would be \$1,381,696.25 to complete. Ms. Andrews also presented the option of new park roads to provide access to the fields, auxiliary areas and AEP, which would cost \$2,070,166.18.

Ms. Andrews also presented some options for five flex baseball fields, improvements to the lake and fishing areas and TX DOT access road improvements. All of these combined would be \$18,789,734.43.

Council questioned if we could look at using some of the Venue District tax for any of these improvements. City Manager Hanna stated that it would be a stretch but that it can be researched. A

collaboration with AYSA was also discussed, as well as how the placement of the animal shelter might effect AYSA. Council was supportive of the flat fields and Festival Gardens.

4. Identify 2-3 Rec Center Facilities for Bond Programs (Nelson Flat Fields, Kirby Lake Rec Center, GV Daniels, Sears, or others):

Ms. Andrews gave a refresh on the presentation she gave at last year's retreat on the same issue. She went over the site assessments for GV Daniels, Sears, Cobb and Rose Recreation Centers. She presented concepts for the redesign of each of these as well as pricing, including staffing and operational expenses.

Ms. Andrews also spoke about the possibility of adding a new recreation center on the South end of town. The Kirby Lake area was proposed as the City already owns the land there.

5. Cedar Creek Trail System:

In 2015, a bond was approved for the Cedar Creek Trail System in the amount of \$1,495,000. Issues arose with permission to cross the railroad right-of-way and land acquisition from area property owners. Because of this, additional funds are needed to continue the project. Around \$1-1.5 million is needed.

Council questioned if the private committee that is also working on this project would be able to help with this. Ms. Andrews stated that they were only focused on the land not contiguous with Cedar Creek, as that was what the bond was specifically for. They are not looking to partner with the City at this time.

Council discussed the recreation centers and the consensus was to focus more on upgrading/updating the centers we already have, versus building a new one.

Council recessed for a break between 10:55 a.m. and 11:05 a.m.

E. Fire Department

1. Emergency Operations Center:

Cande Flores, Fire Chief, presented this segment. Chief Flores gave a presentation on the current Emergency Operations Center, located in the basement of City Hall. He discussed the issues with the current facility, recent changes to the Emergency Management Division and the Fire Department, and a proposed solution of a new Emergency Operations Center. Chief Flores proposed the facility would be located in the old Winn-Dixie building, already owned by the City, and currently being used for records storage. The construction, engineering, furniture, technology, and other various items would total \$2,512,000.

City Manager Hanna stated that it might be better to look into a stand-alone facility, versus putting this into the Winn-Dixie building.

Council questioned if the old fire station on North 10th and Pioneer, the maintenance facility on South 7th or the old fire station off the access road of I-20 might be options. It was also discussed to add on to an existing fire station. There are various issues with each of these options, but they can be looked into and brought back during the workshops.

2. Fire Station Number 9:

Chief Flores also presented the need for a new fire station in the south of town – Fire Station #9. This was also presented at the Council retreat last year. The proposed site is already owned by the City, located on Highway 707 near the Beltway and 707 Spur. It would be a single company station, with 4 full-time personnel, 1 fire engine and 1 brush truck. Chief Flores spoke about the need for the station on this area and how the coverage areas would change with adding a new station. The total cost for this project would be \$5,640,000.

Because of current budget restraints, personnel would become an issue with adding a new station. Chief Flores proposed 3 options. Option 1 is to add 12 new personnel at \$1,080,000. Option 2 would be to dissolve the FRM position in the Fire Department, upgrade a Captain, and add 9 new personnel at \$789,591.35. Option 3 is to dissolve the FRM position, reduce shift staffing by 1, and add 6 new personnel at \$536,060.90.

Council questioned if it was possible to approach Taylor County about a partnership on this new station, since a lot of the coverage area is on the outskirts of town, and could be used for the County. City Manager Hanna stated that he has not seen that approach work elsewhere, but we could approach Taylor County and see.

Council discussed the options for staffing that Chief Flores presented further, and what our ISO rating will look like if we don't get a new station.

F. Animal Services – Animal Adoption Center

City Manager Hanna presented this segment. It was discussed at the last Council retreat with an original estimated budget of \$8.7-9.6 million. There was pushback at that time so the City worked with the designer, Tim Rice McClarty to see about bringing down the price. If it is reduced to the bare minimum, it could be brought down to \$6.7-7.8 million, but doing that would make less capacity for animals than we currently have now. Mr. Hanna stated that by adding \$575,000 back to that, with a total of \$7.5-8.5 million, that would bring the capacity back up.

Council discussed the option of approaching outside organizations and families to see about the willingness to make an investment in the animal shelter, with a matching program like what was done at the Zoo previously. The price is still a concern, but Council would like to see about approaching outside organizations like the foundations, and potentially looking into someone else to run the shelter.

