



CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
Public Safety Bldg—Training Room, 825 41st Ave NE
Monday, October 04, 2021
7:00 PM

Mayor
Amáda Márquez Simula
Councilmembers
John Murzyn, Jr.
Connie Buesgens
Nick Novitsky
Kt Jacobs
City Manager
Kelli Bourgeois

MINUTES

The following are the minutes for the City Council Work Session held at 7:00 pm on Monday, October 4, 2021 at the Public Safety Building, Training Room, 825 41st Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, Minnesota. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this hybrid meeting was held both virtually and in-person.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Mayor Márquez Simula called the meeting to order at 7:23 pm.

Present: Mayor Márquez Simula; Councilmember Buesgens; Councilmember Jacobs; Councilmember Novitsky.

Absent: Council Member Murzyn, Jr.

Also Present: Lenny Austin, Police Chief; Kelli Bourgeois, City Manager; Aaron Chirpich, Community Development Director (via Zoom); Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director; Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary; Joseph Kloiber, Finance Director; Dan O'Brien, Assistant Fire Chief; Will Rottler, Communications and Events Specialist; Charlie Thompson, Fire Chief; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Jackie Zillmer, Assistant Finance Director.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. Code Enforcement Update.

City Manager Bourgeois began the discussion highlighting all the departments that are involved with the process of code enforcement: Police, Fire and Community Development. Police Chief Lenny Austin addressed code enforcement violations, and stated that he did not have a breakdown of numbers from owned homes vs. rental properties. He highlighted the CSO role in being proactive and initiating the review of code enforcement issues. He highlighted that there has been a focus on outside storage concerns as well. Chief Austin also clarified that concerns related to furniture in the yard of a property and non-vehicle related issues are sent to the Fire Department for follow-up. Assistant Fire Chief Dan Obrien clarified that he did not have the specific statistics on these two issues for review.

Councilmember Jacobs asked about concerns with properties that have ongoing issues and what markers are needed to further pursue enforcement (and to see if they are able to address inside concern as well).

Assistant Fire Chief Dan O'Brien requested that those concerns be addressed with the City Attorney and the Property Inspector.

City Manager Bourgeois addressed these concerns as well as information from the City Attorney, stating that the City Attorney takes these issues seriously and that the property inspector can also focus on issues regarding work being completed without a permit. City Manager Bourgeois also discussed point of sale programs. The property inspector, Ryan is doing research on this project, and trying to capture property flips and rental properties. This is similar to what Minneapolis does. Part of this is reviewing rental license structure, and fee reduction / incentives from the City to keep the good landlords. Overall try to create financial disincentive for non-attentive landlords. All of the departments involved are actively working on information for council. City Manager Bourgeois asked for continued flow of information from council, all feedback and information is needed and helps with efforts for focused follow through.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that she would like to use what is successful for surrounding cities and prefers not to reinvent the wheel.

Councilmember Buesgens stated that she would like for the City to be gold standard.

Councilmember Jacobs stated that she does not want the City to be sitting duck. City Manager Bourgeois confirmed that we do not want to be a lightning rod for legal challenges.

Mayor Márquez Simula requested a future presentation from Ryan on what things to look for regarding property concerns.

City Manager Bourgeois confirmed that a green sheet or email to help with pointers for concerns would be helpful. Councilmember Novitsky would also like to share information with Citizens so they know what to look for when contacting Council.

Community Development Director Chirpich covered the highlights of what his department can do related to enforcement. He also stated that Community Development is also looking at staffing considerations for this type of effort. Ryan is very dedicated to this activity and what we need regarding enforcement, zeroing in on the most egregious offenders and to know what evidence and information is needed to move forward.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that she has concerns with landscape parking / parking pads in the front yard and asked if this is something that can be addressed.

Councilmember Jacobs asked for clarification about Ordinances regarding reducing the size of a property for additional parking.

Director Chirpich discussed zoning implications and information regarding parking pads and enforcement efforts. One standard is that a driveway must lead to a garage. This part of the code does address this issue, and residents do inquire about the ability to have additional parking.

