

City Council Work Session

February 16, 2010
5:30 PM
Community Center

ATTENDANCE:

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

ADJOURN TIME: 6:35 p.m.

Agenda

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

- **Kevin Nelson, 4235 Bruce Avenue**, suggested using Tax Increment District dollars to pay for a restroom at the skate park, instead of using the Parks Department budget.

TOPIC #2	<i>2011 Budget Priorities</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

City Administrator Tina Volek reviewed the FY2011 budget process and schedule. She explained that departments submitted their budget requests and, for the ninth year in a row, increases were not allowed in operations and maintenance, with some exceptions for items included in contracts and increased utility expenses.

Ms. Volek reviewed the budget priorities from the Council and issues staff was working on related to those priorities. She noted that one item in process was a communication plan to provide more public accessibility. She mentioned the “Like Cities” project being considered by the Chamber to look at best practices in other communities and noted that Councilmember Ulledalen was serving on that committee.

Ms. Volek referred to issues the Council needed to be aware of as follows: General Fund revenues should equal or exceed expenses; the increase to the Public Safety Fund would be about \$1 million since the current year was the last year of the public safety increase; and the current year was the last year for the Fire Station 7 payment. Ms. Volek said other issues were reappraisal appeals; the State budget crisis; the need for a Planning levy; the Library facility; benefits liability, and labor contracts. She mentioned that HB124 could also impact the budget.

Councilmember Astle stated that the Planning levy would total five levies being presented to taxpayers with three from the school district and one from the County. He asked when the City’s would be presented. Ms. Volek advised that the Planning levy would be on the November general election ballot; the County was considering the primary election, and the

school district's levy would be in May. She noted that she heard the newspaper blogs regarding the school levy were negative.

Councilmember Ruegamer asked if the budget would be balanced without using reserves. Ms. Volek said it would balance without reserves, with the exception of Public Works where use of reserves was planned. Councilmember Ruegamer asked if the budget meetings would be televised. Ms. Volek explained that if the Council decided to move the work sessions to the Council Chambers, the meetings would be televised. She added that the presentations at regular Council meetings would be televised as usual. She said she would check into the Tuesday meetings that would not normally be televised.

Councilmember McCall advised that some of the people that took part in the community conversations wanted more information or an update of how their work related to the Council goals. She suggested an update in the next CityLink. Ms. Volek suggested waiting until the budget process was complete before scheduling further sessions with the public.

TOPIC #3	<i>Dispatch Center</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Fire Chief Paul Dextras reviewed long-term plans to update and upgrade the facility. He explained there were problems with the present facility and the location was prone to flooding, which was a concern since the backbone of the communication center was in the basement. He noted that security was an issue also because the center was located off an alley. He said funds had been saved for several years and about \$1.8 million was in hand for construction and relocation. He advised that remodeling was considered, but the Naval Reserve Center site was identified as a preferred location for a new facility. He said a space needs assessment would be conducted, at a cost of \$5,000.

Mayor Hanel asked if text message calls could be received. Chief Dextras said it was not possible yet, even though the center tried to keep up with the technology -- he noted that it was expensive to keep up with the technology. He said they were moving toward being able to track through an apparatus such as GPS.

Councilmember McFadden asked if the Communication Center was part of the plan to update mobile radios and other communications. Chief Dextras explained that they were two separate projects but related because one was a radio system and the other was a building that housed part of the radio system. He commented that they would mesh but had two different funding sources.

Councilmember Gaghen asked if the suggestion by County Commissioner Reno to use the seventh floor of the Courthouse was a viable option. Chief Dextras explained that the suggestion had merit and had been discussed by the 911 Committee. He advised that three members went to a facility design training session and one idea from that was that renovating existing buildings was a challenge and not always cost effective. He stated that an architect would provide a professional opinion and all of the various options were still on the table.

Councilmember Pitman asked if there was any consideration of using a floor of the Library. Chief Dextras said that idea had been brought to the committee and it would be considered during the preliminary design phase after the space assessment was completed. He

said that once the project got to the architect phase, that information would be presented to the Council.

Councilmember Clark asked if the Parks Department was in favor of locating the Communication Center at the North Park property. Chief Dextras responded that PRPL was receptive even though the details had not been discussed.

Councilmember McCall asked about a timeline. Chief Dextras explained that by the fall, the space needs would be complete and a design architect should have been hired. He said the committee was reviewing the options, but did not have many specifics yet.

