

City Council Work Session

January 4, 2010

5:30 PM
Community Center

ATTENDANCE:

Mayor/Council (please check) X Hanel, X Ronquillo, Gaghen, X Cimmino, X Pitman, X McFadden, X Ruegamer, X Ulledalen, X McCall, X Astle, X Clark.

Mayor Hanel and Councilmembers Ronquillo, Cimmino, McFadden, Ulledalen and Astle were sworn in by Municipal Court Judge Mary Jane Knisely prior to the start of the work session.

ADJOURN TIME: 7:15 p.m.

Agenda

TOPIC #1	<i>Public Comment</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Tom Zurbuchen, 1747 Wicks Lane, stated that department business plans and the strategic plan were presented at work sessions, but had not been presented to the public. He said the public should be aware of those plans. He advised that as Chairman of the Heights Task Force, it was his duty to invite members of the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) to the January 26, 2010, meeting at Castlerock Middle School to discuss the outer belt loop and recent changes approved by the PCC. Mr. Zurbuchen pointed out that two of the three Council representatives were no longer on the Council, leaving Councilmember Ulledalen as the only current member. He suggested making those Council appointments before that meeting. <p>Mayor Hanel pointed out that the documents Mr. Zurbuchen referred to were available for public viewing on the City's website. Councilmember Ulledalen stated for the record that he invited Mr. Zurbuchen to come to his office to examine his copies of those documents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Bill Kennedy, Board of County Commissioners, offered congratulations to Mayor Hanel and the other elected councilmembers on behalf of Commissioners Reno and Ostlund.
TOPIC #2	<i>New State/Federal Wastewater Standards</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Public Works Director Dave Mumford advised that the new wastewater standards would impact Billings significantly over the next ten years. He explained that the State of Montana, under EPA regulations, had to change wastewater standards. He noted that the amount of discharge that could be put into rivers or lakes in Montana would have a greater impact on Billings than the Clean Water Act had in 1972. He advised that the City had one and a half years left on its current wastewater discharge permit and had been working with DEQ and the League of Cities and Towns to determine the effects. He said the big changes would only occur for large cities, because it was a point source regulation, so the seven big cities were affected. He reviewed the changes that would be necessary to the plant and nutrients used to comply with the new standards. He said the major changes would be seen closer to the start of the next permit cycle.

Mr. Mumford said the question was what to do with the wastewater and where it should be discharged. He advised that the EPA and the State of Montana had not considered the changes a financial burden on cities unless wastewater rates reached 1-1/2 to 2% of median income, which would mean a 225% rate increase in Billings. He noted that current wastewater rates averaged about \$16 per household. He said if the wastewater plant was fixed conventionally, the cost would be \$200-250 million. He said various options were being considered and he would keep the Council updated as the process moved forward.

Mr. Mumford advised that one of the big issues was non-point sources which were agriculture, septic tanks, etc., and the development community was concerned with that. He explained that the Montana Association of Realtors' State Legislative Committee agreed to meet with city representatives to work on the point and non-point source issue together. He explained that there would be significant impacts to the communities from a development standpoint if the new standards were not met. He said stormwater was also a big concern relative to the new standards and corrective measures were also expensive. He said the reality of the situation was that the city had less than ten years to find answers and get things fixed so it was not in violation. He noted that some of the issues were addressed in the business plans.

Councilmember Astle asked about phosphorus levels in the water. Mr. Mumford said he did not have the data, but knew the water met the federal drinking water standards. He stated that it was being considered to help educate agriculture and other sources that discharged into the river about ways to reduce what was happening to the river. He said the river was not as clean as what was expected by the standards.

Councilmember Ulledalen asked if Mr. Mumford knew what increases could be expected for water bills to offset the necessary improvements. Mr. Mumford responded that water rates would likely increase about 7%, but part of the integrated water plan idea was how long the city could get by without a second water plant. Councilmember Ulledalen said he was asking how the improvements could be financed. Mr. Mumford said loans would be necessary because there was no other way to pay for it and the increased wastewater charges would be used to repay the loan. Mr. Mumford said there would be a rate increase over the next seven years of at least 100%. He noted that Billings' wastewater rates were reasonable compared to other major cities in the state.

Mr. Mumford explained that consideration was also given to assisting smaller communities with reductions to discharges into other rivers. He referred to floating islands that seemed to be working near MetraPark and Rehberg Ranch, and said that was a less expensive option for those smaller communities. Councilmember Ulledalen stated that the information should be disseminated to the public so it was aware what was expected in the future. He noted

that if voters would be asked to pay for a new library, they should also be aware of this as well. Mr. Mumford explained how wastewater charges were calculated. Councilmember Ulledalen asked for a page of bullet points of the information provided by Mr. Mumford.

