

City Council Work Session

December 7, 2009
5:30 PM
Community Center

ATTENDANCE:

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

Guests: Angela Cimmino, Richard McFadden

ADJOURN TIME: 8:30 p.m.

Agenda

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

- None

TOPIC #2	<i>EMS Annual Board Report</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Skip Godfrey advised he was the current Chair of the EMS Commission. He explained that the Commission's primary responsibility was to monitor the ambulance service to make sure it complied with the City ordinance. He said the Commission was in the process of reviewing the ordinance and may submit suggestions for revision. He stated that the ambulance's primary criterion was that 90% of the calls reached the destination within eight minutes and he would provide a comparison of the last two years. He advised that goals were to support a paramedic service through the Fire Department and to hold regular meetings of medical directors with the ultimate goal of partnering with other organizations in the community. Mr. Godfrey reviewed the membership of the Commission.

Mr. Godfrey reviewed data from 2008 regarding the response criterion. He explained that overall it was good, but there were a couple of months when the standard was not met. He referred to the data from the current year which indicated an improvement. He advised that AMR (American Medical Response) was a for-profit business and constantly struggled to get competent employees.

Mr. Godfrey stated that the Commission was looking at the greater community, not just Billings. He said the changes in AMR resulted in more consistency in response time, and additional reporting when the response time standard was not met. He said the Commission tried to keep employee skills upgraded and to get further EMT/Paramedic training in place.

Councilmember McCall commented that it might be worth consideration to have membership from Riverstone Health. She asked if AMR had difficulty finding qualified staff. Fire Chief Paul Dextras advised that AMR had good staff and a new director that had been in place for about a year that stabilized the employment issues it had. He noted that a private ambulance would always have more turnover than a public agency would. He added that the

College of Technology provided a good pool of recruits. Mr. Godfrey stated he would pursue representation from Riverstone Health.

Councilmember Clark asked if some firefighters still worked for AMR on their days off. Chief Dextras responded that there were some that did, but it was an ebb and flow type of situation.

Councilmember Ruegamer commended Mr. Godfrey for his presentation.

TOPIC #3	<i>Par 3 Golf Course Budget</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Parks, Recreation and Public Lands Director Mike Whitaker explained the agreement with the Exchange Club that included a condition of an annual budget presentation. Gregg Wilson, President of the Exchange City Golf Corporation Board, reviewed the Board membership. He said the Par 3 budget had been pretty steady over the past few years so there were no surprises for the coming year. He provided an overview of the past year, which was considered a successful one. He commended the golf pro and groundskeeper for their hard work that attributed to the golf course's success. He explained how the proceeds were split between the City and the Downtown Exchange Club. Councilmember Pitman asked if a reserve was maintained. Mr. Wilson explained that after the proceeds were divided for 2009, about \$70,000 would be put in a reserve account.

Mr. Wilson reviewed the proposed 2010 budget. He explained that one project for the upcoming year was the sprinkling system. He said a three-year loan would be obtained from Yellowstone Bank to cover the estimated \$75,000 cost of that project. He said that type of project was not reflected in the budget as had been past practices. Mr. Wilson advised that the budget included a slight increase in green fees that would help offset the cost of the irrigation project. He noted that the increase was the first in three years.

Councilmember Pitman asked about the clubhouse renovation. Mr. Wilson explained it included carpet and paint that had not been replaced since the clubhouse was built. Councilmember Ruegamer asked Mr. Wilson to include projected and actual budget figures for the three years in future budget presentations.

Councilmember Gaghen commented that it was a pleasant partnership between the City and the Exchange Club. Mr. Wilson stated that Par 3 was a top-notch facility.

TOPIC #4	<i>National League of Cities Report</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Councilmember Gaghen reported that she attended the National League of Cities exposition in San Antonio, TX, November 10-14. She reviewed the sessions she attended and offered to share the handouts and other information she obtained at the meetings. She explained that she was able to visit with officials from other cities about similar problems and solutions. She explained the efforts in San Antonio to end homelessness. She said it was a worthwhile trip and encouraged other Councilmembers to attend future conferences.

TOPIC #5	<i>PRPL Fee Adjustments</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Recreation Superintendent Joe Fedin explained that review of the pricing structure was done about every two years and any changes resulted in a lot of work to update printed materials and the website.

Mr. Fedin advised that aquatic facilities were expensive and the fees did not cover the budget. He reported that the poor weather in 2009 resulted in poor attendance and revenues. He reviewed rationale for increases in aquatic fees which included staffing costs, utilities, chemicals, and future infrastructure upgrades. He stated that the new aquatic fees would generate about \$27,500 additional revenue. Mr. Fedin commented that the pool concessions contributed to the revenue collected.

