

CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
March 2, 2023 at 9:00 a.m.

CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ABILENE, TEXAS
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

The City Council of the City of Abilene, Texas met in a Special Called Work Session (Retreat) on March 2, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. in the Council Chambers, 555 Walnut St. Mayor Anthony Williams was present and presiding, along with Mayor Pro-tem Weldon Hurt, Deputy Mayor Pro-tem Donna Albus, and Councilmembers Shane Price, Lynn Beard, Kyle McAlister, and Travis Craver. Also present were City Manager Robert Hanna, City Attorney Stanley Smith, and City Secretary Shawna Atkinson.

Mayor Anthony Williams 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:

- James Sargent – asked about the progress with Sears Park and what will happen with the playground there after the arson.

City Manager Hanna addressed Mr. Sargent's concerns and let him know that there are improvements being made and funding will be set aside. Sears Park will be discussed in length later on in the meeting.

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

AGENDA ITEMS

1. 2022 In Review - Growth from 2017 to 2022:

City Manager Robert Hanna reviewed the City's core purpose, core values, mission statement, strategic goals, and a brief review of the Council's priorities.

A brief video was played highlighting the City's accomplishments from the last year.

2. Capital Improvements:

a. Municipal Services Center – Transportation, Public Works & Utilities:

Mr. Hanna discussed the current Fleet facility, built in the 1960s. Jacob & Martin has been asked to do a site review for a new facility or remodel of existing facilities. We are awaiting the report on that. There could potentially be a tour of the current facilities, if Council would like to see the condition of them.

b. Parks & Recreation – GV Daniels, Cesar Chavez, Kirby Lake & Pickle Ball

Lesli Andrews, Director of Parks & Recreation, spoke about the previously proposed bond election items for Cesar Chavez and GV Daniels Recreation Centers. She went over both facilities and why the need exists for new recreation centers. There was a community feedback survey done in 2020 that showed most

people wanted to see more in their recreation centers. And the majority of participants in the survey said they would support a bond for them. The cost for one of the new facilities would be \$27,879,563, after inflation. Council and staff discussed the survey, the facilities being at their end of life, what could also be done at each of these centers, the parking lots there, how the demolition would be handled (one at a time), and the possibility for a public private partnership on this, or perhaps a partnership with the school district.

Ms. Andrews also presented the proposed Kirby Lake Trail System. Abilene is far behind the average on miles of trail per capita. The cost for the whole trail around Kirby would be \$8.9 million and it would be concrete. Council questioned if it could save money by doing gravel or granite, but as the request was to make our Parks more accessible, concrete is the best way to do that. The sidewalks on Maple Street were also discussed with the possibility of tying into those.

Ms. Andrews spoke about the fastest growing sport in the nation, pickle ball. There is currently only one indoor pickle ball court at Rose gym, and the tennis center there has lines drawn but the nets are not the same height. Staff and Council have received numerous requests for pickle ball courts. For a new court at Rose Park, the cost would be \$1 million, with the reconstruction of the restroom facilities there. Council questioned if the restroom could be demolished and a modular restroom put in instead, and if there could be some sort of check out system for the pickle ball equipment. The courts could be run by City staff or possibly by the staff at the tennis center.

Mayor Williams recessed the meeting for a short break at 10:15 a.m.

c. Abilene Zoo – Phase 1 of the Master Plan:

Jesse Pottebaum, Zoo Director, went over the history of the Abilene Zoo. There are 22 acres of land that have been set aside for development. A Zoo Master Plan went out for RFP and Parkhill came back the winning bidder. The Master Plan will be done in four phases, with the first being Wild Encounters and Eats, with the addition of new rhinos, an event lawn and amphitheater for classes and rentals, and a new two-story café, which can create a large revenue stream to help fund the remainder of the Master Plan. Parking lot improvements are being considered too. The cost of a new perimeter fence would be \$197,770. Mr. Pottebaum discussed the costs of all the various phases, and the projected revenues and job creations that could be impacted by these upgrades. Mayor Williams added that any bond funds would be matched by the Zoo Society, which is a great thing.

d. Street Improvements

Mr. Hanna gave an overview of the street projects from 2015 to 2023, with the amount of money that's been spent on streets. It's been \$123.2 million over the last 8 years. He showed a map of all the roads that have been improved already, and the work still to do. Staff has analyzed a bond issuance that will allow us to uplift our Pavement Condition Index further. Mr. Hanna went over the dollar amounts for different amounts for bonds and how each would affect the tax rate. The last discussion on this, Council decided not to do a bond and continue to fund streets as we are.

e. Decision Points

Mr. Hanna talked about the different bond proposals listed above and asked if Council has a desire to see any bond elections, or possibly Certificates of Obligations for the streets. Council and Staff discussed these items at length. The consensus of Council is to look at a possible bond election for all of the items above, except for the pickle ball courts. Council would like to see the pickle ball courts done, but funded a different way. They would like to have further discussion on the Parks & Recreation Centers, the Kirby Trail, the Zoo Master Plan and the Street proposals to decide on calling a bond election.