Councilmember Ulledalen asked if using existing fire stations or other city property had been considered, and whether the communication infrastructure was considered. Chief Dextras advised that other station sites had not been considered, but the communication infrastructure was, and some locations did not have a wide range of communication, but the North Park location worked well.

Mayor Hanel invited the Council to tour the communication center if they had not done so. He said there was no question that additional space was necessary. Chief Dextras reviewed the call volume of the dispatch center.

Councilmember McCall asked about recruitment and retention in the Communication Center. Chief Dextras said one position just became vacant, but it had been fully-staffed for a period of time. He said the department was exploring creative ways to attract and keep employees.

TOPIC #4	<i>Blue Creek Transportation Study</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Neighborhood Planner Lora Mattox explained that about three years ago, the Planning Division offered its assistance with long-range planning to the Blue Creek neighborhood. She said transportation planning was identified as a key issue. She advised that Interstate Engineering was contracted with in 2007 to complete a study. She reviewed the groups that were involved in the process and the public meetings that were held. She noted that the Planning Board conducted a public hearing February 9, and would forward a recommendation of approval of the plan to the Policy Coordinating Committee. She added that it would be an item on the February 22 City Council agenda to also recommend approval to the PCC.

TOPIC #5	<i>2009 Draft Billings Urban Transportation Plan</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Ms. Mattox described the process followed to update the plan, and stated it would probably be presented to the Council in April. She explained the federal requirements addressed in the plan, and noted that one requirement was an updated plan.

Ms. Mattox reviewed the long-range project list. She said the projects were identified on a map and cost projections were included with the project list.

Ms. Mattox advised that she could provide Councilmembers with an electronic copy of the plan and would post it to the City website. She noted that a public hearing would be held in March prior to seeking Council approval in April.

TOPIC #6	<i>Transportation Improvement Program (Highway & Transit)</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Transportation Planner Scott Walker explained that the plan needed to be amended from time to time, and it was necessary to amend it now due to funding issues. He explained the highway amendments which involved ARRA funding of \$1 million for the Main Street Underpass, some funds for I-90 resurfacing, Grand Avenue pavement, Parkhill and 13th Street intersection, and Zimmerman Trail project. He said the bad news was that the Federal Highway Administration was rescinding about \$638,000 of air quality money, leaving about \$835,000 of the allocation. He said that was happening across the country and the state, and it was not common, but possible. Councilmember Gaghen asked what prompted the change. Mr. Walker explained it was a federal legislative change. He said there would probably be a reduction in PL funding later in the year. Mr. Walker advised that the plan would be presented to the Policy Coordinating Committee March 16.

Councilmember Ronquillo asked if HB 124 would impact the State funding. Ms. Volek advised that HB 124 only affected property tax supported funds.

Transit Manager Ron Wenger reported that the TIP amendments for transit were all good changes. He explained that ARRA grant money was originally for capital projects, but transit officials appealed for operating funds, so 10%, about \$188,000, could be allocated to an operating line item. He reported that two new grants to provide transportation to employed but economically disadvantaged individuals added over \$100,000 to operating. He said the New Freedoms and JARC grants had been in the budget and would be for the next year.

Councilmember Ulledalen asked if the transit funds would be more difficult to secure for smaller cities like Billings. Mr. Wenger explained that transit was favored in Washington D.C. and the Montana Senators were supportive of it, so he did not anticipate any problems at the present time.

Councilmember Clark asked if the original request was for three vans, but now only one was being purchased. Mr. Wenger explained that three vans would still be purchased; the only change was that the funding sources were different.

Mayor Hanel asked Mr. Wenger to provide an explanation of the New Freedoms and JARC grants. Mr. Wenger explained that New Freedoms was a federal grant for service that went above and beyond the requirements of the ADA. He said remote areas beyond what was required were served, and some equipment had capabilities that were above the requirements. He explained that the JARC grant was to transport low-income people to job opportunities. He advised that it was utilized to transport developmentally disabled individuals from group homes to their work sites because that procedure was a qualified activity of the grant.

Councilmember Ulledalen asked if the price of \$200,000 for each bus was the best deal they could get. Mr. Wenger explained that the prices were dictated by new diesel engines that followed new EPA guidelines, which drove the cost up by about \$50,000 each. He said smaller

vehicles could be used, but the main costs were fuel and labor and there was almost no difference between the small and large buses for those two factors. He explained that smaller, less expensive vehicles were used for low ridership routes whenever possible.

Additional Information:

Councilmember Ruegamer asked if Ms. Volek could find out about the condition of the roof of the Galles Building. He explained that several service clubs may be interested in constructing a restroom in that building for about \$10,000-15,000.