Councilmember Novitsky asked if there an ordinance regarding parking calculations for rental licenses. He was concerned about tenants renting a house and the owner keeping the garage for their own storage.

Councilmember Buesgens brought up concerns with twelve people living in a rental house and all twelve people parking on the street.

Councilmember Jacobs would like a legal opinion about building parking regulations into rental licensing.

Director Chirpich discussed the standards for the memorializing off street parking and showing plans on site map. There needs to be parking for tenants as the City does not allow on street parking.

City Manager Bourgeois confirmed that the issue of parking will continue to be evaluated as this conversation around code enforcement continues.

2. Replacement of All Automatic External Defibrillators (AED) in the Police Department and Fire Department.

Fire Chief Thompson stated that the approval of funds will allow departments to replace and standardize models and make sure they are all compatible with each other / EMT providers. He then discussed where the funding is coming from for this project and noted that the cost has been reduced because of volume being purchased.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that the update to standardize the AED makes a lot of sense.

Councilmember Jacobs asked about AED's in community, she was curious about grants in the future for businesses and community organizations.

Chief Thompson stated that he has reviewed grants and opportunities and they are a great tool for the community.

Mayor Márquez Simula asked a follow up question about community training. She believes the goal is to train one in four people in the community.

Chief Thompson discussed the Heart Safe Community Program. The program helps by training people in CPR and AED in the community. Chief Austin stated that they will explore opportunities with Allina and other businesses to increase business and organizations within the community with an AED.

Councilmember Buesgens asked about reaching out to Medtronic.

Chief Austin stated that this can be hit or miss, and he would hope that Medtronic could be more involved with these initiatives in the communities here in MN.

Councilmember Novitsky asked if the price for the AED replacement includes batteries and accessories.

Chief Thompson stated that this does include needed supplies, but that we do not want to over purchase batteries and supplies as they do expire. He also discussed the swap out program for pads with EMT.

3. Budget Presentations.

Finance Director Kloiber introduced the budget presentation portion of the meeting and stated that this updated presentation process was developed last year due to pandemic. Residents were very happy with the ability to access this information in this format, with the presentations being available online.

Police Department Budget Presentation.

Police Chief Austin led the presentation of the 2022 Police Department proposed budget. This presentation will be uploaded to the City of Columbia Heights website.

Councilmember Buesgen was concerned with correcting a budget number for the final version of the presentation.

Councilmember Novitsky thanked Chief Austin for being proactive with budget concerns as he feels it is better than being reactive.

Chief Austin gave Captain Markham kudos on social worker program, working with Canvas Health, and getting the program rolling as soon as possible. He understands that this is a significant amount of money, and Captain Markham is aware of finding a way to quantify the returns of the program as soon as mid-year and as the program continues.

Council Member Buesgens was curious about the reduction of police time used for mental health concerns and call reduction and how that allows the Police Department to resolve other issues.

Chief Austin stated that this is still a new concept, and that there is still work needed getting to the root cause of all the issues, larger discussion on a state, national level when addressing concerns with mental health.

Mayor Márquez Simula inquired about when hiring will occur with Canvas Health.

Chief Austin stated that the timing of hiring is based on the approval of operating budget, but they are doing pre work for contract ahead of time. Hope to have someone in position by early spring. He noted that there are shortages for psychiatric social workers.

Fire Department Budget Presentation.

Fire Chief Thompson led the presentation of the 2022 Fire Department proposed budget. This presentation will be uploaded to the City of Columbia Heights website.

Mayor Márquez Simula inquired about training costs, and if this amount would be reduced in 2023.

Chief Thompson stated that this will get the department to the level of 30 paid on call. This number does get us to where we need to be. He is concerned that we were about 2 years behind in the training schedule.

Councilmember Jacobs inquired about additional budget request. Confirming that after this year, we would resume the 3% request.

Fire Chief Thompson stated that he was not sure that it will reduce greatly, but there will not be an increase like this again. Previously the department relied very heavily on State funding for training, notified that 2022 training funding would not be as good as 2021.

City Manager Bourgeois spoke to the concern of when a firefighter is off on vacation or leave and how this impacts staffing, the overtime rate will go down with more staffed trained and available in the pool of staff. So there will be a reduction in this portion of the budget.