Mr. Fedin explained that the operating season was split due to the fiscal year, but the revenue and attendance figures included the entire operating season while the budget figures were displayed by fiscal year. He noted that the entire aquatic budget was not usually spent.

Mr. Fedin reviewed the proposed fee increases for pool admission and rental rates. He mentioned that Council approval was needed and if Council felt any of the fees should be changed, they should let staff know. Councilmember Gaghen asked about the demand for Rose Park Pool rental. Mr. Fedin responded that there was not much time available, but there were some Saturday or Sunday morning rentals. He added that some people rented only the water slides.

Councilmember Brewster asked if staff had determined what the rates would be if the water was not subsidized. Mr. Fedin reported that \$17,000 was charged to the department for water the past year. Councilmember Pitman asked if the rates were catching up to expenses. Mr. Fedin said the department got behind when there was an 8-10 year period when rates were not increased. He said the rates were catching expenses, but with a short season, weather conditions could spoil that plan.

Mr. Fedin reviewed proposed rental/permit and use fees. He advised that increased fees would result in about \$21,000 additional revenue each year. Mr. Fedin stated that the PRPL Board approved the proposed fees. Mr. Fedin explained that some of the park shelters would be available to rent twice each day, which could generate additional revenue and more availability to the public. He explained that the Amend Park group handled the maintenance and scheduling, so the City did not assess any charges for it. He noted that Amend Park users were required to provide the liability insurance. Mr. Whitaker provided an explanation about the infrastructure, maintenance and services provided for that park. He added that the City did not receive any revenue for that. Councilmember Gaghen stated that was a concern of the Council. Ms. Volek stated that that could be reviewed when the agreement was due to renew.

Councilmember Pitman asked about fees at Dehler Park. Mr. Fedin advised that the fees there were regulated by the Mustangs. He explained that there was not a fee structure yet for use other than baseball games, but staff was trying to promote it use for special events. Mr. Whitaker added that direct costs would be charged, but a permit fee would not be assessed. Mr. Fedin advised that he had a meeting scheduled with a group that used the park last summer to

determine costs for upcoming use. Ms. Volek commented that bond counsel had urged caution about the amount of revenue being earned as long as bonds were outstanding. She said the City was getting \$30,000 from the league and it also maintained the grounds to the standards set by the City.

Mr. Fedin explained the rate structure for sound stage rental due to higher use and abuse by some groups. Councilmember Pitman asked if the sound stage was available outside the city limits. Mr. Fedin responded that it was generally only rented in the city, but had been taken a little way out of the city limits in the past for events such as the motorcycle hill climbs, and the cattle drive. He explained that it was not designed to travel on the highway.

Councilmember Clark asked about refund service charges. Mr. Fedin reported about 150 refund requests were received each year. It was consensus to increase the refund service charge to \$20, which was closer to the cost of processing one.

Councilmember Ulledalen stated he heard a complaint from a parent that the City hired so many lifeguards that they were not able to work enough hours. Mr. Fedin responded that anyone who wanted to work 40 hours a week, did. He said several lifeguards worked 40 hours per week and some lifeguards did not want to work and were only employed because their parents required it.

Councilmember Ronquillo asked about slick surfaces at the spray parks. Mr. Fedin stated that those surfaces would probably be refinished with a paint that included sand. He explained that after a few years, the finish started to wear which resulted in the slick surface.

Councilmember Ulledalen asked about adding a per-ticket fee for capital replacement costs. Councilmember Pitman stated there had been discussion about adding a \$.25 fee to everything to direct toward capital replacement. Mr. Fedin said that had been his recommendation for years because major pool renovations were needed every 25 years.

Councilmember Clark suggested revising the agreement for Amend Park because that group collected revenue and the City did the mowing. Mr. Whitaker advised that it was a partnership because there was no way the Amend Park group could afford to operate the park on its own. Mr. Fedin explained that the group provided information regarding its annual revenue and expenditures. Councilmembers agreed that information would be helpful in the future; similar to what was done with Par 3. Councilmember Pitman stated he was trying to determine consistency with the agreements with different groups. Mr. Fedin said the groups and uses were different, so the agreements had to be tailored to suit the situation. Councilmember Pitman commented that the partnerships were needed because the Parks Department could not do things alone and neither could the user groups. Mr. Whitaker noted there were over 50 partnerships with various organizations and agreed that was the way to make things happen.