TOPIC #3	<i>Mountain Pine Bark Beetle (Parks)</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Parks Superintendent Jon Thompson reported that Mountain Pine Bark Beetles had been discovered in Billings and were found in some Billings parks. He displayed a map that showed all parkland and the parks where the beetles were found. He displayed photos of pine trees that had been attacked by the beetle. Mr. Thompson provided an overview of the beetle’s lifecycle, the trees it fed on, and the damage from it. He reported that a survey determined there were about 100 trees in the parks that had been attacked by the insect and those trees needed to be removed so the beetle did not move to other trees.

Mr. Thompson explained that management should include removal of infested trees by June 15 each year; destruction of the wood; preventative pesticide applications; pheromone traps; and thinning of forest stands, which was used primarily in forests. He noted that preventative pesticides were not effective on trees that had already been attacked. Mr. Thompson reviewed pesticide options and applications that were recommended for use. He reviewed the recommended management plan to locate, remove and destroy all infested park trees before March 31, 2010; to educate the public about the problem and the steps to be taken to protect the park trees; and preventative measures to protect the park trees by May, 2010. He noted that there were up to 4,000 pine trees in the developed parks. Mr. Thompson reported that anticipated costs totaled \$47,000 for inspections, removal, disposal, and prevention. He noted that inspection, removal and disposal would be completed in-house at an estimated cost of \$27,000, but because the expense was not anticipated, it was not budgeted.

Mr. Thompson announced a public information workshop would be held January 8, 2010, at the MSUB Downtown Campus. He said the speaker, Dr. Kevin Wanner, was interested in working with the city to conduct a study about the beetle.

Councilmember McCall asked if a plan would be implemented to assist private property owners to make sure their trees were protected and treated. Mr. Thompson explained that there were infested trees on private property, but he was not aware of a city-wide plan to address that, he was only aware of the plan to deal with the situation in the parks. Councilmember Astle asked about the migration ability of the beetles. Mr. Thompson explained the beetles could travel a couple of miles. He said no part of the city was safe, but the beetles attacked pine trees first. Councilmember Pitman asked about chipping and disposal of the destroyed trees. Mr. Thompson explained that chipping a tree destroyed the beetle infestation so the chips were safe to use. He added that trees too large for the chipper could be burned or buried. Councilmember McFadden asked if the infected trees had an economic benefit to a sawmill or other entity. Mr. Thompson explained that since the insect injected a fungus into the tree, the tree was not usable for a sawmill. Ms. Volek noted that a budget transfer would be necessary to fund the measures that would have to be taken.

TOPIC #4	<i>Airport Master Plan Update</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Aviation and Transit Director Tom Binford Presented the Airport’s master plan. He reviewed the advisory committee membership and the elements of the plan. He noted that a draft executive summary was provided to councilmembers. He advised that if councilmembers sensed the plan was headed in the right direction, a public hearing would be scheduled at a future Council meeting, with a subsequent recommendation for adoption. Mr. Binford noted that a lot of time was spent on the analysis and financial portion of the master plan because it was very important to the FAA grant funding. Mr. Binford reviewed the national system plan requirement of the FAA and said it was similar to interstate/highway planning.

Mr. Binford reviewed two primary elements that were subject to FAA review and approval. He reviewed the aviation demand forecasts as the first primary element and said they were scrutinized by the FAA. He pointed out that an average 3% increase in passenger enplanements was projected over a 20 year period. He reviewed the forecasts for aircraft operations, based aircraft and air cargo. Mr. Binford reviewed the second primary element of the airport layout plan. He said the layout plan was a series of drawings that could demonstrate to the FAA that projects could be placed and constructed in accordance with FAA design standards.

Assistant Director of Aviation Kevin Ploehn explained the remaining master plan elements that consisted of inventory of existing facilities; demand, capacity and facility requirements analysis; and alternative plan concepts. He provided an overview of the proposed projects that included: lengthening runway 7/25; relocation of the car rental maintenance facility; parking expansion; and land-use needs for future projects. Mr. Ploehn noted that a proposal for the car rental maintenance facility would probably be presented to Council by summer. He provided an explanation of one additional land option that called for relocation of one runway. Mr. Ploehn provided a detailed explanation of the rental car maintenance facility project in response to Councilmember Ulledalen’s request. Councilmember Ulledalen stated he wanted the explanation to correct how it had been represented in the newspaper. Councilmember McFadden asked about noise impacts as part of the Runway 7/25 project. Mr. Ploehn advised that a noise study would be included in the environmental impact study when one was done. He noted that Runway 7/25 would still be a secondary runway.

Additional Information:

Councilmember Ruegamer referred to an email that Mayor Tussing commented on about a firefighter issue and said he did not have a clue what he was talking about. Ms. Volek explained that she thought he was referring to the result of the arbitration that occurred. She said she had not spoken with him so she was not certain what his comments meant.