Councilmember Jacobs stated that she does not anticipate any budget amounts going down after this year.

Councilmember Buesgens believes there will be more requests for outfitting and training in future as the department meets staffing needs. She also asked if there is any research on how we can retain volunteer firefighters.

Chief Thompson responded that there is a lot of research in MN about this issue on recruitment and retention. Three key items for retention: they want a professional operation; want to have good reliable equipment and a building and reliable staff to work with. He stated that there will always be attrition, but that the focus on training and treating them well helps retain them.

Councilmember Buesgens asked if the fire truck delivery is on schedule.

Chief Thompson stated that the final inspection is scheduled in December, and we should see the truck and equipment in January. Once the truck and equipment is received then everyone will be trained. Timing is still on track and good, there are some slight delays but our parts are all laid aside and designated for our truck.

Councilmember Novitsky asked if there will be Jaws of Life on the truck.

Chief Thompson stated that there will be, and they have done some training with this equipment. There will also be a spreader and a ram.

Recreation Department Budget Presentation:

Director Windschitl led the presentation of the 2022 Community Development proposed budget. This presentation will be uploaded to the City of Columbia Heights website.

Councilmember Buesgens made a suggestion about including the leak in the Senior Center into the presentation.

Director Kloiber suggested adding photos of wear and tear on JPM when presentation is updated to the website.

City Manager Bourgeois mention the upcoming building analysis of JPM Hall. She is hoping to have additional quotes and information for the upcoming work session in November 2021.

Councilmember Jacobs asked about the use of the Highlander Center and the connection to the school district.

Director Windschitl addressed the question about the Highland Center and the school district using the facility. No contribution from school district directly. Maintained by the city, quarterly at about \$10,000 (lower than estimated costs)

Councilmember Jacobs asked a follow up question about a TIF that was completed.

Councilmember Novitsky clarified that the TIF was related to the Parks Department and not the Recreation Department.

Councilmember Novitsky asked about Boosters helping with recreation equipment costs.

Director Windschitl stated that the Boosters have been great. Sign up for indoor sports is low. Recreation is continuing to look at programing for what the needs are in the community.

Councilmember Novitsky stated that he likes the addition of all the activities.

Mayor Márquez Simula really appreciates keeping Candy on to help with programing for seniors. She was also curious about raising costs for rentals of JPM Hall.

Director Windschitl stated that keeping Candy has been beneficial for the senior program. He also addressed that we will need to look at rental costs again soon. He stated that JPM is fully booked for 2022, especially due to the 2021 rebooking. He plans to continue to keep the posting for employees / custodian open. He would like to possibly look at making the size of the booking smaller. He discussed the recent 350 person party this past weekend.

Councilmember Buesgens want to make sure that we are keeping JPM available for residents going forward and with improvements to the building.

Councilmember Jacobs inquired about what the damage deposit is set at currently.

Director Windschitl stated that the damage deposit is \$500, and they do try to return money if there is not damage or people leaving late. He is trying to keep people from bringing in smoke machine and confetti. He needs to continue to tell renters that there cannot be smoke machines or fireworks. He stated that it might be best to increase the rental fee / deposit or further clarify the policy for the return of this money. He discussed

that it can be hard to tell who is causing damage if there are multiple groups using the property.

Councilmember Jacobs inquired about who inspects who is causing the damage and if there is an inspection after each rental.

Director Windschitl stated that there is a report that staff can use, and it is still hard to determine when and what occurred.

Director Kloiber inquired if the rental fee could be based on the number of people attending the event.

Director Windschitl stated that fees based on attendance are hard to enforce because it is hard to get an estimate on who is attending.

Mayor Márquez Simula asked if we need to increase pay for custodian, would like for someone onsite to clean as the event goes and to report concerns.

Director Windschitl stated that yes, we ideally want that. He is trying to balance staff requests for time off.

Councilmember Jacobs inquired if we charge extra for the cleanup / coming in early to set up event

Director Windschitl stated that there is a fee by the hour for event set up and an \$80 late fee for every 30 minutes after 1am that a group stays. They also charge for additional cleanup if needed.

