

CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
February 11, 2022 at 9:00 a.m.

CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ABILENE, TEXAS
SOUTH BRANCH LIBRARY

The City Council of the City of Abilene, Texas met in a Special Called Work Session (Retreat) on February 11, 2022, at 9:00 a.m. at the South Branch Library, Mall of Abilene, 4310 Buffalo Gap Road. Mayor Anthony Williams was present and presiding with Mayor Pro-tem Kyle McAlister, Deputy Mayor Pro-tem Travis Craver, Councilmembers Shane Price, Weldon Hurt, Lynn Beard, and Donna Albus. Also present were City Manager Robert Hanna, City Attorney Stanley Smith, City Secretary Shawna Atkinson, and various members of the City staff.

Deputy Mayor Pro-tem Travis Craver delivered the invocation.

Jackson Richardson, Sophia Richardson and Parker Richardson, all from Bonham Elementary, 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 – spoke about the Fugro street study that was done, gave his support for both a public/private partnership for a new animal adoption center, and Fire Station 9.
- Bob Thomas – would like to see CARES & ARPA Funds used for better purposes. Mr. Thomas also spoke about the decline in our streets and how much money we've spent trying to build them up. He thinks the philosophy of town needs to change, and we need to be a single community and not a North/South rivalry.

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

AGENDA ITEMS

2. 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. Council expressed interest on removing Council Priority #2 – the Downtown Hotel, and replacing it with Downtown Redevelopment. The other priorities were left alone.

Mr. Hanna spoke about the potential of a Main-Street Program, in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, and would potentially be bringing a new position up in the budget process.

For infill development, groundwork is still being done, but it is a priority and will be brought to Council soon.

3. Street Maintenance:

a. Street Maintenance Review:

Mr. Hanna gave an overview of street projects from 2015 to 2022, along with the budget.

b. Street Maintenance Fee

Mr. Hanna gave a breakdown of the Street Maintenance Fee and how it's been used over the years. Part of the Fugro discussion was a potential increase to the Street Maintenance Fee and he asked Council if they would like to see an increase. Discussion was held on this in the next section under bond election.

4. 2022 Bond Election

a. Street Improvements:

Mr. Hanna addressed the possibility of holding a bond election and gave three options for a street bond: \$50 million, that results in a 5.15 cent tax increase, \$60 million, that results in a 6.19 cent tax increase, and \$100 million, that results in a 8.25 cent tax increase. These are three possible options, along with raising the Street Maintenance Fee, and potentially reducing expenditures in other areas.

Council discussed these options at length. Having both a bond election and raising the Street Maintenance Fee was not an option anyone wanted to consider. Possible options for expenditure cuts were discussed, as well as using the \$5 million that will be received from the Lancium PILOT program for streets.

b. Parks & Recreation – Recreation Centers:

Lesli Andrews, Parks & Recreation Director, went over the findings of a survey of area stakeholders, in regards to a wish list for parks. GV Daniels, Cesar Chavez, and Kirby Lake were the top three options.

For the two recreation centers, the total cost to demolish both and build new facilities would be \$25,167,600. Demolishing and rebuilding is more cost effective than trying to remodel and fix them up. Both facilities would not be done at the same time. Ms. Andrews went over the various education classes, sports, and programming that is available at these facilities, that could potentially be improved on.

c. Parks & Recreation – Kirby Lake Trail Improvements:

The Kirby Lake Trail project can be done several ways for anywhere from \$5 million to \$7 million, depending on the types of amenities provided. The idea would be to build a 10k concrete track around the entirety of Kirby Lake, with branches that connect to schools and homes in the area. A feasibility study done recently said that the Kirby Trail was the number one thing people in the area wanted to see.

Options for the potential trail were discussed at length, with the possibility of partnering with agencies in town to sponsor certain parts of the trail, or amenities. Parks Bucks were discussed, as well as the potential to raise the amount of money someone can give to Parks Bucks. Starting a Parks Foundation was also discussed.

Council is amenable to both the Recreation Center improvements and the Kirby Trail system, and they would like to see what the voters have to say. They would like to have a brochure or some type of education on the potential improvements so everyone can see what is being proposed.