TOPIC #6	<i>Federal Legislation</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Bruce Putnam reviewed the mechanics for the legislative requests. He said the legislative delegation requested the format and this was the seventh year it was used. He stated that the project list was generated by staff and from past requests and needed to be prioritized. He said ten projects were being requested, six were new. He reminded Council that it had the latitude to recommend or delete projects. He suggested prioritization of only eight projects to

forward to delegation to not appear greedy. Ms. Volek pointed out that even if there did not seem to be an immediate outcome; the delegation became familiar enough with the projects that alternative sources of funding could be identified. She referred to projects that had been on the priority list for a long time and were now being funded with ARRA funds.

Mr. Putnam asked Councilmembers to submit their individual priority rankings to Ms. Volek no later than January 8, 2010, for final action on January 25. He commented that the City of Billings had a good reputation with the delegation and the visits to them on their turf were appreciated. He said it was also important to assist the delegation with issues that impacted the community. He explained that Ms. Volek would introduce the prioritized projects to local legislative staff, electronic submittals would be completed by late February, and then Council would visit Washington D.C. in March or April.

Councilmember Brewster referred to the radio system item and commented that there were inherent problems with the digital trunked system the State was recommending. He said interoperability was important, but may not provide the necessary performance. He added that by January 2013, the 800 MHz system had to be turned off or high fines could be assessed. Ms. Volek said the backbone was in progress. Mr. Putnam suggested using Councilmember Brewster’s expertise.

Councilmember Ulledalen commented that the Sharptail storm water detention system should be a high priority. He suggested examining the possibility of combining the parkland acquisition request with storm water management. Ms. Volek advised that Ms. Beaudry was working on a floodplain study for the west end. Ms. Beaudry stated that she expected the study would show the need for smaller reservoirs upstream and that land could be used for parks. Mr. Whitaker stated that the Parks Department was interested in partnerships with Public Works and the County.

TOPIC #6	<p><i>Quarterly Updates</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Budget</i> • <i>Initiatives</i> • <i>Downtown Billings Partnership</i> • <i>Strategic Plan</i> • <i>Pending Litigation (Executive Session)</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Assistant City Administrator Bruce McCandless provided a budget review. He stated that some funds reflected low revenues because they were collected with property taxes and were not credited until December. He noted that cash reserves were used to carry the budget until the taxes were collected.

Mayor Tussing asked why the Mayor/Council and Human Resources budgets had spent such a large percentage of their budgets compared to all the others. Mr. McCandless explained that was due to the lawsuit payments from those budgets to the liability fund. Ms. Volek added that the expense of the Council attendance at the MLCT conference was reflected also.

Ms. Volek referred to the list of Council initiatives. She provided updated information regarding some items still in progress. Ms. Volek pointed out that there seemed to be a duplicate with an initiative from 8/24 and 10/26 regarding the use of cell phones while driving and asked if

one should be eliminated. Councilmember Gaghen suggested keeping the more current of the two initiatives. Councilmember Ulledalen referred to the initiative regarding a \$.25 surcharge on ticket sales at Dehler Park. He said it was necessary to help fund capital costs. Councilmember Clark stated that the Mustangs had already billed for season tickets. Councilmember Ruegamer stated that it cost \$25,000 per year to not do that. He noted his frustration because a year ago it was too late to do that because tickets had been printed, but it could have been done for the upcoming year. Ms. Volek stated that it would take planning and advanced work because bond counsel had advised that if it was attached to one facility, it had to be attached to others. Councilmember Ulledalen commented that it made sense to do that for capital improvements that were going to be needed in the future, and the mess was due to prior Councils not having done anything about it. He suggested an ad-hoc committee if necessary. Ms. Volek pointed out that it was a staffing issue also because every ad-hoc committee had to be staffed. She said the issue would be evaluated with staff and she would report back to Council.

Ms. Volek advised that she was unable to remind Mr. Krueger that the Downtown Billings Partnership update was on the agenda.

Ms. Volek reviewed the strategic plan report handout. Councilmember Ulledalen referred to Item #4 and explained that the Chamber would try to get part or all of the bed tax that currently went to the State's general fund.

Additional Information:

Mayor Tussing asked if anyone planned to attend the new homeless facility and could provide a welcome and greet guests in his place due to a conflict. Councilmember McCall volunteered to attend.

Council adjourned to Executive Session to discuss pending litigation at 7:50 p.m. Council returned to the regular session and adjourned at 8:30 p.m.