

City Council Work Session

January 5, 2009
5:30 PM
Community Center

ATTENDANCE:

Mayor/Council (please check) x Tussing, x Ronquillo, Gaghen, x Brewster, x Pitman,
x Veis, x Ruegamer, x Ulledalen, x McCall, x Astle, x Clark.

ADJOURN TIME: 6:29 p.m.

Agenda

TOPIC #1	<i>Public Comment</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- None

TOPIC #2	<i>FY 08 CAFR Report</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Financial Services Manager Pat Weber introduced Barb Aasen from Eide Bailey in North Dakota, who served as the managing partner for the audit. Ms. Aasen explained that she would cover a couple of things -- communications to the Council which were distributed earlier that day; CAFR reports; and special audit items.

Ms. Aasen reviewed the required communications and the related procedures, internal control, qualitative analysis, corrected and uncorrected errors, and best practices.

Ms. Aasen reviewed the CAFR report. She noted that the opinion statement reflected a clean opinion which meant the financial statements were presented fairly and in accordance with accepted accounting principles. She noted that the CAFR report provided extra information that bonding agencies liked because it provided statistical information. She said the report was submitted to the Government Finance Officer's Association for a Certificate in Excellence in Financial Reporting. She suggested further review of the management discussion and analysis (pg 3 – 15) and statistical information which included trend analysis. She noted that the bulk of the document was prepared by City staff.

Ms. Aasen reviewed the government auditing standards section which identified three findings. She pointed out there were no findings on the financial statement contents which was unusual for cities the size of Billings and said that staff did a thorough review of it before it was sent out.

Ms. Aasen reviewed the federal audit for the federal funds. She summarized the audit's clean opinion and the three findings related to the financial statement. She pointed out there were no findings related to the federal programs either in internal control or compliance.

Ms. Aasen reviewed the three special audit areas of: Montana Legal Compliance, which identified one finding related to retention of I-9 records and included in the findings mentioned earlier. She reviewed the other areas of Passenger Facility Charges at the airport which resulted in no findings, and the Building Inspection Fund which resulted in no findings.

Ms. Aasen expressed appreciation for staff's cooperation during the audit process which could be disruptive.

Mr. Weber added his appreciation to his staff and staff from other departments. He introduced Finance Department staff members Alene Malloy, Jim Hauck and Nikki Stoke.

TOPIC #3	<i>Transportation Public Outreach Plan</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Neighborhood Planner Lora Mattox presented the Transportation Public Outreach Plan for the Billings urban area. She explained it was combined with the citizen outreach program that was completed a couple of years ago to make sure all Federal transportation planning requirements were met. She said it would also assist with other long-range plans because there would be a document that outlined procedures and processes to follow to provide public participation.

Ms. Mattox advised that the document went through a 45-day comment period; went before the Planning Board in December and would go to Council at the January 12, 2009, meeting for review and action to be taken to the PCC. She said she hoped the plan would be presented to the Board of County Commissioners during January prior to going to PCC.

Councilmember Brewster said he was glad the plan came to Council prior to going to the County Commissioners or PCC. He said the public input process could be burdensome to some projects and he wondered how much it added to the cost of a project.

Ms. Mattox stated there were several media outlets to promote the public comment opportunity. She reviewed the public comment received for the document. Mayor Tussing asked if the plan was taken to the task forces. Ms. Mattox said it was not, but the process had been reviewed by those groups a couple of years ago.

TOPIC #4	<i>Revised Graffiti Notice</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Planning Director Candi Beaudry advised that at the request of Council, the graffiti notice was revised to make it friendlier and a little less accusatory to the victim. She explained the revision acknowledged that graffiti was unwelcome and unintended, but property owners still had the responsibility to remove it within ten days of the notice. She said the violation

notices had a tendency to scare a person which was not as necessary with that type of situation, so the notice was revised to reference the penalty instead of quoting it.