Mayor Williams recessed the meeting into a short break at this point, from 10:20 am to 10:30 am.

d. Fire Station Number 9:

Cande Flores, Fire Chief, presented Council with a breakdown of the cost for a new fire station. It will be \$7,684,000, and comes out to \$557 per square foot. The land it would be built on would be land the City already owns, so no expense there.

There are several options for personnel: additional 12 persons for \$1,184,619, 9 new persons for \$888,462, or 6 new persons for \$592,308. Mr. Hanna's preference is 9. That option and the 6 persons option would remove the field resource medic. Chief Flores would like 12, so as not to remove anyone from other stations.

Council and staff discussed the options at length. Council is supportive of a bond election for Fire Station 9.

To proceed with a bond election, Council would like to see a blue ribbon committee and staff work on marketing and education for a potential bond election. It would potentially be held in May or November of 2023. Council would each recommend someone for the committee.

5. Water Utilities:

Rodney Taylor, Director of Water Utilities, gave Council a brief presentation on the winter weather event last year that led to these required changes. Every city in Texas is required to submit an emergency preparedness plan. Staff recommends moving forward with backup generation for 5 critical sites, which would be about \$1 million a year, purchased in installments. If purchased all together now, it would be about \$12.7 million. Other energy sources were discussed, as well as the state's requirements and if this meets them. This installment plan recommendation meets the state's requirements.

6. Animal Services:

Mr. Hanna gave an overview of the current public/private partnership with All Kind Animal Initiative for the design of the animal shelter. Architect Tim Rice McClarty is finishing up the design work currently. Originally, the plan was to have the new shelter at Grover Nelson Park, but there was concern that it was not a good fit there so we are looking at other parcels. We have identified one option that we are currently investigating. We do need the private sector's help to bring this forward.

Council discussed different options for funding, including fundraising and a bond, but a bond was not something anyone was in favor of. Councilmember Price expressed interest in putting up the City's portion of the funds to a public vote, but Mr. Hanna already set aside \$4 million of MIP funds for our contribution. Everyone else was in favor of keeping that as is, and not going for a vote.

Adding a backup plan to the charge of the blue ribbon bond committee for this project, in case any funding falls through, was also discussed, and everyone was okay with that.

7. Infill Development:

Staff is looking at the Sears and Carver neighborhoods and identifying buildings that are occupied or vacant, any code concerns, possible condemnations, and lots that are undeveloped or with abandoned structures. We will begin to approach the building and banking community soon, after we have a game plan setup. Partnerships with non-profits and programs like Habitat for Humanity were discussed.

Other neighborhoods were also discussed, but it was the consensus to stick with the two already identified, and then move forward with more after everything gets set up and running. We will have to find the right recipe for Abilene and will need to enforce things better.

8. Administration:

a. Charter Amendments:

Mr. Hanna refreshed everyone on the proposed charter amendments that were discussed at last year's retreat. He recommended changing language to gender neutral language, and correcting some of the reporting structures to reflect our actual practice. City Attorney Stanley Smith went over the amendments in further detail. Staff will work to bring an ordinance to Council for the proposed changes at a later date.

b. Financial Overview:

Mike Rains, Finance Director, went over the General Fund assumptions and analysis, including different scenarios for property tax increases, sales tax adjustments, meet and confer adjustments and salary adjustments. He did the same breakdown for both the Water Utilities Fund and the Self-Insurance Fund.

c. Front Lot Utilities:

Mr. Hanna went over a request from AEP to have us consider adopting an ordinance that require front lot utilities. Mr. Hanna went on to describe what front lot utilities are – easements in the front yards of homes instead of the back, that make it easier and safer for utility workers to access. They do pose an aesthetic issue, as they can be bulky and hard to hide. Council discussed the proposal in detail, and since this would open the door for all utilities, not just AEP, it was decided not to consider this option, as there are no guarantees that poles would not be put up in peoples' front yards.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:03 p.m.

Shawna Atkinson
City Secretary

Anthony Williams
Mayor

Minutes approved on: February 24, 2022