G. Public Works – Street Bond Program

Greg McCaffery, Director of Public Works, presented this segment. Mr. McCaffery gave a brief overview of the 2015 bond project – completed projects and those still underway. He stated that because of using in-house design work and saving money, the City was able to add a 26th project – Sayles Boulevard.

Mr. McCaffery also spoke about the Street Maintenance Fee program that generates \$6,261,318 annually, and the projects associated with that fee. He gave an overview of the street improvements over the last 5 years, including what roads were able to be replaced/repared.

Mr. McCaffery presented a few different options for street bonds moving forward – 3 20-year options, and 3 30-year options. They would like to have an updated roadway network inventory (PCI study) done by the end of 2021, and then work with the Street Advisory Board to recommend a bond program to Council in time for a May or November bond election in 2022.

Council discussed the street projects at length and the possibility of putting together a committee to review the bond project.

H. Administration

1. New Budget Format and Process:

City Manager Hanna presented Council with his intentions to restructure the budget document as part of a multi-phased approach to realign the organization into a “high performance organization”, with the intent to use a performance based, programmatic budget. The organization will be divided into 5 programs – Administration, General Services, Public Safety, Infrastructure & Development, and Community Services.

This new format will allow for performance measures for programs and departments to be created and tied to Council priorities and strategic objectives. It will take more than one fiscal cycle to implement. In addition, this fiscal year’s budget development approach will use a zero-based budgeting approach, where every penny is touched and evaluated.

Council questioned if it would be better to do it all at once, versus spreading the implementation out over multiple fiscal cycles. Mayor Williams asked if there could be an additional public forum to discuss this before the budget workshops in July.

3. Charter Amendments:

City Manager Hanna presented the following charter amendments to be considered in order to modernize and update the City’s Charter:

- Changing the language to make it more gender neutral
- Changing the annexation language to be more in line with recent statutory changes
- Currently the charter only allows for meetings to be called by the Mayor or 3 council members. Changing that to allow the City Manger to call special meetings.
- Having two ordinance readings is not a statutory requirement, so possibly changing that to allow for only one reading
- Currently the charter requires a roll call vote of Council. Changing that to allow it to be done by voice or electronic voting.
- Removing language that confuses the Parks Board and City Manager roles, specifically the part that allows the Parks Board to implement policies throughout the City
- Removing language that allows the Parks Board to hire the Parks & Recreation Director
- Removing language requiring the Planning & Zoning Committee to provide a list of capital improvements to the City Manager
- Reviewing the language in the Franchises and Public Utilities section for compliance with State law
- Allowing “advisory” boards to not follow the Open Meetings Act, which is only required by the Charter
- Reviewing Political Activity language to align with State Law regarding police & fire associations, as well as considering a ban on City employees holding a publicly elected office
- Adding language to empower the Mayor to appoint task forces or ad hoc committees

After discussion, the consensus of Council is to leave the two readings for ordinances, look at updating the gender neutral language, and changing the language on the Parks and Planning and Zoning areas to make them less clunky. Council also discussed the electronic voting but there was not a consensus on that. Appointing a committee to look into these charter amendments was agreed upon. Councilmember Hurt questioned if something could be done about three Councilmembers abstaining from the same vote, and the item passing by one vote. Mr. Hanna stated that staff would look into that.

2. Financial Forecast:

Mike Rains, Director of Finance, presented this segment. Mr. Rains gave an overview of the General Fund, with different scenarios for property tax increases, sales tax adjustments, meet and confer adjustments and salary adjustments, and the projected effect on the General Fund until 2025.

Mr. Rains also presented different scenarios for the Water Utility fund and the Self Insurance fund, and the projected effect on those funds until 2025.

Council discussed the \$21 million the City will be receiving from the recent federal act and how it could be spent. Council questioned if the modifications we've made to benefits have produced expected results to the Self Insurance Fund. Mr. Hanna stated that yes, it's been helpful, but he is also looking at some new options on extremely costly drugs and a possible increase to employee premiums on health insurance, to help the Self Insurance fund.

4. Infill Development:

Mayor Williams requested infill development be discussed. It was talked about at last year's Council retreat, but due to COVID, the plans fell through.

It was discussed to continue with the idea of a field trip to the City of Denison, or other Cities that have a similar program, to see how their program to help infill development worked. Mr. Hanna gave a brief overview of the program – Denison owned lots and partnered with the development community and local banks to provide low income housing (\$90-120,000). It was a communitywide effort to put vacant lots to use, and build affordable housing.

Council discussed a few builders possibly wanting to help with this, and the possibility of reaching out to local universities to help as well. The consensus of Council is to move forward with the field trip and look into how this type of program, or something similar, can work for the City of Abilene.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:36 p.m.



Shawna Atkinson
City Secretary



Anthony Williams
Mayor

Minutes approved on: April 8, 2021