Ms. Beaudry advised that City legal staff assisted with the revisions, along with the victim/witness specialist.

Councilmember Ronquillo asked if the weather was taken into consideration when a notice was sent. Ms. Beaudry referenced the portion of the letter that directed people to call the Code Enforcement Office if the cleanup could not be completed in the ten-day period. She added that information about graffiti removal assistance and private contractors would be included with the notice.

Councilmember McCall asked about the volume of calls or complaints. Ms. Beaudry said the summer months were the busiest with businesses targeted more than residences.

Ms. Beaudry explained that there was some assistance available for low to moderate income individuals and her department would work with the youth court and a violator would be assigned to help.

Ms. Beaudry said staff would proceed with implementing the revisions if Council was agreeable. Councilmembers Veis and Pitman suggested revision of the first paragraph.

Additional Information:

City Administrator Volek advised that Lobbyist Ed Bartlett asked if the Council was interested in a regularly-scheduled phone call to provide a legislative update. Ms. Volek proposed a call at the beginning of work sessions on the first and third Mondays throughout the session, and also before regular meetings beginning February 9. It was agreed to provide advance notice of items of discussion so attendance was optional.

Councilmember Ulledalen asked if anyone had requests for different information from the past budget presentations. He suggested projections for more than one year. He added that he had a specific request regarding the implementation and expenditures of the public safety levy. Ms. Volek said discussions had begun about revenue projections which would be dependent on the legislature, reappraisal, and other variable revenue sources.

Councilmember Ulledalen referenced a newspaper article about redevelopment in Fargo, ND. He distributed a copy to Councilmembers and said he had reviewed it with Greg Krueger.

Councilmember Clark said he felt some legislators did not understand the impact of the property tax on the City of Billings.

Mayor Tussing referenced a letter from Barbara Bryan regarding donations to graduation parties. Councilmembers indicated they received the same letter and any consideration would occur during a business meeting.

Mayor Tussing asked if anything was submitted for the infrastructure stimulus bill. Ms. Volek explained that she was told by someone from Senator Baucus's office that there would not be earmarks for any of those bills. She said national organizations would submit requests for funds and the rest would come through the state. Councilmember Ulledalen asked if that would include the Shiloh Road project. Ms. Volek advised that she was not sure.

Councilmember Veis asked if the Joint Library Committee would report to Council in the near future. He said the portion of the facility that would come from MSU-B was not included in the Governor's budget.

Councilmember Astle asked about a rumor that Gainan's wanted to sell its downtown facility to the City for a library. Ms. Volek explained there was some discussion but the current focus was more on the joint library project. Councilmember Veis advised he was on one of the Library committees and they wanted to make a future presentation to the Council regarding facilities needs and how to fund them. Ms. Volek said the possibility of a Heights branch was still considered and she understood that some of the opposition to a library at the Sahara Park location had diminished, although the preference was still to have it closer to schools.

Councilmember Ruegamer said that during budget sessions, he would want to know how much was proposed for raises from some departments. Ms. Volek advised that exempt employees typically received the same increase the Teamsters received. Councilmember Ronquillo stated that the Planning Department reported it also gave incentive raises. Ms. Volek explained the step increases. Mayor Tussing clarified that step increases were allowed and 5% was the maximum. He noted that departments could be asked why the maximum was given. Ms. Volek cautioned that difficulties occurred if the cost of living increases differed between union and non-union employees.

Councilmember Ruegamer stated he did not want the raises stopped, but wanted to know about them sooner. Mayor Tussing explained that step increases occurred at anniversary dates, not all at the same time. Councilmember Brewster said he felt it was reasonable for departments to indicate they budgeted for maximum increases and to defend that. He said he was concerned with spending reserves and granting maximum increases at the same time.

Councilmember Ruegamer stated he needed the whole picture; he was not saying that he wanted to stop or change things, but wanted the information. Councilmember Ulledalen advised that was why he wanted to see multi-year projections.