3. Personnel:

a. Non-Civil Service Compensation & Classification:

Mr. Hanna went over the philosophy statement and stated that we are trying to bring our pay plan up to the going market rate. He went over how we came up with these finds, the different benefits we have compared to sister cities, and claims versus the national average.

Pamela Williams, Director of Human Resources, presented the four different proposals to raise the pay plan up to the market level. Option one is bringing it up completely to the market level. Options 2, 3 and 4 are different levels of increases spread out in phases.

Mayor Williams recessed the meeting for a short break to get lunch at 11:32 a.m.

b. AFD Station Number 9 Staffing:

Cande Flores, Fire Chief, presented the options he has come up with for staffing the new Fire Station 9, that was approved by voters in November 2022. There are three staffing levels he is proposing. One is 15 new personnel, two is 12 new personnel, and three is 9 new personnel. Chief Flores is asking for the 15, but Mr. Hanna's recommendation is for the 12. There is a FEMA SAFER Grant we can apply for that would help with the expenses here, but it's not a guarantee.

c. APD Authorized Strength:

Marcus Dudley, Chief of Police, went over the definition of authorized strength, the different patrol and special duty assignments and the department's response time. They are struggling with staffing, as their calls keep increasing. The FBI recommends 2.4 officers per thousand citizens. The national average is 2.0. Abilene Police Department is currently at 1.7. If there was an addition of 19 new officers, which Chief Dudley is asking for, it would raise that average up to 1.84, which puts us closer to the 2.0. Council and Staff discussed different staffing options, how reports are filed, overtime, and mental health of officers.

d. Decision Points:

Mr. Hanna asked Council if there is a desire to adopt the minimum entry level at market for the compensation plan changes, or to make a lower level our standard. The consensus of Council is to chose option 2, going up to 94% of market, and then seeing how that affects us. If another increase is needed later, that can be discussed at a later date.

For the Fire Department staffing, Council would like to add 12 new fire fighters, and then take a look at how that has affected everything when the station is opened, and depending on if we get the SAFER Grant, to see if the additional 3 are needed.

For APD staffing, Council would like to go ahead with the 19 new officers Chief Dudley requested, since there is a specific need for each one.

4. Planning:

a. Lake Fort Phantom Hill Recreation Plan:

Ms. Andrews spoke about Lake Fort Phantom Hill and the improvements people would like to see to the area. Some things recommended were a duty station, fishing pier, boat dock, improved camping areas, or a restaurant. There has been a proposal put out for a plan for a consultant for the area. Phase one would just be the scope of work. Ms. Andrews talked about the parks around the lake and questioned if focus groups and stakeholder meetings would be necessary for planning this. Council says the more public input the better on this opportunity.

b. Marketing & Communications:

Mari Cockerell, Communications Director, presented Council with her need for a better way to get messaging out to the citizens of Abilene. She has come up with an idea for a better way to meet the communication needs of our citizens with a multi-phase staffing shift. Phase one is adding a multimedia coordinator position, that they are already in the process or hiring. The other phases would be adding more collaborators and shifting multimedia specialists from underneath the departments they currently work in, over to the Communications Department. That way there are multiple people that can see and approve postings, consolidate jobs and equipment, and provide a more streamlined process for communications. Council and Staff discussed the proposed organization charts for the Communications Department, how this will affect emergency communications, and the need for this.

c. North/South Council Boundary:

Council discussed the possibility of moving the North/South boundary line for Council from the T&P Railroad Main Line, as it no longer accurately represents an equitable division of the City, with all the population growth. Different options were discussed, including South 14th or different zip codes. Council would like the Legal Department to look at the legalities of this for future discussions.

d. Infill & Code Compliance:

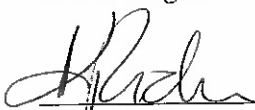
Mr. Hanna discussed the infill development project. Sears Park area has 180 empty lots in the neighborhood and 8 dilapidated structures. Code Compliance is working to see if any of these can be saved. The Carver Neighborhood has 210 vacant lots and 17 dilapidated structures. Council has already approved two more Code Compliance officer positions.

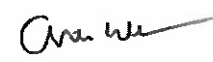
e. Decision Points:

Mayor Pro-tem Hurt would like to make sure we have enough staff for the infill projects and possibly look into incentives for home buyers in that area. Mayor Williams discussed some ideas on incentivizing the area. Councilmember Price discussed the trip to Denison Council took to look at their infill development program, and would like to consider assistance with demolition, or a Chapter 380 agreement possibility. The Denison trip was discussed at length. Council recognized City Staff for their achievements.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:41 p.m.


Kaitlin Richardson
Deputy City Secretary


Anthony Williams
Mayor

Minutes approved on: March 23, 2023