Mayor Márquez Simula inquired if people are ok with these additional fees.

Director Windschitl stated that in the last 20 years only one person has challenged him about the extra fees.

Assistant Fire Chief Dan O'Brien addressed the number of people allowed. Fire code dictates the amount of people allowed in the hall. They should be submitting a seating plan. There should be calls from staff to for over population concerns and permits issued for fireworks.

Community Development Budget Presentation.

Director Chirpich led the presentation of the 2022 Community Development proposed budget. This presentation will be uploaded to the City of Columbia Heights website.

Councilmember Jacobs inquired about the reduction in personnel, and how this will impact the workload of the staff.

Director Chirpich discussed the reduction of the administrative assistant and the phased retirement of Shelly. He feels the right balance is one admin, and having the backup with the CD Coordinator.

Councilmember Jacobs would like the wording changed from Fairview Ramp to City Ramp for the presentation.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that the public parking sign will be going up soon. There is work to complete on ramp to before announcement of public parking.

Councilmember Buesgens inquired about how long it will take for completion of ramp improvements.

Director Chirpich stated that the goal was for the capital improvements to be completed in 2022. Doors are ordered and will be replaced soon and the elevator will take time to complete. The lighting controls will be updated soon and overall ramp will be easier to maintain. There is pressure wash of entire ramp scheduled for mid-October. Goal is to whip into shape in 2022. He stated that Fairview has been paying on their contract and they did pay for some capital improvements. There are positives to build off of, and to get people to use the space.

Councilmember Jacobs stated that she was disappointed that it will take as long as it will, but understand the timeframe. She asked when to anticipate a contractor in place?

Director Chirpich stated that PD is completing daily patrols of the ramp, and they are checking stairwells. The camera system needs to be migrated from Fairview Clinic, and an existing utility room is being updated to accommodate the heating and ventilation needs. PD will be able to remote access the surveillance system. At this time he needs one more competitive bid and hopes to execute a contract by the end of the year.

Councilmember Jacobs stated that the ramp is a health and safety concern. She hopes to get the cleanup expedited. She understands that there are squatters. Once business paid a squatter to clean up, and it just continued getting worse. Businesses on Central Avenue are concerned.

Director Kloiber made a note on the reserve fund. \$300,000 has been set aside for capital improvements in addition to the \$90,000 from Fairview. There was an external study that this would project would be around \$500,000 but it will not cost as much as anticipated.

Finance / IS Budget Presentation.

Director Kloiber led the presentation of the 2022 Finance and IS Department proposed budget. This presentation will be uploaded to the City of Columbia Heights website.

Mayor Márquez Simula inquired if there is a way to look into processing payments via ACH.

Director Kloiber stated that the City has offered this as an option for a while. There will be additional options for one-time payments, regularly scheduled payments, and for customers to self-budget

Mayor Márquez Simula had concerns with credit card processing fees and educating community about using ACH vs. Credit Card processing. She would like to educate / advertise the ACH option.

Director Kloiber stated that there are a number of marketing materials and modes that will be rolled out shortly. He wants to make sure that we are operating at a high level before the discussion. There will also be policy discussion regarding paperless billing and options for payment. There are a number of customers who do not have ACH, but have a credit card and want to use that option.

Additional Items.

City Manager Bourgeois wanted discuss the potential for rescheduling the City Services Expo from February of 2022 to beginning of 2023. Department Heads would like to skip in 2022 as the pandemic and social distancing is still a concern (there are concerns with vulnerable residents in attendance and winter Covid restrictions). There will still be a Snow Blast in the beginning of 2022, so there will still be a winter event. She stated that as of right now it seems that 2023 would be a good time for the City Services Expo to return with the opening of the new City Hall.

Councilmember Jacobs inquired about the combined meeting with the School District and if it will be occurring. She was concerned about skipping a year.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that this is nice to do once a year. There will need to be additional conversation about hosting at the Library, JPM or the school. The City hosts every other year so would we would need to plan location.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Márquez Simula adjourned the work session at 9:29 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary