



CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
Public Safety Bldg—Training Room, 825 41st Ave NE
Monday, May 02, 2022
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 Work Session Meeting of the City Council held at 7:00 pm on Monday, May 2, 2022, in 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 7:00 pm.

Present: Mayor Márquez Simula; Councilmember Novitsky; Councilmember Buesgens; Councilmember Jacobs; Councilmember Murzyn, Jr.

Also Present: Lenny Austin, Chief of Police; Kelli Bourgeois, City Manager; Kevin Hansen, Director of Public Works; Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary; Ben Sandell, Communications Coordinator; Charlie Thompson, Fire Chief.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. Public Safety Fencing JPA.

Chief Austin led the presentation of the information to the Council. Chief Austin explained that there is a continued focus on upgrading the fencing and this is another step in that process. When exploring options for the fencing upgrades, he also gained information about the fencing consortium. There are potentially over 40 Cities that will join this program, it is a cost saving measure. This is de-escalation tool for critical incidents, and if an event occurred there would be the ability to access this portable fencing. The fencing would be able to be deployed in a much faster manner than doing this on our own. We would be leasing the fencing, and the cost of the program is five to six thousand dollars a year. The public works employees would be trained on how to deploy the fencing here and in other communities. If the fencing is deployed there would be additional costs involved.

Chief Thompson stated that this is an insurance policy and would allow us to be able to protect the Public Safety Building if needed.

Councilmember Jacobs clarified the timeline of deployment of the fence.

Chief Austin felt that it could be 24 to 48 hours at a maximum. Chief Thompson stated that it could be even less if some of the supplies are kept in Anoka County as planned.

Chief Austin and Chief Thompson are working on finalizing some of the arrangements and bringing the JPA to the Council for approval at the last Council meeting of the year.

2. Police Department and General Staffing Ideas.

Chief Austin stated that there are generally staffing concerns and at this time there are approximately twenty Cities looking to hire police officers at any given time. The challenge right now is that the schools are not having the same number of graduates and multiple agencies are going after the same candidates. He has been brainstorming ideas with the City Manager and coming up with ways to address retention issues that are an overall National issue.

The CSO program is an effective and great opportunity to get candidates into the role of Police Officer. These CSO officers coming into the Officer Training Program are more versed in the Police Department policy and procedure. These CSO officers have a higher confidence level. Chief Austin would like to look at reimbursement for the Police Officer skills program. The cost of this is about \$6,000. If a CSO looks like they are a candidate to move into the position of Officer, then we will look at the opportunity to pay off the skills program costs if they stay in the officer position for three years. It costs us approximately \$50,000 to train an officer, and reimbursing these costs is a great tool to aid in the retention of these officers. This ultimately is a retention program that allows for a return on investment.

Councilmember Buesgens had a question regarding if the employee is terminated. She would like to see the program for repayment at three years to encourage people to stay and believes that the length of time is reasonable.

Chief Austin stated that his recommendation would be that this is not repaid if employment was separated.

Councilmember Jacobs had a question regarding when the contract would be activated. Is three years enough or should it be three years or five years? What percentage of the CSO's move into the officer position?

Chief Austin stated that the overall agreement would be that they repay the cost of the skills program if they terminate their contract. He is not sure that more than three years is best, based on how the contract is structured. He believes that over half of the current officers have moved into their position from CSO. For several years there were not openings for all the CSO's in the department, and some of them have moved into Anoka County Law enforcement positions.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that we are hoping people are honoring their contract, legally it is hard to extend the program more than three years. The CSO program has really been updated into the feeder position for finding good officers. We analyze these employees as to how they would be going into the Officer program. We do provide tuition

reimbursement up to \$3,000 per year for all employees who are outside of their probation period, so this is in line with what we do for other employees.

Councilmember Murzyn, Jr asked when the money is being offered.

Chief Austin stated that the way they are looking at the program it allows for repayment when they complete their field training. This program demonstrates the commitment to the CSO and their success with the Police Department.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that she is very happy about this program and the CSO's having the buy in is allowing for investment and getting involved in community and events.

Chief Austin also addressed the potential for a four-month sabbatical for sworn staff as a retention and recruitment option. In preliminary discussions with officers this is something that they are interested in. This is a unique opportunity for an officer to see in the hiring process. This type of sabbatical can also be viewed as a wellness opportunity, allowing the employee to be completely free of their work duties and responsibilities for an extended period, allowing that employee to recharge their batteries. This would be offered to employees every four years.

Many of the details of the program are still being reviewed and worked through as this is an idea that has not been used in many police departments here in the United States. Officers who would like to participate would notify the Police Chief as a starting point. Then, over the next three years, officers would have a total of four months' worth of pay removed from their payroll checks and placed in a type of city-held savings account to cover the four-month sabbatical. During the sabbatical, officers would not be subject to call, court, or any police department related activity, and would not lose seniority. They would be paid using the money that had been deducted the three years prior, and this would keep them eligible for city provided insurance and other benefits.

Councilmember Jacobs stated that she feels this is an excellent idea, mental health is a huge piece of officer wellbeing. She inquired if there is a consideration for this being short term disability, what the impact on fellow officers workload would be, and if an officer can look at splitting this into two month blocks.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that this is not part of a leave attached to an underlying health condition.

Chief Austin stated that when we are fully staffed this would not be an impact. This would need to be staggered and based on seniority. It is likely that a more senior officer close to retirement would not use this. He sees younger officer wanting to travel and do something out of the ordinary utilizing this. He stated that this is a huge recruitment tool, and our goal is to have something in place by January next year, so that by 2026 this would be in place for the first officer to take.

Councilmember Buesgens likes that this helps with long term retention. She would like to the City contributing to this fund as a recruitment tool. We want to use this as a marketing tool. She would be ok with increasing taxes related to funding this option for officers.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that this would need to be included in a Memo of Understanding related to the officer's employment contract. The extended period to deploy the program is related to the officers saving to cover their benefits and insurance. There would need to be additional meetings with the business agents related to the employment contracts for the officers.

Councilmember Murzyn inquired as to how does this impact the officer's retirement?

Chief Austin stated that he does not anticipate that this would not impact an officer early in their tenure. The officer is still considered an employee during their time away. There is some additional work behind the scenes that needs to happen to get this program into place.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that there is also an option to discuss what it would look like for City Staff that would like to take an employee-initiated leave. Priorities have shifted with employees, and some are looking to take an employee initiated leave. Each Department Director would look at what their department could handle for an unpaid leave for an employee. There would be a system in place to allow for insurance coverage and benefits to continue during the leave. Overall, we would like to look at this program as a one week option for this year and two years going forward. There would need to be a MOU with the Unions to cover this.

Councilmember Jacobs was curious what this looked like for an employee who already has four weeks of accrued vacation coverage.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that would be up to the department and what the department can cover. There would be a specific department where seasonally this would depend on workload.

Chief Austin saw people taking a day here and there to supplement their vacation time.

Mayor Márquez Simula likes the ability to retain good employees.

3. City Hall Floorplan, Design, and Snow Melt Overview.

Public Works Director Hansen stated that there are three items that need to be reviewed related to the City Hall buildout. Currently there are 28 bid scope segments, and there have been quotes obtained. The City Hall build out cost is currently 6.4 million. This increase from the last estimate is indicative of what we are experiencing overall related to costs.

A review of the bids show that they are very close to the initial estimates of costs. Our next steps are recognizing that we have an aggressive schedule to get into the building. Our

recommendation is to move forward with the reasonable bids. We would also move to reject some bids that wouldn't impact the construction schedule. The last thing we would want to look at is scope or material changes that would impact the bid. Overall, we really like the plans that have been established, and there are not any extravagant finished. We want to look at all our options to keep things on time and near budget.

Councilmember Buesgens stated that she does not want to change anything and wants to have a city hall that will last an extended period of time. She was concerned that there is a risk of the bids increasing.

Director Hansen stated that we would rely on Doran to see if rejecting and rebidding would be appropriate. At the upcoming City Council meeting there will be recommendations to award of some of the public bids. It will not be for all 28 of the items. We will work with Doran to continue to find additional options. We will need to have an evaluation on if ordering materials must be extended. Most materials are being sourced from North America.

Director Hansen also addressed was a change order request from Leo Daly. This has been a start and stop project, and they have reviewed additional time that has been spent resolving issues that staff has requested and for the type of build out that is occurring.

Some of the items that we have asked for extensive information about leading to this change order are: the snow melt system, the garage vestibule design, multiple renderings of the side of the building facing Central Avenue. There has also been additional review of mechanical and electrical components as well as the post tension flooring and sleeving. We also asked for Leo Daly to attend the design meetings and construction meeting with Doran. We asked for multiple furniture companies to be evaluated for furniture and fixtures. There was additional work needed for the generator as well, we wanted to be able to operate everything within the building on the generator, and where the generator is placed. All of these concerns have led to hours that have been spent, and we will want to move forward with the change order of \$108,000. These hours have occurred over three years.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that this is a lot of money, but it is what it is.

Director Hansen also gave a review of the status of the grant eligible sidewalk and snow melt program costs. This item is also part of the change order. The developer has provided a price of \$167,116 for their portion of the work. This work will be funded partially through the project escrow and a grant from the MWMO. We will be going back to the MWO to see if we can acquire additional funds. To move forward with the project, we need to address the change order.

4. Public Engagement at City Meetings.

Councilmember Buesgens stated that she would like to remove the portion leading into the Community forum regarding "items not included on the agenda".

Councilmember Novitsky thinks that some of the issues related to the Community Forum should also be addressed in the upcoming goal setting session.

Councilmember Jacobs wanted to address the issue and feels that this lacks transparency, and she does not have objections related to the ability for people to speak freely. She wants to make sure that if we come to a consensus about this then the Mayor does not have the authority on their own to make an arbitrary change. That was her intent with the point of order that was made at the recent Council meetings. She feels that whatever change is made is what needs to be abided by. Her concern is also with personal attacks and stopping it immediately. She feels that a warning should occur right away.

Councilmember Novitsky agreed. The idea is to allow people to speak, but not be disrespectful.

Councilmember Murzyn stated that he also agrees. If people are calm and talking, he does not mind listening to them.

City Manager Bourgeois clarified the requirements for Public Hearings vs. Community Forum.

Mayor Márquez Simula would like to see additional information related to how staff is following up with concerns raised during the Community Forum. Councilmember Buesgens stated that she likes how Edina addresses these issues.

Councilmember Jacobs thought adding an agenda item related to the follow up of items related to concerns during the Community Forum might be helpful.

It was determined that the language in the Community Forum include that individuals address the Council in a respectful manner. The Community Forum will not be limited in overall length and will remain at the conclusion of the meeting.

City Manager Bourgeois asked Council to review the remote options related to meeting attendance. She would like input related to Council meetings, Work Session meetings, and Board and Commission meetings.

Councilmember Buesgens would like there to be continued online access to meetings.

Councilmember Novitsky would like to continue with online options. There is a lot of work that is completed at the meeting and wants it to be open to people in a meaningful manner. He would like to see those addressing Council using their live video.

Councilmember Jacobs stated that she would like to discontinue online options for the work sessions. She would prefer that people are coming to chambers if they have a question or comment, but should have to turn on video if attending remotely.

Mayor Márquez Simula feels that when there is in depth meetings people will learn more about the topic during the work session. She would like openness and transparency of all the meetings to continue.

The Council would like to make sure that anyone addressing Council via Zoom has their camera on.

5. Filling Vacant Board and Commission Seats.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that the Council just made Board and Commission appointments. There is a vacancy that occurred on the Library Board, directly after these recent appointments were made. Overall staff would like to know how Council wants to proceed with vacancies and if this process is dependent on when the vacancy occurs.

Councilmember Jacobs would like to go back to the last pool and because the people have already been interviewed the process should be expedited. Once we have exhausted the pool of applicants and have interviews, then we would re-open the application period.

Councilmember Murzyn stated that when it has been a short period of time, we should follow up with the applicants that were not selected to see if they are still interested. We should review the materials and then have brief interviews. He would like to have the City Clerk follow up with the interested candidate, see who still available and schedule interviews for the Council. He believes if the vacancy occurs within three months, then we should just go back to the original applicants and interview notes.

Councilmember Novitsky clarified what the time frame is for appointment / interviews and what the threshold would be to wait to appoint.

Councilmember Buesgens would like to use a six-month period to go back and look at the applicants that have been interviewed.

Councilmember Jacobs also clarified that six months would still be acceptable. She felt that the last quarter of the year would be when we would wait for the next round of applications to fill the open Board / Commission.

Mayor Márquez Simula clarified that if a vacancy occurs after October, then we would wait until the next round of applications to fill the opening on the Board or Commission. Late applications that have not been interviewed would not be included in the open position interviews. Those applications will be held until the next cycle.

City Clerk Ion clarified that she would contact the recent applicants for the Library Board to see if they are still interested in filling the open position. She will then pull together the Council notes related to their interview for review at the next work session meeting. This item will be included on the June Work Session agenda, where the council will decide on the appointment or re-opening the application process. If someone is chosen at the Work

Session meeting, then a Resolution will be passed at the June 13th meeting appointing the new member.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that she is working on tentative dates for the goal setting sessions. Currently June 30th and July 7th (looking at 1 to 5pm) or Wed 29th and July 6th are dates that will work for the facilitators.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Márquez Simula adjourned the meeting at 8:51 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary